




DEVELOPMENT

PERSPECTIVES

Making evidence matter in Africa's development

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 001, JULY 2017



Harnessing the Potential of Africa's Youthful Population for Socio-economic Development

AFIDEP

African Institute for
Development Policy

Bridging Development Research,
Policy and Practice

Demystifying the Demographic Dividend

By ELIYA ZULU

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *Development Perspectives*, a new biannual publication from AFIDEP. The *Development Perspectives* will provide critical evidence-informed analyses and commentary on urgent development challenges in Africa, with the aim of informing policy and programme decisions. Each issue of the *Development Perspectives* will address a specific development topic and will feature leading experts on the subject matter working in Africa.

This first issue focuses on Africa's potential to harness a sizeable demographic dividend (DD). The purpose is to inform ongoing regional and national efforts by African governments and development partners to use the DD paradigm to spur socio-economic growth on the continent. The DD is the economic benefit arising from a significant increase in the ratio of working-age adults relative to young dependents that results from declines in birth and death rates. With significantly more productive adults than dependent children and old people, a country has the opportunity to accelerate economic growth and socio-economic development. This is partly as a result of the increased productivity of the large workforce and the potential of accrued savings both governments and households make because of the reduced costs of taking care of young dependents. The DD also accrues from increased participation of women in the formal labour market due to reduced childbearing responsibilities and increased education opportunities for girls.

However, the DD is not automatic and can only be earned if countries pursue the right policies that would strengthen the four critical pillars of DD recommended in the African Union Roadmap for harnessing the DD. These are: 1) Health and wellbeing – which includes investments in family planning and health to accelerate fertility decline and improve the health of the working-age population; 2) Transformational education and skills

development to build a skilled workforce; 3) Employment and entrepreneurship to create ample quality jobs for the workforce; and 4) Rights, governance and youth empowerment to include accountability in service delivery and use of public resources.

Rapid fertility decline will change the age structure and open the window of opportunity for harnessing the DD, while simultaneous investments in the other pillars will help maximise the magnitude and durability of the DD that a country can earn. These sort of investments helped create the DD and socioeconomic transformation that the “Asian Tigers” such as Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan experienced between the 1970s and 2000s. A number of African countries that have experienced relatively rapid fertility decline (such as Tunisia, Botswana, Mauritius, and Cape Verde) have also harnessed the DD, albeit at lower levels compared to the level of the DD achieved in several East Asian countries because the investments in the other pillars were not timely and deep enough.

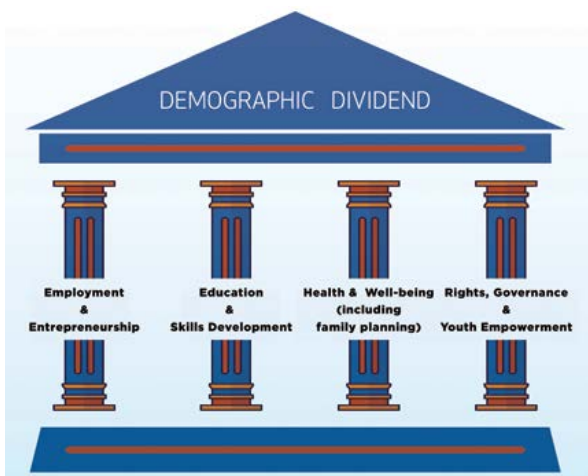
The African Union's landmark decision to make “Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth” the theme for 2017 demonstrates the seriousness with which African leaders and development experts are taking the potential benefits of the DD in accelerated socioeconomic

transformation envisaged in the Union's Agenda 2063 and national development visions. The elevation of the DD at the African Union level provides a critical entry point for well coordinated efforts to demystify the DD concept and provide evidence-based technical assistance to enable countries define and implement specific game-changer interventions that will put them on the path to harness the DD, depending on the stage of the demographic transition.


Moving forward, countries need to domesticate the African Union DD Roadmap to define national coordination modalities and roles of different partners, critical interventions to pursue, and performance management and accountability mechanisms that will be used to ensure that they remain on track in the next couple of decades or so. Through this process, countries should decide what interventions they should undertake in the short and medium terms to achieve the structural transformations in their education systems, economies and governance systems that will pave the way for them to maximise the economic benefits from the DD. The DD interventions should then be mainstreamed in all medium and long-term developments plans and budgeting processes to ensure that they are an integral part of the development planning and execution process.

Articles in this inaugural issue of the African Development Perspectives focus on key challenges and opportunities that African countries face towards their DD journey. The articles examine various dimensions of DD including the significance of quality education, governance, health systems and the relationship between DD and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We hope that you will find them informative and a valuable addition to the debate on how best to accelerate sustainable and inclusive development across Africa.

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African Union Demographic Dividend Priority Investment Pillars



Demographic Transition in Africa and the Opportunity to Harness the Demographic Dividend

By EUNICE MUENI

A demographic transition, through which countries move from high birth and death rates to lower rates, results in reduced dependency burden because majority of the population is of working-age. Deliberate measures can be undertaken to accelerate the transition through improved health care to lower the mortality rate and enhanced access to modern Family Planning (FP) services to lower fertility rates. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are in the early stages of this transition. An opportunity therefore exists to speed up the transition through policies that support improvement of health systems and access to FP services. This way, sub-Saharan Africa can open the window for reaping a substantial DD if necessary simultaneous investments are made.

Countries are said to go through the demographic transition when they move from high to low death and birth rates, as they evolve from a pre-industrial age to industrialised developed states. Rapid demographic transition is associated with increased economic growth, as reduced number of births results in a low child dependency burden and increased working-age population, thus countries are able to produce, save and invest more. The economic miracle among the East Asian countries, known as “Asian Tigers” is associated with the rapid fertility decline, from an average of six to two children per woman between the 1970s and 2000s.

Most countries have completed the transition, but African countries are still in the second stage with an average fertility rate of 4.5 to 6 children per woman.

The transition varies widely in Africa, with fertility rate ranging

from **1.5 children** in **Mauritius**

to **7.6 children** per woman in **Niger**.

Plus

The transition **differs significantly** from other regions in the developing world: African countries started the transition at slightly higher levels of fertility; started the transition much later; and moving at a slower pace.

Fertility rates decline

Between 1960-1965 and 2000-2005



The transition occurs in four stages. In the first stage, both death and birth rates are high, and therefore population growth is slow. In stage two, deaths start declining fast while births remain high. The rapid reduction in deaths at this point is mainly due to adoption of preventive public health measures and innovations in medicine such as widespread provision of clean water, improvements in sanitation, improved nutrition, immunisation and the use of antibiotics. On the other hand, births remain high due to cultural and socio-economic significance of children, thus creating a lag between decline in births and deaths. This lag leads to an explosion of population growth.

In the third stage, fertility decline catches up with mortality decline, and population growth slows down. Fertility declines because of acceptance of the concept of small family size and improved child survival, and thus couples adopt measures to achieve fewer children. In the fourth stage, both mortality and fertility are very low, and population stabilises.

A declining child dependency burden following the demographic transition means that less resources are used to provide basic services like education and health care for children, thus families can save more and invest in other areas of the economy. In addition, women, with less child care roles, get into employment. This, coupled with the youthful population, results in many productive workers and accelerated economic growth. This is what is referred to as the demographic dividend.

Although most countries have completed the transition, African

countries are still in the second stage with an average fertility rate of 4.5 to 6 children per woman. However, the transition varies widely, with fertility rate ranging from 1.5 children in Mauritius to 7.6 children per woman in Niger. In addition, the transition differs significantly from other regions in the developing world: African countries started the transition at slightly higher levels of fertility; started the transition much later; and are moving at a slower pace. For example, fertility rates in sub-Saharan Africa declined by 37 percent between 1960-1965 and 2000-2005, much less than the 61 percent decline recorded in Asia and Latin America over the same period.

The Asian Tigers' economic turnaround gives hope to many African countries that are in the early stages of transition. African countries, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, have for a long time lagged behind other global regions in almost all indicators of development, be it health, education or economic prosperity. The region can therefore take advantage of this transition period to propel an economic takeoff by capturing the potential social and economic benefits. The transition will not be a silver bullet to the developmental challenges that the continent faces, but it does provide an opportunity to change the outlook of most Africans if the right policies are implemented judiciously. The best policy choices and actions can transform the population into a healthy, educated, empowered labour force that can contribute to real and sustained economic growth that lifts people out of poverty.

For countries in the first and second stages, accelerating the transition

is key to rapidly reducing the child dependency burden. Improving health care services to reduce child mortality, providing appropriate contraceptives to those who need them and improving access to education especially among young girls to at least complete secondary education, constitute the best approach to accelerate fertility decline. For the countries in the third stage, the focus should be on provision of jobs or an enabling environment for creation of jobs by the private sector. This will increase the benefits from the youth bulge. Countries in the fourth and post-transition stages still stand a small chance to benefit from increased savings and investments by the largely mature population.

All countries will undergo the demographic transition at some point. Whether African countries wait for transition to happen at its own pace or accelerate the process will in a major way affect the economic outlook of the continent. Taking advantage of the early stages of the transition will reduce most of the challenges that will crop up during the later stages of the transition, as increased economic growth and improved investments and savings can ensure adequate resources to take care of the aging population. African countries should make the decision now as time is of essence. The ripple effect of the investment decisions made today about the current youthful population will be felt many decades to come, and will be the turning point on whether Africa remains poor or joins other developing countries in charting a brighter future for its citizens.

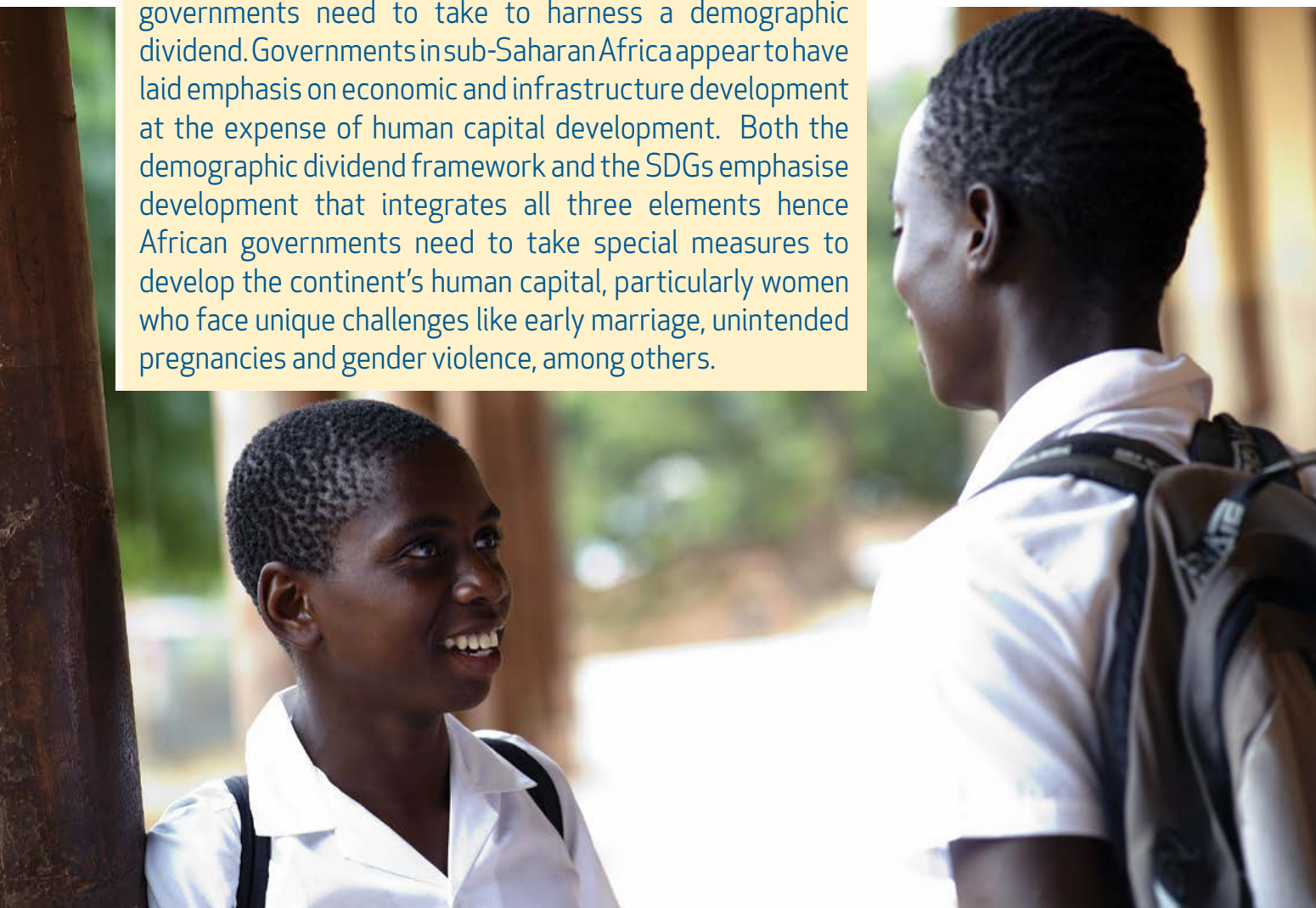
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Two Sides of the Same Coin: The Demographic Dividend and the Sustainable Development Goals for Africa



By BERNARD ONYANGO

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) formulated to be achieved in the post-Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) era align well with actions that African governments need to take to harness a demographic dividend. Governments in sub-Saharan Africa appear to have laid emphasis on economic and infrastructure development at the expense of human capital development. Both the demographic dividend framework and the SDGs emphasise development that integrates all three elements hence African governments need to take special measures to develop the continent's human capital, particularly women who face unique challenges like early marriage, unintended pregnancies and gender violence, among others.



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“People-centred development. That is it! That is what the demographic dividend (DD) is all about”. I have heard this several times from a long-time population and development

practitioner in Africa. Beyond the debates, what is the correct definition of the DD? How do you earn it? How do you quantify it? In what areas do you make priority

investments to maximise the dividend? This summary of the end-game of the DD agenda on the continent succinctly captures why we should care. Perhaps add in the



word “sustainable”. People-centred sustainable development.

The pathways to achieving this goal have much congruence with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are 17 consensus goals and targets that were agreed upon by 169 governments under the United Nations umbrella in 2015. They constitute a framework for achieving global development aspirations over the next 15 years to 2030. The recommended investments areas to achieve the DD in Africa are the same ones required to make positive strides towards the SDG 2030 targets.

Investing in robust family planning (FP) programmes, improving

child survival and keeping girls in school to accelerate demographic transition and open the window to maximise the DD will also enhance maternal health and enable women to get more involved in the formal economy. Robust FP programmes allow women to have the number of children they can comfortably take care of, while improved child health encourages smaller family sizes since parents are confident that the children they have are likely to survive to adulthood. Efforts to discourage early marriages and child-bearing and to keep girls in school, aid them to maximise their full potential and compete favourably with their

male counterparts. Therefore, investments in these areas directly contribute to meeting SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 5 (gender equality).

Projections by the UN estimate that the total global population is set to rise by 2.4 billion by 2030. Africa will contribute to more than half (1.3 billion) of this rise as a result of the high fertility rates in the continent relative to other world regions. The rapid population growth in Africa is taking place during periods of slow pace of economic production. This is in turn contributing to environmental degradation as people resort to unsustainable activities to support livelihoods, such as deforestation.



Africa has the most fragile ecosystems and is threatened by a disproportionate burden of climate change. Without sounding too Malthusian, it is in the interest of the region to manage the rapid population growth. This would in turn indirectly help to achieve SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), 12 (responsible consumption and production), 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water), and 15 (life on land).

Achieving quality education in line with SDG3 is congruent with the urgent need for Africa to move policy focus from increasing enrollment in primary school, that it has commendably



Africa will contribute to more than half of this rise as a result of the **high fertility rates** in the continent relative to other world regions

done over the last decade, to radically improving education and training. Focus should also be on quality and relevance of education alongside increasing enrollment for early childhood education and transition rates to secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum reform to prioritise science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) can ignite the stalled industrial revolution in Africa. Training in key transferable skills that are sorely lacking such as critical thinking, leadership, entrepreneurship and ethics will equip graduates of the education systems with important employability skills that would improve their prospects for decent work. Quality education for all also promotes SDG 2 (gender equality).

In recognition that Africa lags behind on major indicators of human development, the DD agenda on the continent is making a strong pitch for these strategic reforms in education to take advantage of its youth bulge to accelerate socio-economic development. To further improve the quality of human capital, the DD paradigm also promotes policy actions to improve public health by tackling the double burden of infectious and non-communicable diseases, as well as malnutrition that blight the region. These actions reinforce efforts to achieve SDG 3 (good health and well-being) and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation).

The DD pillar that advocates economic policy strategy reforms aimed at increased productivity,

job creation and inclusive economic growth mirror the ambitions of SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

Improvements in all sectors in the absence of good governance and accountability will not lead to people-centred sustainable development. Thus the DD framework advocates enhanced governance, accountability and performance management. This can significantly contribute to SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions). A review of long-term development strategies for countries in the region shows that most governments appear to put much focus in investments in economic production and infrastructure development at the expense of human capital development and with limited focus on governance. They have to step back and realise that sustainable development will not be possible without the integrated multi-sectoral strategy advocated for the DD and similarly by the SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals) that envisions strong global and national public-private partnerships for sustainable funding and implementation of the SDGs.

Two sides of the same coin? You decide.

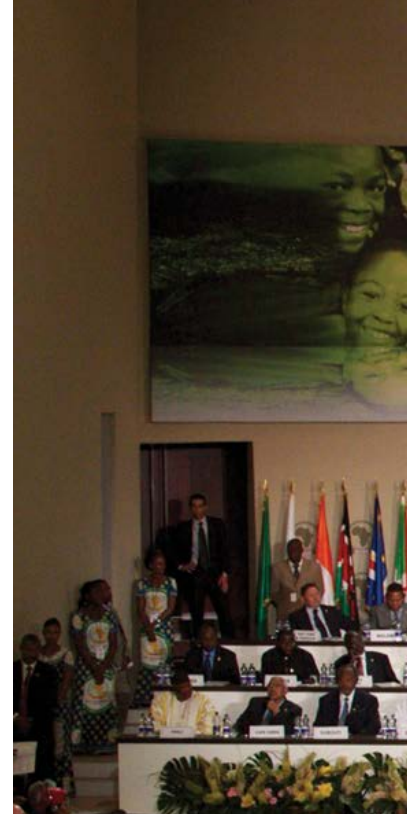


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Governance as a Key Enabler of Delivering on the Demographic Dividend

By MIKE ELDON

Governance, the actions taken by those in leadership to manage the affairs of the entities they govern, is a major factor in determining whether or not Africa can harness a demographic dividend. To increase employment of young people, who constitute the majority population in Africa, governments should enact policies that support the growth of the private sector, a key employer. Harnessing a demographic dividend requires long-term planning. Governments also need to have the responsibility of ensuring that any economic gains made by having most people engaged in economic productivity are equitably distributed. Citizens therefore have a role to play in calling governments to account and in effect increasing the possibility of countries gaining from the demographic dividend.



“youth bulge” to become a blessing rather than a curse. Above all, it requires allocating national resources to support the private sector in creating jobs, and the education system (both public and private) in bringing forward young people into the workplace who are suited to carrying out those jobs competently. The government must also ensure that these people have access to quality affordable healthcare (again public and private), and that fertility levels are kept to a manageable number of children.

So what is required of leaders to qualify as practitioners of “Good Governance”? First, they must evolve a vision of a country where the demographic dividend has become reality. They must passionately believe in that vision, and communicate their commitment effectively, convincing others to share it. But a warning: longer term goals like this one – and like mitigating climate change – are very challenging in democracies, where the electoral cycle favours initiatives that can be effected within the life of a single administration. This is where the statesman comes in: the leader whose concern lies beyond the next election to the next generation.

First, let's be clear about what we mean by that very elegant if rather overwhelming term “Governance”. It is just the actions of governing a nation or organisations at other levels, and the manner in which these actions are pursued by those who manage the affairs of that entity. Good Governance is therefore all about good leadership and good management, about crafting strategies for the long-term good of the people who comprise the entity and then executing on those strategies.

In the context of a demographic dividend, this means creating an enabling environment that will allow the phenomenon of the



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In recent times, many countries have sought to overcome the temptation to go for short-term sub-optimisation by coming up with national plans covering twenty and more years. Rwanda's Vision 2020, Kenya's Vision 2030 and Uganda's Vision 2040 provide examples of such attempts at stretching leaders' – and followers' – horizons. Increasingly, regions within countries have adopted such social, political and economic blueprints, and also country clusters such as ECOWAS with its Vision 2020 and SADC with its Vision 2050. At the continental level, the African Union has its own Vision 2063, which foresees "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena."

Complementary to such visions are very helpful Scenario Planning initiatives, such as South Africa's Scenarios 2025, drawn up in 2008, in whose section on Governance a number of questions are posed:

"How able, competent, efficient, honest and legitimate is Government going to be in 2025, and in the years leading to 2025? Is it able to promote national competitiveness and drive the economy forward, or does it inhibit innovation, productivity and social inclusion? How well does it deal with the key issues of health, education, crime and corruption over time? Related to this are matters pertaining to electoral politics and dynamics within the largest political alliances: the tone of political discourse, the conduct of the leadership and centripetal and centrifugal trends tugging at the ruling party. Ultimately will leadership engender a greater sense of purpose and unity?"

Importantly, as is the case with Kenya's Vision 2030, a nation's social, political and economic pillars must be underpinned by national values that are beyond the merely aspirational if the vision is to be actualised. And this is the

most challenging aspect of good governance: finding ways of promoting healthy attitudes and behaviour in the people. Not least, leaders themselves must be role models for living good values.

At the turn of the century Kenya too worked on scenarios for its future, defining the most optimistic one as "Flying Geese", that reflected the aligned energy with which geese travel in their flocks. This scenario goes to the heart of Good Governance, to the ability to bring about inclusive democracy and growth, to introduce simultaneous and inclusive political and economic reforms... to benefit from youthful energy in abundance.

It is easy to call for abiding by the rule of law, for transparency and accountability, and for responsible, honest, fair and efficient government. But the challenges, everywhere in the world, are daunting. Even among the Asian Tigers and Brazil, where extraordinary achievements have been witnessed in bringing about demographic dividends,

struggles concerning good governance abound. Grand corruption, or at least allegations thereof, seriously threaten some of their regimes, and inequality looms as a serious threat to stability.

In countries like Kenya where there is open democracy and reasonable freedom of speech – and of the media – it is too easy to gain the impression that everyone is corrupt and that no one and nothing is working as it should. Yet, those who work with government come across so many unsung heroes doing their best to deliver on their mandate. The journey to Good Governance is long, and progress is at best fitful. But unless those who govern us – and we who elect them – become more ambitiously impatient we will run out of time to benefit from that vision of a demographic dividend.

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Investing in Education and Relevant Skills to Harness a Demographic Dividend for Africa

By JACKLINE NYERERE & OKWACH ABAGI

Most education systems in Africa have not put in place mechanisms for ensuring that education reforms reflect the skills demand of the labour market. One area identified as needing critical attention is the inculcation of “soft skills” such as communication, critical thinking and resilience among young learners. Countries also need to invest not only in expanding formal education institutions but also those that offer technical and vocational education. Alongside these measures, there needs to be more interaction between tertiary institutions and industry in order to ensure skills being taught match with those that employers demand.

The need for sub-Saharan Africa’s (SSA) investment in quality education and training for the continent to achieve socio-economic transformation cannot be over-emphasised. According to the United Nations World *Population Prospects 2015 Revision*, young people and youth (0-19 years) form about 50 percent of Africa’s population at about 622 million. Any development agenda that fails to include youth skills development is therefore likely to fail.

Investment in holistic education is important for sustained human capital development and studies have shown that diverse and high quality skills are at the heart of improving employment and livelihood outcomes, increasing productivity and driving national

economic growth as well as competitiveness at the international level. The modern globalised workplace environment is increasingly characterised by complexity, competition, collaboration, flexibility, and the constant pressure to learn more, process more, and produce more. Investment in quality education is therefore a developmental strategy which Africa should embrace.

Over the last 50 years since most SSA countries gained independence, the continent has faced development challenges and gaps including low economic growth, increased poverty and hunger, increased population growth, limited access to basic education and high unemployment. But it seems to be in a period of transition to faster economic growth. Several countries including Nigeria, Angola, Ethiopia, Ghana and Kenya have projected gross domestic product growth above five percent per year for the next decade. This means that there will be resources to spend on education and other sectors like health. The challenge now is to strategically harness these resources appropriately.

Generally, the SSA region has made great efforts in improving access to education especially at primary level since many countries introduced free primary education in early 2000 after introduction of Millennium Development Goals. The expansion of opportunities for subsequent levels

have however not kept pace since there are low transition rates: below 40 percent from primary to secondary and about 4 percent from secondary to higher education, for most countries. There is particularly limited access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, partly due to the neglect in resource allocation and lack of the kind of prestige associated with university education.

Most SSA countries are thus not building sufficient and relevant competencies and skills of the youth which currently constitutes 75 percent of the population. It is now increasingly recognised that young people need to acquire and demonstrate a broader range of both cognitive and non-cognitive skills if they are to become productive and well-integrated participants in the modern knowledge-based economies as recommended by the International Labour Organisation.

This mix of cognitive and non-cognitive skills are together generally described as “transferable skills”, or “21st century skills”. In more general terms, these skills are understood as “higher order cognitive and non-cognitive skills that individuals can use to be successful across different situations in work and life.” They include communication, critical thinking, problem solving, resilience and reliability. Transferable skills “prepare all learners to be life-long creative, connected, and collaborative

problem-solvers and to be healthy, happy individuals.”

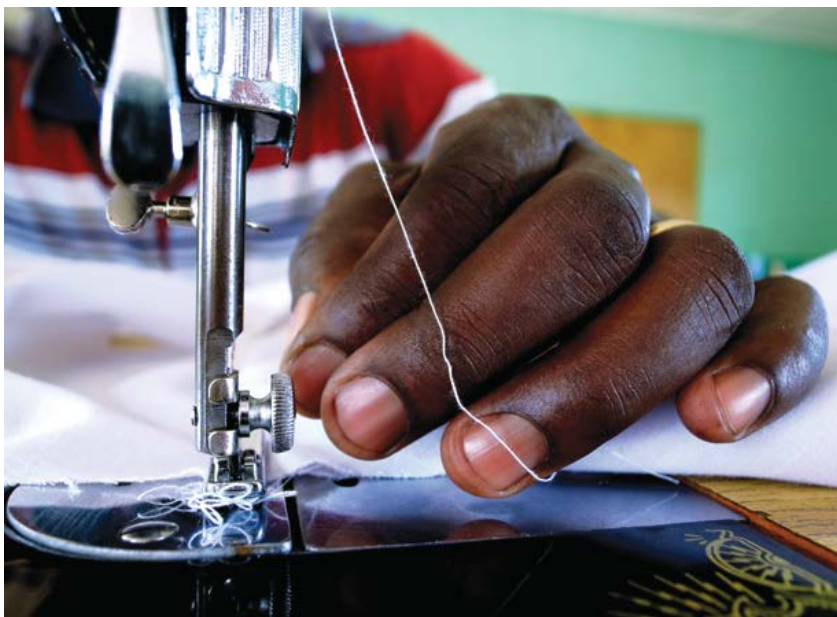
Studies by UNESCO have shown that at primary level, 30 percent of children are not learning and are still semi-illiterate after being in school for up to six years. Higher education is not doing any better. There is low quality education occasioned by inadequate funding, teaching and research facilities and infrastructure as well as qualified teaching staff. It is evident that quality of education and research has declined in the face of increasing enrollment in higher education, which is over four-fold between 1985 and 2005 in SSA.

Relevance of teaching and research has not been maintained and institutional quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms are either not in place or are weak and inefficient. There is also very little interaction between researchers and innovators, affecting technological innovation and research and development programmes. Worse still, gains made in education are not enough to meet employer demand for skills. This is reflected in an African Economic Outlook (AEO) Country Experts Survey carried out in 2012 in 37 African countries. It showed that up to 54 percent of youth with advanced qualifications lacked relevant skills required in the job market.

To achieve meaningful development, the continent needs to invest in expanding education and training opportunities for the youth. Some of the strategies needed include: investment in and enhancing the quality of TVET institutions, to integrate transferable skills in curriculums and to have dialogue with industry to understand the skills needed in the labor market. Linkages between training institutions and industry is key to empowering the youth and making them innovative, relevant and competitive in the labor market.

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Youth Unemployment Could Compromise Africa's Demographic Dividend Opportunity

By GRACE KUMCHULESI

A country's ability to take advantage of the potential of its youthful population determines how well positioned it is to harness a demographic dividend. Most African countries have large youthful populations. However, they also have high levels of youth unemployment, a situation that leaves most young people underemployed or even idle. If not well managed, this situation can turn hopes of harnessing a demographic dividend into disasters. African governments therefore need to formulate policies and make investments that create meaningful jobs for the youth. A key area that requires focus is education, with governments needing to ensure that education being offered is of high quality, relevant and aligned with demands of industry.

Although unemployment rates vary across African countries, the problem of youth unemployment is evident in Africa. A number of countries such as South Africa and Botswana face extremely high youth unemployment

of above 50 percent. With 14 percent of the population aged 15-24 years without a job in sub-Saharan Africa countries and new entrants joining the labour market, it is unlikely that African economies will benefit from

their youthful populations and achieve the demographic dividend.

But if large numbers of people in the working-age population are not productively engaged, this might

be a missed opportunity for Africa to maximise the potential value of the youthful population to yield a demographic dividend, since this phenomenon is neither automatic, guaranteed, nor perpetual.

A comparison between Tunisia and South Korea provides a good example of the importance of investing in youth for a maximum realisation of the demographic dividend. While both countries historically experienced high proportions of the working-age population, they remarkably differ with respect to youth employment. In Tunisia, youth unemployment has persisted at around 30 percent since the early 1990s, whereas in South Korea, it has been around 10 percent over the same period. In terms of national income, South Korea's has grown remarkably by a factor of 12 between 1980 and 2010, while Tunisia's has only tripled. The sluggish growth in national income in Tunisia has been largely attributed to lack of employment opportunities for the youth.

In order for young people to drive socio-economic transformation in African countries it is critical that the youth make the largest proportion of the working population. Currently, Africa is home to 226 million youth aged 15-24 years. By 2030, it is projected that the number will have increased by 42 percent and doubled by 2055. Youth can be critical agents for positive socio-economic change if appropriate investments are made to unleash their power to innovate and become productive citizens. They can also just as easily be agents of violent extremism if they are idle and unemployed and have no hope for the future.

The challenge is to provide decent economic opportunities for young people particularly the majority of those who are in some sort of employment or are employed in the informal sector. In Malawi for example, a large fraction of employed youth work in subsistence agriculture. Thus, Malawi will

ILO estimates that between 2000 and 2008 Africa created a total of **73 million jobs**, but **only 16 million** were for **young people** aged between **15 and 24 years**.

have to structurally transform its agro-based economy in order to productively employ its substantial number of youth employed in the agricultural sector which is the major employer and also the main driver of economic growth in the country.

A major barrier to employment opportunities in Africa is inadequate job creation. Although most African economies have experienced positive growth over the last decade, the level of growth has not been high enough to create ample jobs. An analysis of 53 countries in Africa by the African Development Bank reveals that a lack of sufficient job creation is by far the biggest hurdle young Africans face today.

This means that African governments have the important task to create a conducive social, economic and political environment for sustainable decent job creation. While some

jobs have been created, they have not been adequate to employ the numbers of young people in search of work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that between 2000 and 2008, Africa created a total of 73 million jobs. However, only 16 million were for young people aged between 15 and 24 years. Consequently, many young Africans are forced into unemployment or, more frequently, underemployment in informal jobs with low productivity and pay. A good number of them get discouraged, after spending long durations unsuccessfully searching for jobs.

Many young people in Africa also lack appropriate skills needed to match the needs of the labour market. They lack a mix of qualifications and non-cognitive skills that employers look for. Although many African countries have significantly improved primary school enrollment, much more has to be done to improve transition to secondary, tertiary and vocational training institutions. Moreover, the quality of education in most African countries is wanting and needs to be enhanced to ensure that graduates have relevant skills required to develop the economy.

Without urgent action to reform their economies and provide employment for the productive working-age population, African countries risk wasting the tremendous economic potential offered by the favourable population age structure. Instead of reaping a demographic dividend, Africa might risk having to deal with a demographic disaster.



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Community Health Approaches Key in Tackling NCDs and Exploiting a Demographic Dividend in Africa

By MARTIN ATELA & COLLINS OUMA

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries are facing a simultaneous challenge of having to tackle persistently high levels of infectious diseases and growing burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs). This calls for innovative and cost effective ways of dealing with these challenges. One proven approach is the use of Community Health Workers (CHWs) to extend the reach of the health systems deep within areas where majority of the population in SSA countries lives, particularly rural, informal urban settlements, arid and semi-arid areas. Governments need to formulate policies and programmes that strengthen health systems in order to ensure they can support initiatives to address the twin burdens of infectious diseases and NCDs, ensuring a healthy working-age population needed to take advantage of the demographic dividend (DD).



The growing burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) populations is well recognised. Governments need to rethink their almost sole focus on infectious diseases in order for them to leverage on a possible DD. In 2010, it was estimated that more than 2 million deaths in SSA were due to NCDs, a 46 percent increase from 1990. Whilst NCDs are projected to become the leading cause of death by 2030, at present, almost three quarters of NCD associated deaths - 28 million - occur in low- and middle-income countries.

In SSA, nearly half of the population already suffers from hypertension, a predisposing condition for heart attacks and strokes. Notwithstanding the immense financial and health strain on individuals and their families, the growing burden of NCDs is also increasingly adding tremendous pressure to already overstretched health systems and presents a major challenge to development in Africa. This situation calls for urgent action both at programme and policy level to reduce the incidence and impact of NCDs so as to meet the region's sustainable development goals. In this article, we articulate four ways



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Multi-sectoral response to the NCD challenge

A critical strength of the community health approach is its emphasis on multi-sectoral collaboration and responses to health system challenges. Given the multiple angles of the NCD problem namely: behavioural, lifestyle, genetic and dietary, community health interventions incorporating key sectors in the health system where the youth are a majority would appear to be more effective. Healthy lifestyle messages can effectively be passed on platforms where the youth are the majority particularly education, labour and social services in order to leverage resources and ensure efforts are focused on both the individual and the communities to tackle factors predisposing people to NCDs.

A multi-sectoral approach should be facilitated through community health activities such as community wellness talks, school open days, promotion of physical activities, maternal, new-born and child health days. This would ensure the implementation of interventions that tackle the social and economic precursors of NCD risks and encourage positive health behaviours, while discouraging negative ones among young people. Collectively, these approaches have the potential of significantly shifting the projected trajectory of NCDs in SSA allowing for redirection of resources to development projects that help create employment and improve tax-base for social services.

Early response to NCDs

Community health interventions can contribute to early responses to NCDs in SSA context in two ways – detection and treatment. Appropriate and suitable training and supervision, complemented with logistical support can enable CHWs to participate in the detection and treatment of NCDs such as hypertension, diabetes, and other priority chronic diseases. Integrating community health approaches in formal training and curriculum can facilitate skills transfer to young health professionals to ensure they are culturally sensitive to the environment in which they practice.

through which the community health approach could be used to respond to the growing challenge of NCDs in the SSA region.

Flexible, home grown response to NCDs

Community Health Workers (CHWs) are able to provide strong links between the health system and communities. Armed with extensive knowledge of the community, its culture and given their proximity to the community, CHWs can respond to particular community challenges and tailor NCD prevention, control and treatment responses in a manner sensitive to local cultures. Since behaviour with direct consequences on individual's health is learned at an

early age, typically at adolescence, community health interventions targeting lifestyle choices could be critical in tackling NCDs particularly in SSA with its huge youthful population.

Besides behaviours developed early in life, cultural practices greatly influence lifestyle choices. Since community health interventions are flexible, SSA health systems can tailor health messages targeting the youth and use the youth to transmit these messages to the general population with a view to challenging long-standing practices that predispose communities to NCDs. For example, many African societies perceive women with a high waist circumference as being more beautiful than slim ones, a cultural norm that could predispose women to obesity.



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Skills such as health promotion, preventive medicine and care for the vulnerable are at the core of community health principles and have worked in countries such as Ethiopia and Rwanda. These skills become critical in tackling NCDs if interventions are put in place early, since most of the NCDs share four key risk factors— tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol, physical inactivity and unhealthy diet. These are all modifiable behaviours typically established during adolescence or young adulthood and ones that set the stage for NCDs later in life, hence the need to sensitise young people early. Health professionals can use acquired skills to provide advice and support in promoting healthy lifestyle habits with the potential of contributing to improvements in NCD programmes.

Affordability and ease of mobilisation

Increasing costs of care is a worrying trend globally, more so in SSA where myriad development challenges are

competing for limited resources. To achieve sustainable development, SSA policymakers and governments must apply resources prudently through intentional development plans that prioritise health. A healthy population is critical if SSA countries are to achieve the DD. This calls for prudent ways of managing the limited resources available to the health system. Provision of community health services using trained CHWs is a more cost-effective way of responding to NCDs. Effectiveness can be achieved through task shifting which has been shown to be effective for maternal, child health and HIV services. This is because, CHWs can be deployed in areas specialist workers tend to avoid such as rural communities and arid and semi-arid areas.

Policy options

The SSA region is at cross-roads on its health priorities: it is facing a growing burden of NCDs alongside persistent infectious diseases. The region must now decide whether it will empower its youthful population

to enable them contribute positively to its development plans – by leveraging on its potential for the DD. To maximise on the DD potential, the region must move fast to address the growing burden of NCDs. Community health approaches offer some robust interventions that can help the region tackle this health challenge and meet global health targets such as Universal Health Coverage for all by 2020. The interventions selected should be flexible, context sensitive, rights-based, and have the youth at the core. To achieve this, governments need to: shift their responses from the current curative to prevention efforts; empower youth to deliver community health services; allocate resources to community health interventions; and invest in research that can drive evidence gathering and use to scale-up what works and reform what does not work.

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Generating Political Commitment for Harnessing the Demographic Dividend in Africa

By ROSE ORONJE & BERNARD ONYANGO

The last four years have seen the demographic dividend (DD) concept gain important traction at the highest levels of governments in Africa. AFIDEP has been central to this process, galvanising action by governments through evidence generation, synthesis, modelling and scenario building, to illustrate the potential of DD as an impetus for transformational and inclusive socio-economic growth in Africa. As a result of this work, top level leaders among them Uganda's President, H.E. Yoweri Museveni and Malawi's President, H.E. Peter Mutharika, endorsed the concept and influenced the African Union (AU) to endorse "*Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth*" as the theme of the 2017 AU Summit.

Over the last four years, the *demographic dividend* (DD) has gained significant traction as a transformative development paradigm among top policymakers and political leadership in Africa. AFIDEP has been centrally involved in supporting the DD to gain this prominence. In this short article, we share some of the strategies we have employed to garner high-level political commitments to the DD as an important development paradigm in Africa. Such commitments are crucial as an ingredient contributing to successful development efforts and can be leveraged to translate into actions needed towards addressing sluggish socio-economic development in the continent.

Evidence on the DD and how this can positively transform countries' economic trajectories is not novel. In Africa, the crippling implication of high child dependency on socio-economic development has been acknowledged for decades and cited in many governments' policies as a

barrier to development. However, for years, this evidence has not energised political leaders and policymakers to take decisive actions to address high fertility - the notable driver of the rapid population growth that has contributed to the continent's dependent youthful population age structure. So how have we captivated political attention on the DD paradigm in Africa?

Since 2012, AFIDEP has been immersed in evidence generation, synthesis and modelling and scenario building, to illustrate the potential of DD as an impetus for transformational and inclusive socio-economic growth in Africa. We have also engaged in advocacy at country, regional and global levels and in the development of DD roadmaps to support countries in concretising policy actions to maximise their potential DD.

An important strategy for AFIDEP in popularising DD in Africa has been to effectively position itself as a stakeholder in regional decision-

making arenas that have implications for policy decisions at national levels.

One of our initial engagements was through our membership to the African Union Commission (AUC)-led Experts Steering Committee on the demographic dividend in Africa. Our key role on the Committee was to provide technical guidance on the potential of the DD paradigm in Africa's development efforts. The work of this Committee was instrumental in deliberations leading to endorsements of the DD paradigm at key regional fora. Among these were the 6th Joint AUC and UNECA Conference for African ministers of finance, planning and economic development in Abidjan in 2013, the 2013 African Regional Conference on Population and Development in Addis Ababa, and the Common African Position on the Post-2015 Development Agenda agreed upon in 2014. The endorsement of the DD paradigm as an integrated approach to sustainable and inclusive development opened the door to



interest from country levels in adopting the paradigm in thinking through their development planning and policies.

The regional endorsements of the DD paradigm triggered much interest in the DD at country level. As AFIDEP, we realised that for the DD to ignite any meaningful change in African countries, there was need for national level analyses that illustrate how individual countries could integrate the reforms and targeted investments required to harness a sizeable DD. Specifically, investment in family planning to lower fertility and women's empowerment, enhancing public health, investments

in education and job creation, and addressing governance issues (such as corruption) and fast-tracking transformative development.

To effectively do this and make the evidence matter, we have focused on building strategic partnerships with key actors within and outside African governments as well as conducting rigorous national level modelling and evidence syntheses. A particularly fruitful partnership has been with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) which has supported our work on the DD since 2013 in more than 10 countries in East, Southern, Central and West Africa. This partnership also facilitated working with traditionally

influential ministries and agencies such as ministries of finance, planning and development, and national planning agencies that are supported by UNFPA in respective countries.

Engagements with these government ministries and agencies have been important in advancing DD since not only are they essential in overall development policy formulation and resource allocation, but also have strong convening powers to bring other stakeholders on board the agenda. These ministries have commissioned our national DD studies and we have worked collaboratively with them in defining and conducting the modelling studies, cultivating



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population and development where previously there has been reluctance to embrace family planning - viewed in some quarters as a population control strategy. For example, the evidence from the Uganda DD study elicited strong support for the DD from the highest levels.

While launching the national DD study report, President Museveni, previously noted as a sceptic of the positive impact of family planning and fertility reduction on development, came out to publicly declare that “family planning is good for the health of the child and the mother, for the wellbeing of the family, and the whole country...It’s about holistic development that starts with the realisation that having too many children is not good for development.”

He noted that he was happy that the population discourse was finally focusing on how countries like Uganda could take advantage of its population dynamics to accelerate socio-economic transformation, rather than the narrow focus on controlling population growth. President Museveni has since become a strong advocate of the DD and directed that the paradigm be integrated in the National Development and the Sectoral Plans.

In Malawi, engagement of the President and top government officials in the national DD study and the appointment of the President as a DD Champion by UNFPA has been instrumental in leading Malawi to propose and have other member states of the AU endorse “*Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth*” as the theme of the 2017 AU Summit. The title of the theme also betrays an important aspect that has made DD attractive to political leadership. This is the fact that most of these countries which have a very large youthful population, are looking for solutions to bottlenecks holding back the youth from achieving their full potential. These include high unemployment rates of the youth partly driven by a mismatch between labour market needs and the skills the youth possess. Other bottle necks include harmful cultural practices holding back the progress of women

such as child marriages that lead to early pregnancies causing girls to drop out of school and also keeping the fertility rates high.

In line with the 2017 AU theme, countries have been making even greater efforts to ensure they are doing something about the DD and they are not left behind by their counterparts. AFIDEP has been involved in some of these activities advising governments and agencies as they develop roadmaps to harness the DD. The roadmap moves the DD agenda from evidence and advocacy to action, hence operationalising the frameworks intended to harness the DD.

Finally, influential actors, both institutional and individual have embraced the DD paradigm as a possible opportunity to be seized to transform the continent’s fortunes. Apart from UNFPA that has become a strong advocate of DD, other institutions currently supporting both research and programmes on the DD in Africa include among others: The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and (USAID). Influential economists who have previously shunned the centrality of population as an important variable in economic growth have also become converts paying greater attention to the implications of changes in population structure and DD in particular on socio-economic development.

We believe that the strategic partnerships that we have established with African governments and other partners in our ongoing efforts to support countries to harness a sizeable DD have significantly contributed in raising commitment to the DD paradigm on the continent. These efforts are backed by rigorous evidence that we have generated illustrating how integrated investments and reforms can transform economies, and strong advocacy to ensure that the evidence is translated into policy action. 

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government ownership in the process and the study findings. Consequently, it is local experts within government agencies who have presented the modelling results and led discussions at national level with top government officials and other stakeholders. This kind of collaboration has also strengthened technical capacity within the governments’ planning agencies to conduct these kinds of rigorous analyses.

Findings from the national DD studies that frame the DD as a holistic integrated development paradigm have been critical in shifting opinion of leaders on the relationship between



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