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## Malawi Parliament launches Caucus on Population and Development



Hon. Esther M. Chilenje, Deputy Speaker of the Malawi Parliament speaks at the launch of the Parliamentary Caucus on Population and Development on 27 April 2017. The Caucus was officially launched by H.E. the First Lady of the Republic of Malawi, Dr. Gertrude Mutharika, who is also the Patron of the Caucus.

By Diana Warira, Nissily Mushani and Dr. Rose Oronje

The Malawi Parliament has made good strides in driving efforts towards dealing with the country's population and development challenges. On 27 April 2017, the Parliament launched the Caucus on Population and Development. The Caucus seeks to promote advocacy and legislative reforms aimed at tackling Malawi's population and development challenges. The day-long event was attended by over 100 Members of Parliament (MPs). Other guests included representatives of development agencies, civil society and the media. The Caucus was officially launched by H.E. the First Lady of the Republic of Malawi, Dr. Gertrude Mutharika, who is also the Patron of the Caucus.

In her remarks, the First Lady noted that it is impressive that MPs have taken the initiative to address Malawi's population and development challenges. She further pointed that the Caucus provides an opportunity for the larger community in Parliament to deliberate population and development issues in an inclusive manner.

### Why the Caucus?

The Caucus was launched at a time when Malawi is moving towards prioritising population dynamics in its planning and investments to achieve sustainable development and shared prosperity. The 2008 Malawi Population and Housing Census enumerated the Malawi population to be 13.1 million,

with an annual growth rate of 2.8 percent. The projected population in 2017 is 17.4 million. The population is also youthful with about 52 percent aged 18 years and below, and 70 percent aged below 30 years. Although declining, Malawi's total fertility rate remains high, currently estimated at 4.4 births per woman, down from 5.7 in 2010.

This rapidly rising population has serious implications for Malawi's socio-economic development and consequently, Malawi is struggling with numerous population and development challenges. These include: unsustainable farming leading to land degradation and food insecurity, climate change and other environmental-related

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# Malawi Parliament launches Caucus on Population and Development

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challenges. Malawi is vulnerable to environmental shocks with the drought in 2016 reducing the country's GDP by about 2 percent. The country's overreliance on subsistence farming which although employing 85 percent of the workforce has low productivity, thereby aggravating food insecurity. Other challenges include rapid urbanisation, disease burden due to HIV/AIDS and Tuberculosis (TB), teenage pregnancies, maternal and child mortality, among others. For instance, out of every 100,000 live births, about 440 women die in pregnancy, during labour, or within 6 weeks of delivery.

In the context of these prevailing challenges, the Caucus will focus on

increasing Parliamentarians' understanding of the linkages between population dynamics and issues on reproductive health, family planning, food security, water resources, environment, ageing, urbanisation, migration, HIV/AIDS, TB and gender equality. Ultimately, the Caucus seeks to enable Parliamentarians to make evidence-informed decisions and reform legislation that will contribute to reducing the country's high population growth rate, as well as stimulate investments in the key sectors that have potential to transform the country's socio-economic development prospects.

Speaking during the launch, Hon. Juliana Lunguzi an MP and co-chair of the

Caucus, said the Caucus will provide MPs with a platform through which they can understand population and development issues better and gain in-depth understanding of the needs of their communities. Hon. Lunguzi, who is also the Chair of the Parliamentary Committee on Health, also pointed that the Caucus will sharpen the skillset of MPs by increasing their knowledge on the country's population and development challenges and the solutions needed to improve the lives of Malawians. MPs will also be more knowledgeable in formulation of relevant legislation and how to engage their constituents and how they (constituents) can play a role in overcoming the country's population and development challenges

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## Opportunity for transformation

Despite the prevailing challenges, Dr. Eliya Zulu, the Executive Director, AFIDEP, pointed that Malawi stands a great chance to harness a demographic dividend. However, due to high fertility, the country's population is dominated by children and youth. In order for Malawi to harness a demographic dividend, the country needs to reduce the high fertility by investing in programmes that increase access to family planning services to all who need them. Further, investments in public health are needed to promote child survival and reduce death rates. "If the population shifts from one dominated by children and youth to one that has more workers, this can accelerate economic growth," said Dr. Zulu. Keeping girls in school and

promoting the quality of education should then accompany these investments.

Seeing that the mandate of the Caucus cuts across issues that are pertinent in the achievement of the demographic dividend in Malawi, Dr. Zulu pledged AFIDEP's commitment to providing evidence to the Caucus, so the Caucus activities translate to real change for Malawians.

Further, Dr. Zulu noted that Malawi is at a great advantage as its President, H.E. Peter Mutharika, is a demographic dividend champion and has been instrumental in driving advocacy on the demographic dividend among African leaders. For instance, President Mutharika led advocacy to the African Union (AU) to adopt the demographic dividend with a

focus on investments in youth, as the theme of the 2017 AU Summit. "The President and First lady have shown great leadership in promoting the demographic dividend agenda in Africa," he said.

With buy-in from the country's highest level of leadership, Caucus members are hopeful that this will drive towards resource allocation and formulation of relevant legislation to address Malawi's population and development challenges. Having the First Lady as Patron of the Caucus also provides a strategic opportunity for MPs to rally for wider political commitment on issues relating to population and development. Further, in order to take the Caucus agenda forward, parliamentary sub-committees focused on key challenges shall be established within the Caucus.

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## AFIDEP shares lessons on building capacity for evidence



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Dr. Rose Oronje, Director, Science Communications and Evidence Uptake - AFIDEP, speaks during a session at the ECSA-HC Best Practices Forum in Arusha, Tanzania.

By Diana Warira

Policy makers, health professionals, scholars and other stakeholders in development convened for a knowledge sharing forum on best practices in the health sector in Arusha, Tanzania, hosted by the East, Central and Southern African Health Community (ECSA-HC). Ahead of the main conference, which began on 10 April 2017, AFIDEP convened a session on 9 April 2017 to share experiences and lessons learned in implementing the programme on Strengthening Capacity to Use Research Evidence In Health Policymaking in Kenya and Malawi (SECURE Health).

### Where we began

Speaking about the genesis of the programme, Dr. Rose Oronje, Director, Science Communication and Evidence Uptake, AFIDEP, discussed the resolution by the ECSA Health Ministers Conference (HMC) in 2009, to improve the generation and use of health research in policymaking. The growing need to address the gaps in the capacity of policymakers to use evidence in policy formulation at the time, saw AFIDEP, ECSA-HC and other partners design the programme. The SECURE Health programme, which has been implemented in Kenya and Malawi since 2013, came to a close in February 2017.

### Making a difference

At institutional level, the programme has provided policymakers in both Kenya and Malawi with a roadmap that shall facilitate operationalisation of evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM). The programme has produced Guidelines for Evidence Use in Policymaking, aimed at supporting formulation of sound policies in African countries. As noted by Dr. Oronje, the programme has ensured that EIPM is entrenched within existing government frameworks such as Malawi's Knowledge Sharing Platform (KTP). The advantage with this is that EIPM shall be an institutional function that shall outlive individuals who

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## use in policymaking at regional forum in Tanzania

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have adopted the use of evidence in policy formulation.

Similarly, in Kenya, the SECURE Health programme began implementation at a time when the Ministry of Health established its Research and Development Division. The programme was therefore integrated as part of the Division's annual operations. As noted in the discussions at the forum, institutionalisation of EIPM functions not only ensures sustainability of a culture of evidence use in government, but also ensures ownership of the new way of conducting business among policymakers.

Cumulatively, this creates a favourable climate for the use of evidence in policymaking. Furthermore, the programme has stimulated dedication among policymakers towards use of evidence in policymaking. For instance in Kenya, the programme facilitated the formation of a Caucus to champion evidence use in the Kenya Parliament. In addition, the Kenya government has allocated funds to research and development at the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health has also included evidence use as a key indicator for the formulation of policies.

In Malawi, the College of Medicine (at the University of Malawi) is developing a module on EIPM that it intends to include in its graduate training programmes. This is geared towards ensuring that graduates

are well trained in translating research evidence into decisions and programmes. At individual level, the programme has improved the skills of policymakers and their support staff such as researchers at the ministries of health and parliaments in both Kenya and Malawi. The trainings were focused on building capacity to access, assess, synthesise and utilise evidence in policymaking processes.

### Not without challenges

While there have been several successes, the programme has encountered challenges in getting political commitment from top level policymakers such as cabinet and principal secretaries. However, championing by other policymakers in both the ministries of health and parliament has given momentum to what could transform the policymaking landscape in Africa. Research evidence shows that most policies in Africa are formulated based on intuition, political and personal interests, among other factors. Changing the manner in which African policies are formulated therefore, has been the core of the SECURE Health programme.

### A word from the champions

Dr. Damson Kathyola, Malawi's Director of Research at the Ministry of Health is one of the policymakers championing the use of evidence in Malawi's policymaking processes. Speaking at the forum, Dr.

Kathyola noted that for Africa to make progress [in development], all relevant stakeholders need to recognise the relevance of evidence in policymaking. He also noted that policymakers and researchers are often on opposite sides of the policymaking divide. However, this divide needs to be bridged in order for policies to be responsive to the continent's challenges. "[The] formulation of public policy is messy. [We therefore] need to create rapport between researchers and policymakers," he said. Dr. Kathyola also noted that in order to ensure the culture of evidence use is embedded within the Ministry of Health's operations, the Ministry intends to integrate regular dialogues on evidence in the work of the Malawi Public Health Institute. These will facilitate regular discussion on the evidence needs and gaps on urgent health issues in the country.

A key success of the programme's work in Malawi has been the buy-in among policymakers not only in the Ministry of Health, but also Parliament. Ms. Velia Mayonga, Chief Research Officer at the Malawi Parliament noted that Parliament is now seeking to ensure a 2 percent budgetary allocation towards research that will inform policymaking.

### We've only scratched the surface

As noted by majority of the delegates at the forum, Africa has a long way to go in as far as the use of evidence in

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# Role of media critical in making the demographic dividend a reality in Kenya



A section of the journalists that attended the media forum follow discussions on the media's role in setting the demographic dividend agenda among the public in Kenya.

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By Diana Warira

The role of the media fraternity in setting the demographic dividend agenda among the Kenyan public was the subject of a media forum held in Nairobi on 4 May 2017. The forum hosted by the Population Reference Bureau (PRB), brought together journalists and editors from across the country. The forum sought to foster a better understanding of the demographic dividend paradigm among journalists and editors so they can take an active role in reporting on demographic dividend issues.

Population and development experts drawn from the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) and the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP) discussed the demographic dividend paradigm and how it relates to Kenya's development. Experts from the Center for the Study of Adolescence (CSA) and PS Kenya then linked the demographic dividend conversation to adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

## Adolescent sexual and reproductive health emerges as central focus

Of particular interest was media coverage on sexual and reproductive health issues among adolescents. Nearly all participants identified this issue as

their main interest. In the recent past, reportage on sexual and reproductive health relating to adolescents/youth has elicited controversy from various quarters including religious groups. Calls for the provision of contraceptives to adolescents/teenagers and access to comprehensive sexuality education have been the most emotive. The media forum was therefore timely as it provided a platform for journalists to understand sexual and reproductive health from a development perspective, and particularly how it fits in the demographic dividend conversation.

Speaking on behalf of the Ministry of Health, Dr. Joel Gondi, Head of the Reproductive and Maternal Health Services Unit, noted that health information is a public good and a human right for all Kenyans. He, therefore, urged journalists to ensure the public has access to accurate and well-packaged sexual and reproductive health information. Dr. Gondi further called upon journalists and development experts to collaborate in order to ensure the public has access to this information.

## Agenda setting

Representing the Kenya Editors Guild, Mr. Michael Mumo, who is also the Editorial Director at Capital FM, pointed out that the media should shape the agenda of

the country for the benefit of society. He therefore appealed to his media counterparts not to lose focus of the value of the lives of Kenyans, more so as the country prepares for the general election in August 2017. Mr. Mumo further urged journalists to play a central role in placing sexual and reproductive health on the political agenda so as to ensure Kenyan leaders play their part in improving the sexual and reproductive health outcomes of Kenya's adolescents. To facilitate this, journalists need to ensure stories are well researched, analysed and packaged.

## Journalists' experiences and perspectives

As journalists discussed their experiences and perspectives regarding reporting on sexual and reproductive health, it emerged that the lack of capacity to interpret complex scientific data is a key barrier to effective reporting on these issues, and development stories in general. Capacity building on the use of data in journalism is therefore needed. Journalists also pointed to other challenges such as: difficulty accessing resource persons in development institutions to clarify study findings or elaborate on contextual issues, organisational policies [of the media] that impede coverage of controversial topics, cultural and/or religious norms, competition from politics and other

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'breaking news' stories, among others.

Having set the pace for improved understanding of the demographic dividend and key aspects such as sexual and reproductive health among adolescents, the journalists made suggestions on how the media can move the demographic dividend agenda forward. For instance, they suggested that key messages be developed for different audiences such as policymakers, the youth, among others, as opposed to having a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Messages intended for the youth should be tailored in youth-relatable language that also leverages on modern technology

such as social media. Journalists also pointed to constant holistic reporting on the demographic dividend components as a key step towards putting the issue high on the country's political agenda. Humanising stories relating to each of the demographic dividend pillars would also drill down the messages, not only among policymakers but also the general public.

## Building relationships

This media forum set the pace for more engagements on improving reporting on development in Kenya. As noted by various individuals, journalists and development experts need to build and sustain long-standing relationships in

order to ensure that the existing divide is bridged. To this effect, journalists were challenged to file quality stories in order to build their credibility and personal brands. Development experts also need to work towards bridging journalist capacity gaps in data journalism and addressing other barriers to effective reporting on development issues. Going forward, it is expected that engagement between media and development experts will be an ongoing process to ensure that development stories rise and stay high on Kenya's socio-political agenda so as to set the country on a path towards sustainable development.

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# AFIDEP shares lessons on building capacity for evidence use in policymaking at regional forum in Tanzania



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Delegates at the ECSA-HC Best Practices Forum perusing material at the AFIDEP information desk generated from the SECURE Health programme.

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policymaking is concerned. While there are efforts to use evidence in policy formulation in different countries, work to strengthen the capacity of policymakers to use evidence in policy formulation has just begun. For instance, policymakers at other levels of governance such as counties in Kenya, and districts in Malawi, also need capacity building so they can support and complement efforts of policymakers at the national level. More resources from different stakeholders therefore, are needed. While not all research is relevant for policymaking, there is need to ensure

that academic and research institutions generate research that addresses Africa's development challenges. As noted by Prof. Ruth Nduati from the University of Nairobi, graduates from universities and other institutions of higher learning need better training in research. This will ensure research evidence is of high quality, and where it is relevant for policymaking, the evidence shall effectively inform policy formulation.

In addition, the role of other players in the policymaking ecosystem should not

be downplayed. For instance, different knowledge intermediaries such as communication and knowledge translation experts, journalists, among others, are critical to bridging the gap between research and policymaking. Efforts to support evidence-informed policymaking in Africa therefore need to integrate all players to ensure that policies are not only responsive to the continent's development challenges, but also steer countries towards sustainable development.

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# The demographic dividend: Transforming Africa's Development Agenda



AFIDEP has been at the forefront of efforts to advocate for political commitment on the demographic dividend in Africa. The Institute has also conducted demographic dividend studies in about 15 countries assessing the potential of countries to harness a demographic dividend through scenario modelling, and the investments needed for the potential to translate into reality.

We speak to **Dr. Bernard Onyango**, head of the demographic dividend programme, on the various elements of the Institute's work on the demographic dividend in Africa, and how this contributes to development on the continent.

## Tell us a bit about yourself

I am a Demographer and Sociologist with interests at the intersection of population dynamics and development. I am particularly interested in how we can translate research findings to policy and programme actions. I have been at AFIDEP since 2014 working as the programme manager for our work on the demographic dividend. The concept of the demographic dividend relies on the premise that if mortality and fertility decline fast enough, the population age structure of a society can change from one that is dominated by child dependents to one that has significantly more people in the working ages, relative to dependents. If this working age population is productively engaged, the change can lead to a stimulus of economic growth through both the increase in productivity and the savings accrued by both households and families as a result of the smaller dependency burden. Today, the reality is that most African countries still have a very young population, with those below 15 years old estimated to constitute slightly over 40 percent of the continent's population. Therefore, much remains to be done for the continent to benefit from the demographic dividend.

**AFIDEP has been at the forefront in engaging African governments on the prospects for harnessing the demographic dividend in their countries and what investments they need to make in order for these prospects to translate into reality. Tell us more about that.**

Indeed, we have done quite a bit of work in the area over the last few years, working with various partners on evidence generation and synthesis to facilitate evidence-informed decision-making on the demographic dividend. This work has also entailed advocating for the paradigm to be integrated into development planning. In particular, we have had a very fruitful multi-year partnership with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) that has enabled us to work with governments in at least 12 countries not only in East and Southern Africa, but also in Central and West Africa, to help them understand their prospects for harnessing the demographic dividend. Through modelling and policy analysis, we have helped the countries understand the challenges they face in turning the potential of their population into a demographic dividend and the possible policy actions they need to pursue to overcome these challenges.

Some of the countries where we have provided technical support on the demographic dividend through our partnerships with UNFPA and other stakeholders include: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Mozambique, Malawi, Botswana, Namibia, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Senegal and Cameroon.

## What major differences have you noted in the prospects the different countries have?

As you can imagine, these countries are at various stages of development – from low-income to upper middle-income status. More importantly, they are also at various stages of the demographic transition with countries such as Uganda and Mozambique having high levels of fertility, with women expecting at least five children

over their reproductive lives. On the other hand, in countries such as Botswana, fertility has dropped to levels as low as fewer than three children. Therefore, the high fertility countries have a much higher child dependency level than the likes of Botswana who already have a significantly large, though still young population between the theoretical working ages of 15-64 years. What that means is that not all the challenges for the two sets of countries are similar and therefore, the recommendations for the policy actions to maximise their demographic dividend also differ.

Of importance is that high fertility countries still have to invest heavily in driving down their fertility through robust family planning programmes, enhancing girls' education, women's empowerment and improving child survival, as these are all drivers of fertility. This is a pre-condition for countries to change their age structures to become favourable for maximising the demographic dividend. On the other hand, the lower fertility countries such as Botswana, Swaziland and Namibia, have an urgent need to turn their youthful population in the working ages to productive forces for development through the creation of decent work opportunities. Unemployment among young persons in the Southern Africa region is particularly high, in some instances going as high as 50 percent.

That said, there is much overlap in the investment actions. All these countries still need to invest heavily in human capital development with education and skills development as a major focus area. They also need to improve governance and accountability to ensure that policies are translated into effective programmes.

Countries also need to enhance service delivery, judicious use of public resources, and an attractive business environment to spur job creation. These are the strategies that the East Asian Tigers put in place to reap huge demographic dividends between the 1970s and 2000s.

## Are there countries that were already on the path towards harnessing the demographic dividend at AFIDEP's point of contact? What sets them apart from the rest of the countries?

Botswana, Cape Verde and Seychelles were already on this path. Generally, these countries perform better on governance indicators. For instance, they have stronger participatory democracy records, lower levels of corruption, more effective governments and stronger regulatory measures. They have also invested more in women's education and empowerment, and have robust family planning programmes.

## What challenges have you faced engaging African governments and how has the team worked to overcome these challenges? What do these challenges mean for the different countries?

Engaging most African governments on the need to reduce fertility has been a major challenge. There is a seemingly inevitable fall back to the narrative that the African culture that promotes large families is not easy to change, and the idea of smaller families is an imposition of foreign culture. However, from our observations, African culture with reference to family size is quite dynamic. Particularly, this is seen in rural-urban differences in fertility across the continent, with women in urban areas having fewer children than their female rural counterparts. This is partly explained by higher levels of education and women's empowerment in urban areas. Further, urban areas record lower levels of harmful traditional practices such as early marriages that lead to early child-bearing in the rural areas relative to urban areas.

Governments have also been cautious about the risk of an 'ageing population', a problem China is currently grappling with. They have therefore asked how far the fertility decline should go. African countries can avoid this problem of a fast ageing population by encouraging families

(not coercing) to reduce births to two children. This is called replacement fertility, as it replaces the father and the mother. Fertility will stabilise population growth and reduce the severity of the problem of ageing populations. If birth rates in Africa fall to below replacement levels, and there are already signs of this in some of the smaller island countries, then over time, the populations will age. In addition, if African countries make the right investments to harness the demographic dividend, then the incomes of people will rise, and all things being equal, most people will be able to save enough money for retirement. Thus, the aged population, when it happens, will be less burdensome to the working-age population.

Tackling issues on governance has been tricky as most countries are defensive on what is seen as a subjective topic and also touches on the issue of sovereignty. However, we have overcome this by ensuring that governance is understood through a more holistic approach where the intention is to see better and effective service delivery and a translation of policies to programme action.

## What lessons have you drawn while working with governments that could benefit anyone working on similar development issues such as the demographic dividend?

One major lesson is that African governments are averse to "experts" talking down to them about the solutions to their problems. They want to be involved every step of the way in coming up with policy recommendations and actions. At AFIDEP, we have ensured that we work on the demographic dividend agenda with governments from the conceptualisation phase of the project, through to analysis and the recommendations stage – at which point the government has bought into the agenda and therefore more inclined to implement programmes. We have ensured that we always work with a team of national experts to get their own insights on the issues to inform our work. This is also to ensure the transfer of technical expertise so that they can carry on similar work and be advocates and champions of the demographic dividend agenda once AFIDEP has left the scene.

We have also learned that it is important to work closely with government ministries and agencies that have convening power

for an agenda such as the demographic dividend, an area that has multisectoral interest groups. For instance, working with the ministries of finance, planning and economic development as the lead agencies on the demographic dividend work has been quite helpful in garnering multisectoral participation in the countries where our work has been most successful.

## The African Union (AU) theme for 2017 is harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth. What does this mean for African countries?

It is an opportunity to bring back population to the centre of development discourse. It is also an opportunity to ensure the concept of the demographic dividend is clear to all the decision-makers and that they, in particular, understand the kind of investments required from countries to maximise the dividend. There has been a tendency to conflate the demographic dividend with having a large youthful population. In fact, what is required is to have a large population in the working ages who also have decent jobs in order to maximise the demographic dividend. Obviously, this will not happen with high levels of fertility. It will not happen with high levels of unemployment and under-employment. It will not happen without empowering our girls and women and ensuring that both women and young people are engaged as decision-makers.

The recently concluded Summit was also an opportunity for learning and sharing what some African countries are doing right to progress on pillars of the demographic dividend.

## What does this focus on the demographic dividend at continental level mean for the work AFIDEP has been undertaking over the years?

It is a validation of our work, and of course multiple other players - that we have managed to get such high level political traction for the demographic dividend to make it an agenda for the AU and its member states. We only hope that this will also ensure that the recommendations out of the work we have been doing become a reality in the countries and not mere rhetoric.

# Population and development stakeholders in Africa and China commit to driving the demographic dividend agenda forward



Mr. Peter Nykwara, Technical Director, National Council for Population and Development (NCPD), makes his address during the Africa-China Conference on Population and Development in Nairobi.

By Diana Warira

In April this year, Kenya hosted the Africa-China Conference on Population and Development, which has set the stage for more engagements on how Africa can harness the demographic dividend and achieve sustainable development. The Conference held in Nairobi on 18 and 19 April 2017, was a learning and knowledge-sharing opportunity. Different stakeholders shared their experiences and efforts towards overcoming some of the continent's development challenges such as rapid population growth, child marriages, below par education outcomes, and gender inequality, among others.

The Africa-China Conference was a follow up to action points outlined at the International Inter-Ministerial Strategic Dialogue on South-South Collaboration on Population and Development held on 18 March 2016 in Beijing, China. The Dialogue recommended deepened cooperation in various population and development issues including sexual and reproductive health, gender equality, among others, in the broader context of the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

## Lessons from China on harnessing the demographic dividend

Since China and other East Asian countries have already harnessed substantial demographic dividends, they present an excellent learning opportunity for Africa on how to make timely critical investments in their populations so the continent can harness a demographic dividend as well.

Dr. Joe Thomas, the Executive Director, Partners in Population and Development (PPD), noted that there are important lessons for Africa on facilitating lower fertility (the average number of children per woman) to achieve the demographic dividend. Investments in voluntary family planning programmes are critical in getting this done. Advocacy efforts on the benefits of having fewer children should also be strengthened in order to ensure that investments in family planning programmes translate into lower fertility.

Other lessons from China include investments in quality education from basic to tertiary level, and the mainstreaming of technical and vocational education as a job creation strategy. Governments and other stakeholders should also collaborate in order to increase job opportunities for the continent's burgeoning youth population. Further, China is noted to have invested heavily in gender equality by increasing both education and employment opportunities for women. Having more women going to school for longer, and then joining the labour force reduces early marriages and early childbearing. This, in turn, contributes to smaller family sizes. As a result, the child dependency burden reduces significantly.

Notably from the success of China, is that the window of opportunity to harness a demographic dividend (which is opened by the fast decline in fertility rates) must be accompanied by simultaneous investments in human capital and the creation of gainful employment opportunities to make the demographic dividend a reality.

## Opportunities for south-south cooperation

As noted by stakeholders at the forum, south-south cooperation not only provides an opportunity for China to contribute towards Africa's socio-economic transformation but also for China to learn from Africa.

China is also set to support the establishment of a population and development centre in Africa, to ensure African countries are better placed to plan for their population dynamics. For instance, improving analysis, access, and sharing of population data through modern technology is a priority.

## The resolutions

The engagements at the two-day forum culminated in a Communiqué that outlined resolutions to work together towards improving the quality of the population and achieving socio-economic transformation in Africa and China.

First, stakeholders committed to enhancing advocacy by organising strategic dialogue including the annual Africa-China Conference on Population and Development. This will also include sharing of experiences and existing evidence on different thematic areas such as sexual and reproductive health, youth empowerment, healthy ageing, among others. Collaborative effort will also gear towards mobilising support for advocacy activities.

Second, capacity building and technical cooperation. This shall be done through facilitating the establishment and nurturing

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of centres of excellence in population and development. Stakeholders shall seek to nurture the training of experts in population and health, facilitate exchange programmes, and also support youth volunteering and internship programmes. This cooperation shall also facilitate the building of national capacities on data analysis, research and dissemination, population projection, among others.

Third, stakeholders committed to strengthening partnerships through

fostering cooperation between national institutions including governmental and non-governmental institutions, and fostering a partnership with the youth and the elderly in harnessing the demographic dividend.

Finally, stakeholders also resolved to partner for strategic dialogue to renew commitments to the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Beyond 2014 and the SDGs.

## A tool for accountability

As noted by Kenya's National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) Director General Dr. Josephine Kibaru-Mbae, the resolutions from the Conference shall be handed to the Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Devolution and Planning. She also indicated that the resolutions shall be incorporated in the Kenyan government's planning documents and shall also be a tool to hold the Council (and other stakeholders) accountable.

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# AFIDEP in new project to analyse youth demographics in East Africa and their implications



By Diana Warira

Africa is undergoing profound demographic changes characterised by declining fertility and child mortality rates and rapid population growth. As a result, the continent's population is estimated to increase from about 1.2 billion people to 2.2 billion people between 2015 and 2050. About 41 percent of the population on the continent are aged below 15 years while another 19 percent are youth aged between 15 and 24 years. Africa's young population is mirrored in the East African Community (EAC) where around 45 percent of the 150 million people in Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda are below 15 years, and a further 28 percent are youth aged between 15 and

24 years old.

The prospects of emulating the East Asian countries and harnessing the demographic dividend have excited many African leaders including in the EAC. Yet, there is still lack of clarity on the demographic dividend paradigm and the investments and policies required to meet the needs of the youthful population in the region, and ignite its full potential to stimulate sustainable socio-economic development.

AFIDEP and its partners, with support from the East African Research Fund (EARF) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID), are conducting a study to understand the implications of the present and future changes to the youth

population (15-24 years) in the four EAC countries (Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda) on social services, labour force and urban planning.

The aim of the programme is to increase awareness of, and commitment to multi-sectoral approaches to generating traction and action towards harnessing the demographic dividend. The study results will emphasize and advance dialogue about how the demographic dividend can improve outcomes for women and youth, including greater gender equality and youth empowerment, as a core component for achieving Africa's long term socio-economic transformation aspirations.

# Malawi Parliament amends constitution to outlaw child marriage



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A reduction in early marriage will enable girls to stay in school longer, complete their education, and eventually find or create decent employment, hence contributing to meaningful development of the country.

By Nissily Mushani and Dr. Abiba Longwe-Ngwira

On 14 February 2017, Malawi made a historic amendment to the Constitution to fully outlaw child marriage following a year-long campaign by youth groups and various civil society organisations. The amendment was voted through by the country's parliamentarians 131 to 2, in favour of removing a legal ambiguity, which previously allowed children between the ages of 15 and 18 years to marry with parental consent.

Malawi's population is largely youthful, with 80 percent of its population aged below 35 years and 52 percent aged below 18 years. The population below the age of 18 years is projected to increase to 11.6 million by 2025, and to 13.6 million by 2030, from 8.8 million in 2016, as projected by the Malawi National Statistical Office. This will be the largest cohort of adolescents and young people to ever enter the productive and reproductive ages.

## Legal loophole

According to UNICEF's 2016 State of the World's Children, Malawi has the 11<sup>th</sup> highest child marriage rates in the world, with nearly 1 in 2 girls married before the age of 18 years. In essence, the practice was technically already prohibited by law, having been banned in 2015 by the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Law, which increased the minimum age of marriage from 15 to 18 years. However, despite this important step, the Constitution

contained a legal loophole that still allowed children between 15 and 18 years to marry with parental consent.

In Malawi, child marriage occurs more frequently among young girls living in rural areas, who are also often poor and the least educated. Unfortunately, child marriage contributes significantly to reproductive health problems, high rates of school drop-outs and it is an outright denial of personal growth, empowerment and development. Child marriage therefore perpetuates poverty. It also contributes to high levels of mental and emotional stress owing to the fact that children are not mentally, physically and psychologically prepared to deal with responsibilities that come with marriage, including child-bearing and relations with in-laws. Worse still, as they have not matured fully, children are predisposed to high probabilities of being sexually, mentally and physically abused. In most cases, they neither have the ability nor the platform to voice their grievances.

## Securing children's future

Raising the age at marriage is an important step in making sure that Malawi is compliant with regional and international standards while at the same time conferring young people sufficient legal protection against early and forced marriages. The country stands to gain more by reducing child marriage. A reduction in child marriage will enable

girls to stay in school longer, complete their education, and eventually find or create decent employment, hence contributing to meaningful development for the country. Relatedly, reduced child marriage will contribute to a decline in early pregnancies and fewer births, and ultimately reduced maternal deaths. Moreover, with more girls attaining higher levels of education, there will be increased demand for contraception, which will ultimately contribute to reduced fertility rate. Finally, more educated mothers will likely have and raise healthier and more educated children. With all these potential gains, eradicating child marriages is not only the right thing to do, but also an economically practical decision for Malawi.

Ushering young people into a healthy and productive adulthood through the right investments and legal frameworks is critical for the socio-economic development of Malawi and the country's ability to achieve the demographic dividend and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

## Overcoming barriers

Nevertheless, the country cannot afford to sit back and relax. More needs to be done, especially in dealing with the drivers of child marriage and the barriers to enforcing the law. A key challenge to reducing child marriage in Malawi is entrenched attitudes and cultures that accept the practice. High rates of

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poverty and gender inequalities have been documented to be important causes of child marriages. Often, in rural areas, girls get married off at a young age to improve a family's financial status through dowry and the anticipated support from a son-in-law. More often, daughters are seen as a burden and parents would rather marry them off, to avoid the cost of fending for them. In some instances, in northern Malawi, giving away a young daughter in marriage as repayment for

a debt (kupimbira) is still practiced. Also, the common perception that girls are often unable to get a good education, a good job and earn a living like their male counterparts, fuels and sustains child marriage for girls.

Another challenge that needs to be addressed to enable effective enforcement of the new law is the lack of consistent civil registration and vital statistics system and national identities. This makes it difficult for

relevant authorities to identify an individual as being underage.

Raising the legal age at marriage is a commendable step in the right direction, however, the onus is on the government, communities and all stakeholders to put in place stringent mechanisms that will guarantee the execution and effective enforcement of this and other important legal instruments.

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# Challenges with evidence use in Kenya's legislative spaces



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Parliamentary Research Services (PRS) staff during a training on evidence use in May 2016. The PRS is a non-partisan, professional department of the Parliament of Kenya that provides information, advice, policy research and analysis that adds value to parliamentary discourse and legislative activities. Capacity for legislative research has been identified as one of the barriers to evidence use.

By Dr. Rose Oronje

Kenya's Senate and County Assemblies hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Legislative Summit from 20 to 23 March 2017. I had an opportunity to speak at this forum as part of a panel themed "Evidence-Based Law-Making in the Legislature: Challenges and Opportunities for Effective and Efficient Law-Making Processes." Other panelists included Dr. Johnson Okello, Acting Director at Legal Services at the Senate, and Mr. Edward Libendi, Clerk of the Makueni County Assembly.

Key challenges with evidence use highlighted during the session include weak capacity in law-making and evidence utilisation, lack of county-level data for

county-level decision-making, poor relations between the county governments and county assemblies, and lack of implementation of laws.

## Weak capacity in law-making and evidence utilisation remains a key barrier

Conversations at this session kept coming back to the challenge of weak capacity in law-making, conducting legislative research, and effective utilisation of evidence. At national level, the main capacity issue is in relation to legislative research and evidence utilisation. Dr. Okello decried the weak capacity in legislative research at the national level

as one of the barriers to evidence use. He argued that many of the existing staff lack the requisite capacity to conduct legislative research in order to provide the evidence needed by Members of Parliament (MPs) or parliamentary committees. At the county level, Mr. Libendi observed that there is a huge capacity gap in knowledge and skills in law-making among Members of County Assemblies (MCAs) and this means that many Bills are being drafted by county assembly staff because MCAs lack capacity to prepare these. The staff lack capacity on conducting legislative research and in evidence use generally, and this affects the quality of Bills written. At institutional level, he noted that county

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# Key ingredients for African countries to harness the demographic dividend



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Africa's high child dependency - fueled by high fertility - has been recognised as a major barrier towards efforts to improve the quality of human capital and capital accumulation.

By Dr. Eliya Zulu

Africa's rapidly growing population has been of keen interest to African leaders and development partners, particularly due to its potential as a transformative force for sustainable development. This can be seen in the many commitments, conversations and efforts on the continent to harness the demographic dividend, which culminated in the African Union (AU) designating "Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in the youth" as the theme for 2017. The demographic dividend (DD) refers to the accelerated economic growth initiated by a rapid decline in fertility and mortality, resulting in a change in the age structure from one dominated by dependent children to one of economically productive working adults.

On 8 June 2017, AFIDEP, as one of the technical leaders working closely with African governments in their efforts to harness the DD, partnered with the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, and the German Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB) to organize a lab debate on 'Investing in Africa's youth to harness the demographic dividend.' The main question that shaped the debate was, "In light of a potential demographic dividend

in future, what exactly does it take to make Africa's young generation the driving force for a bright economic and social future of the continent?" The debate was part of the European Development Days (EDD) 2017 that ran between 7-8 June 2017 in Brussels. EDD is organised by the European Commission and convenes the development community each year to share ideas and experiences in ways that inspire new partnerships and innovative solutions to the world's most pressing challenges.

As AFIDEP's Executive Director, I took part in this debate and in this article, I look back at the critical insights discussed at the debate on how African countries can enhance their prospects for harnessing sizeable demographic dividends.

## The entry point for harnessing the DD for most African countries is accelerating fertility decline

Africa's high child dependency - fueled by high fertility - has been recognised as a major barrier towards efforts to improve the quality of human capital and capital accumulation. High fertility is associated with low investments in health services, education, savings, and low participation of women in the formal labour market.

It also puts pressure on an economy's capacity to create enough jobs for the ever-expanding number of new entrants to the working ages.

According to the Population Reference Bureau's (PRB) 2016 World Data sheet, women give birth to an average of 4 or more births in 40 of the 57 African countries, and birth rates are between three and four in eight countries and between two and three in nine countries that are mostly located in northern and southern Africa. For the majority high fertility countries, which actually currently have a "child bulge", with more than 40 percent of the population being below age 15, the primary concern should be prioritising the three critical investments that have been proven to accelerate fertility decline. These factors are: 1) making voluntary family planning universally accessible to all women and their partners who need to delay the next birth or stop childbearing altogether; 2) keeping girls in school and eradicating teenage childbearing and marriages; and 3) accelerating progress being made in reducing child mortality, since parents want to have few children if they are optimistic that the few children have a decent chance to survive.

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Rapid fertility decline will enable high fertility countries to create a "youth-bulge" from the current "child-bulge". This will enable families and governments to enhance per capita investments in health and education, that will ensure tomorrow's youth are better prepared than the current ones to lead Africa's socio-economic transformation agenda. The simple fact is that without creating the "youth bulge," that later turns into a "working-age bulge," there is not going to be a demographic dividend to talk about in the majority of African countries.

## To harness the demographic dividend, African countries should focus on both today and tomorrow's youth

One of the main reasons why the demographic dividend paradigm has generated so much traction among African leaders is that it resonates with the very vivid challenge of dealing with the growing number of unskilled and underemployed African youth that almost every African country is grappling with. While focusing on today's youth is important, the sole focus on this component of the population is likely to undermine the comprehensive structural transformations that African countries need to undergo in order to optimise the demographic dividends that they can earn.

African countries need to have a long-term life-cycle perspective and ensure that children being born today have good health services, nutrition and transformative education throughout the education pipeline. The very young ones should receive universal and quality early childhood education to ignite their thinking and interest in education and prepare them for primary school. Primary education should be reformed to provide quality literacy, numeracy and critical thinking skills and set the seeds for innovation and ensure there is universal transition to secondary school. Secondary education systems should be reformed from following examination and knowledge-based curricula to competency-based curricula that will ensure that all children have the practical transferable or work-readiness skills they need to be practical thinkers, responsible global citizens, acquire and keep jobs, and to be successful entrepreneurs. Tertiary education systems should build on these strides and be at the forefront in developing youth who will engineer Africa's innovation revolution that is needed to make the continent a force on the world stage. Therefore, while countries should focus on how to enhance skills and livelihood opportunities for current youth, there should be equal, if not greater, energy in transforming education and health systems to make sure that the next generation of youth will not have the same skills gaps as the current youth do.

## Low fertility African countries can salvage their demographic dividend by enhancing quality of human capital and job creation efforts

Africa is quite heterogeneous and we should not talk about it as a uniform set of countries. Therefore, policy options for optimising the demographic dividend should be context-specific both from the perspective of socio-economic conditions, but also the stage of the demographic transition where countries are. "Youth bulges" and "working-age bulges" have already been created in the African countries with relatively low fertility, mostly located in southern and northern Africa. These countries have already harnessed some demographic dividend, but not to the same magnitude as achieved by some East Asian and Latin American countries because the fertility decline was relatively slow and not accompanied with huge investments in human capital development and job creation. Since the window of opportunity for harnessing the demographic dividend will remain open for a couple of more decades in these countries, the level of the dividend can be salvaged by enhancing investments in strategic human capital development focused on sectors of comparative advantage and diversifying their economies to absorb the "working-age population bulges" they are already facing.

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African countries need to have a long-term life-cycle perspective and ensure that children being born today have good health services, nutrition and transformative education throughout the education pipeline.

# Key ingredients for African countries to harness the demographic dividend

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**African countries urgently need country-specific evidence and technical assistance to move the demographic agenda from rhetoric to action**

There is a danger that the demographic dividend rhetoric can end up as a mere development buzz with no tangible actions or benefits for most countries. This is especially possible if experts and development practitioners do not

job creation; civil society organisations given their critical role in enforcing accountability; and other development actors. The specific interventions and investments to be made under the broad intervention areas have to be determined at country level. Even then, countries need to know that the demographic dividend wheels need to move together even if more emphasis is on some wheels depending on the stage of the demographic transition in specific countries.

to harness the demographic dividend. The leaders realised that: their countries were not going to develop if they continued to sustain socio-economic systems that propagate low status of women and lead to high fertility and high child dependency burdens; developing quality infrastructure that balances rural development and value addition chains in agriculture and industrial as well as service based urban economies is critical; transformative education is the ultimate tool for building quality human



While countries should focus on how to enhance skills and livelihood opportunities for current youth, there should be equal, if not greater, energy in transforming education and health systems to make sure that next generation of youth will not have the same skill gaps as the current youth do.

urgently move to provide evidence-informed technical assistance in policy prioritisation within each pillar and across the pillars. This should involve practical assistance to policymakers and planners on how to adjust their priorities to put their countries on the demographic dividend path. Many countries lack capacity to do comprehensive policy prioritisation analysis and design implementation-ready priorities when creating development plans. If this gap is not addressed, we are likely to fail to seize the momentous opportunity provided by the designation of “harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth” as the 2017 theme for the AU. Domestication of the demographic dividend agenda should also ensure active participation of the private sector given their critical role in engineering economic performance and

**Ultimately, what will make the difference is strong political will, determination and action to steer transformative development**

Ultimately, what will determine whether African countries maximise the demographic dividend they can harness or not will be strong political will, from the highest level and at all levels of government and society, and the determination to chart a different development course for Africa. African citizens also have a huge role to play in driving their own development destiny, and therefore their leaders’ ability to get their citizens to buy into the long-term development vision and proactively work towards it will be critical. This is what responsible governments should be doing anyway. The ‘Asian Tigers’ did not set out

capital and engineering the innovation and vibrant private sector that is needed to create quality jobs and accelerate inclusive economic growth; all these cannot be achieved if African countries do not enforce accountability in use of public resources and address corruption, while ensuring efficiency in service delivery.

If African countries do all these, albeit at different levels depending on local contexts and stages of the demographic transition and development process, the “youth bulge” that will result from reduced fertility will give them an extra impetus to accelerate the achievement of the socio-economic transformation goals articulated in the AU’s Agenda 2063 and national development visions. That is what the demographic dividend means in practice.

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# Challenges with evidence use in Kenya’s legislative spaces



It has been observed that there is a huge capacity gap in knowledge and skills in law-making among members of county assemblies (MCAs) and this has meant that many Bills are being drafted by county assembly staff because MCAs have no capacity to prepare these. In general, this affects the quality of Bills written.

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that county assemblies lack information resource centres to support evidence use. In fact, he said he only knows of three county assemblies that have information resource centres out of the 47 county assemblies. All these challenges curtail evidence use in the decisions and/or Bills passed both by national and county assemblies.

**Lacking county-specific data for decision-making by county assemblies**

Another challenge raised during this session was the lack of county-specific data. Mr. Libendi noted that government data and research institutions such as the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), the Kenya Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRRA) among others, are not devolved and therefore still generate data for national decision-making only. Yet, counties require county-specific data to inform their decision-making, but these data are lacking. This issue challenges the data and research institutions to revisit their strategies and mechanisms to respond to evidence needs of counties in order to improve decision-making at these levels. This is especially critical given the importance of the decisions being made by county governments and county assemblies, and their implications for service provision to Kenyans.

**Poor relations between the county governments and county assemblies resulting in poor and unnecessary laws**

The persisting poor relations between county governments and county assemblies are having adverse effects on the effectiveness of law-making and the subsequent use of evidence in law-making processes. It was observed that in many counties, county assemblies are making laws ‘to fight’ governors and county governments and not laws needed to spur development. As such, many of these laws are not being assented to by governors and in most cases, are not being implemented. It is also the case that due to these poor relations many county governments may not be providing data and information on their implementation efforts to enable the county assemblies to conduct oversight.

**Non-implementation of laws limits opportunities for evidence use**

In one way, it may be the case that the laws being made by counties are not relevant as they are made to ‘fight’ county governments. Therefore, why should county governments assent to and implement such laws? More importantly, county governments are supposed to review and contribute to the Bills even before they are passed in Parliament, but due to poor relations, whenever Bills are sent to

governments, they do not comment or input into these. Ideally, Bills should be made out of policies prepared by the executive (government), rather than policies being made out of Bills. So then the question is, if policies are lacking, should county assemblies go ahead to develop Bills that will not be implemented or should they find other ways of requiring governments to develop policies from which Bills can be derived?

One of the participants concluded that county assemblies are simply ‘oversighting non-implementation’ because the laws they are passing are not being implemented by county governments. If laws are not being implemented, then it means that there are no opportunities for evidence use in implementing and monitoring implementation of laws. This also means that there is limited opportunity for county assemblies to conduct oversight.

These conversations and my reflections provide useful insights for informing efforts aimed at enabling the utilisation of evidence in legislative processes in Kenya. It is important to note that county assemblies are making very important development decisions including resource allocation in Kenya. For this reason, urgent investments to enable better and increased use of evidence at county level legislative processes are needed.

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## JAN - JUNE 2017 IN PICTURES



Different stakeholders in health follow proceedings at the East, Central and Southern African Health Community (ECSA-HC) Best Practices Forum in Arusha, Tanzania in April 2017.



Dr. Eliya Zulu, AFIDEP Executive Director, speaks during the launch of the Malawi Parliamentary Caucus for Population and Development. Dr. Zulu pledged AFIDEP's commitment to providing evidence to the Caucus so that its activities translate to real change in Malawi.



Her Excellency, First Lady of Malawi, Dr. Gertrude Mutharika makes her speech during the launch of the Parliamentary Caucus for Population and Development. The First Lady is the Patron of the Caucus.



AFIDEP staff at the Strategic Plan review meeting in Nairobi in March 2017.



## JAN - JUNE 2017 IN PICTURES



L to R: Dr. Rose Oranje (AFIDEP), Dr. Susan Musyoka (Women Representative, Machakos County), Dr. Eliya Zulu and Violet Murunga (AFIDEP) at the event celebrating the culmination of the SECURE Health programme in February 2017.



Dr. Eliya Zulu (Executive Director, AFIDEP) and Prof. Nyovani Madise (Deputy Chair, AFIDEP Board of Directors) congratulate Dr. Bernard Onyango (Knowledge Translation Scientist, AFIDEP) (centre) during the Employee of the Year Awards. Bernard was awarded the "Employee of the Year 2016."



Dr. Eliya Zulu congratulates Edward Njenga (Finance Officer, AFIDEP) during the Employee of the Year Awards. Edward was awarded the "Most Supportive Administration Staff of 2016."



Dr. Eliya Zulu congratulates Eunice Mueni (Knowledge Translation Officer, AFIDEP) during the Employee of the Year Awards. Eunice was awarded the "Blogger of the Year 2016."

## JAN - JUNE 2017 IN PICTURES



A panel during the European Development Days (EDD) conference in Brussels between 7 and 8 June 2017. Dr. Eliya Zulu represented AFIDEP at a lab debate on 'Investing in Africa's youth to harness the demographic dividend' on 8 June 2017 during this conference.



County health representatives hold a discussion during a training session on evidence use for the six Kenyan counties with the highest rates of maternal deaths on 16 June 2017. AFIDEP organised the training to cascade gains made from the SECURE Health programme to the county level.

## Recent Publications

### Research Reports

The MasterCard Foundation. (2017). Skills at Scale: Transferable Skills in Secondary and Vocational Education in Africa.

### Policy Guidelines

Parliament of Kenya. (2017). Kenya Parliament Guidelines for Evidence Use in Policy Analysis and Decision-Making.

### Fact Sheets

AFIDEP. (2017). Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal and Child Health. June 2017. (Mandera, Marsabit, Migori, Isiolo, Lamu, Wajir Counties).

AFIDEP. (2017). Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health. May 2017. (Bomet, Mandera, Kitui, West Pokot, Uasin Gishu, Turkana, Tharaka-Nithi, Samburu, Nakuru, Migori, Laikipia, Kisumu, Meru, Kisii, Isiolo, Kajiado, Garissa, Embu, Elgeyo Marakwet, Murangá, Marsabit, Nyeri, Kirinyaga, Nyamira, Nandi Counties).

### Policy Briefs

AFIDEP. (2017). Creating sustainable financing for the Malawi health research system. February 2017.

### Peer Reviewed Journal Articles

Warira, D., Mueni, E., Gay, E., & Lee, M. (2017). Achieving and sustaining evidence-informed policymaking: Effective communication and collaboration can go a long way. *Science Communication*, 39(3), 382-394. doi:10.1177/107554701710243

## Transferable skills are key to driving the employability of Kenyan graduates



There has been rising interest in the need for 'transferable skills' training to enhance the overall quality of graduates from secondary schools and institutions of higher learning.

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cases were focused on secondary school curriculum. The education reform process in Kenya began in 2013 when the government signed into law a new TVET Act, which launched the transition to a Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) framework across TVET institutions. The reforms referred to CAP-YEI's Basic Employability Skills Training (BEST) programme, as a model demonstrating the incorporation of skills training within the new competency-based education and training approach.

While Kenya and Rwanda have referred to 'pilot' projects initiated by non-governmental organisations in embedding transferable skills into TVET and secondary school curricula, Nigeria rolled out its senior secondary school curriculum nationwide without the benefit of successful pilot projects.

### Drivers of success

The study findings reveal key drivers of education reform in these countries as being, first, an enabling policy environment that presents a conducive platform for

reforms. For Kenya, as in the case of Rwanda, the scale up of the CAP-YEI programme coincided with a period when education reform was ongoing.

The programme also benefited massively from champions within government who advocated for integration of transferable skills into TVET curricula taking the example of successful models like CAP YEI's BEST model. The contribution of champions at policy level was also seen in the Rwanda case.

The other contributing factor is evidence that transferable skills actually improve the employment prospects of youth. The Rwanda and Kenya cases revealed that youth who underwent transferable skills training programmes were about 12 percent more likely to be employed compared to those who did not.

An effective participatory approach to stakeholder engagement also gave the reforms a springboard for success as all the stakeholders, and particularly government owned the reform processes fully.

While the curricula reforms are not devoid of challenges such as resource constraints and the uphill task of retraining of teachers and instructors in the new teaching methodology, the study reveals that curricula reforms for effective training can be successful when the drivers of reforms are taken into account.

### Planning for the long-term

Going forward, the study recommends that governments prioritise training in the new teaching approaches that are learner-centered for effective integration of transferable skills. Assessment tools that reflect the competence nature of training are also needed beforehand. Other considerations include proper costing of reforms before undertaking large-scale implementation to avoid scenarios where education programmes stall midway due to financial constraints. Further, there is need for governments and other stakeholders to work in partnership and to embrace innovation through research and development, and experimentation in order to find the best structure and approach.

# Transferable skills are key to driving the employability of Kenyan graduates



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By Dr. Jackline Nyerere and Diana Warira

The quality of education in Kenya has been a subject of debate in recent times. The debate questions the content and approach of skills training and their relevance to the job market. Research shows that there is a correlation between quality of education – which determines the skills graduates bring with them to the job market place – and unemployment. Like many African countries, Kenya's youth unemployment is at about 35 percent. This, coupled with high rates of underemployment and working poverty, poses a great risk to the country's socio-economic development.

## Life-long learning

There has been rising interest in the need for 'transferable skills' training to enhance the overall quality of graduates from secondary schools and institutions of higher learning. Transferable skills are defined as higher-order cognitive and non-cognitive skills that individuals can use to succeed in different situations in work and life. Some of these skills include (but are not limited to) critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration and leadership skills, and entrepreneurship capabilities.

A recent study by the Mastercard Foundation in collaboration with the African Institute for Development Policy (AFIDEP), reveals that employers value training on transferable skills (also referred to as employability skills, soft skills, life skills or 21<sup>st</sup> century skills) as not only does it improve employees performance but also has been proven to significantly improve the learners quality of life. Students with transferable skills perform better in school, at the work place and in life in general, and have the ability to switch between jobs and fields. Transferable skills have been proven excellent in developing youth to become productive citizens who can contribute to national socio-economic development. Not only do these skills prepare them to be good employees, but also creators of job opportunities.

The study whose findings were published in March 2017, features three cases: **CAP-Youth Empowerment Institute (CAP-YEI), Kenya**, an employability skills training programme incorporated by the government within the formal technical and vocational educational training (TVET) system; **Akazi Kanoze, Rwanda**,

an employability skills programme designed by Education Development Center (EDC) for out-of-school youth, that was brought into the formal secondary school curriculum across Rwanda as part of the government's education reforms; **Senior Secondary Education Curriculum, Nigeria**, a new curriculum that focuses on technical and transferable skills training designed and rolled out nationwide by the federal government.

## Competency-based curriculum

Evidently, there are efforts to integrate transferable skills into education curricula at all levels. The three countries in the study have/are reviewing their curriculum to integrate transferable skills in what is popularly referred to as a 'competency-based curriculum.' The curriculum reforms are aimed at preparing youth with employability attributes, that is, relevant knowledge, skills and personal attributes.

The three case studies present a variety of ways through which transferable skills can be integrated into formal curriculum at various levels of education. The Kenya case, for instance, focused on the TVET level whereas the Rwanda and Nigeria

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# AFIDEP

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