



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa
Sub regional Office for West Africa



Concept Note

**SEMINAR OF THINK TANKS AND EXPERTS ON DEMOGRAPHIC
DYNAMICS FOR DEVELOPMENT**

THEME:

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND POLICY
TOWARDS ACCELERATING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN WEST
AFRICA**

28th September to 1st October 2022 - Accra, Ghana

by

Centre for Demographic Dynamics for Development (DDD), ECASRO WA
in collaboration with

Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS), and

Population Reference Bureau (PRB)

Background

Sustainable development has been at the forefront of Africa's developmental agenda in recent times, driven by the continental agenda 2063 and the UN 2030 sustainable development goals (SDGs). It has been widely acknowledged that Africa's potential in leveraging the demographic dividend is critical to achieving the development goals.

In 2015, the UN projected that Africa's fertility rates would decline further in the next decades such that by 2050, the ratio of the working population (15-64 years) to the dependent population (below 15 and 65+ years) will be greater than in Asia, Europe, and North America¹ This projection implies Africa has great potential to experience a demographic dividend. However, this dividend is not automatic and whether it materialises, and the extent of the benefit depends substantially on policies and institutions in key realms that include macroeconomic management, human capital, trade, governance, labour, and capital markets²

To show commitment to this course, African Heads of States through the African Union Assembly decision [Assembly/AU/Dec.601(XXVI)] of January 2016, devoted the theme of the year 2017 to "Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investment in Youth".³ In furtherance of the decision, and to expedite implementation of the initiative, the African Union Commission (AUC) in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), UNFPA and other partners developed a roadmap focussing on four (4) key pillars:

1. Employment and entrepreneurship
2. Education and skills development
3. Health and wellbeing
4. Rights, governance, and youth empowerment

The roadmap and pillars are to support and guide member states to develop country specific action plans and areas of focus to achieve the demographic dividend at national levels.

To implement this AU roadmap to achieve the demographic dividend (DD) and in effect the SDGs and Agenda 2063, there is urgent need for robust policy reforms and programs at country levels. Evidence of 'what works' will play an essential role in fostering effective and efficient policies and programs. The use of evidence in policy and practice has not only proven to produce better results, but also reduces poverty, improves health outcomes and advances development performance⁴.

In view of this, the 2030 sustainable development goal 9.5 stresses on enhancing scientific research and encouraging innovation particularly in developing countries. More recently, the UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 – "The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development", underlined that science must play a major role in advancing sustainable development. It further calls on universities, policymakers, and research funders to increase support for research guided by the 2030 agenda while simultaneously working together to strengthen the science-policy-society interface.

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). "World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables". *Working Paper No. ESA/P/WP.241*.

² Bloom, D. E., Kuhn, M., & Prettnner, K. (2017). "Africa's prospects for enjoying a demographic dividend". *Journal of Demographic Economics*, 83(1), 63-76.

³ AU Roadmap on harnessing the Demographic dividend (2016)

⁴ Court J, Young J. (2006) "Bridging research and policy in international development: an analytical and practical framework". *Dev Pract.* 2006 Feb;16(1):85-90.

Context and Justification

The demographic trends and structure are particularly acute in West Africa. The subregion comprises of 15 countries of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)⁵ and it is home to an estimated 401.861million people in 2020 with average annual growth rate of 2.7, higher than the continental average of 2.5 and the world average of 1.1. The ECOWAS zone represents 30% of the population of Africa and around 5% of the world's population⁶. By 2050, the population of the subregion is projected to reach 8% of the world's population and 31.6% of Africa's population. Like the rest of Africa, the sub-region has a young population with 44% under age 15 and an average total fertility rate of 5.5⁷.

In addition to having one of the youngest populations in the world, the working-age population (25 to 64 years) is growing faster than other age groups in the subregion, and as the dependency rates reduce, the opportunity for demographic dividend becomes brighter. Using the dependency ratio approach, the window of opportunity for West Africa is expected to open from year 2045 when the dependency rates are projected to have reduced to 67 dependants per 100 population in the working ages, in which case, there are at least 3 people of working age for every 2 dependants.⁸ The economic support ratio approach using the profile of demographic dividend indicates that West Africa had entered the period of first demographic dividend since year 2002. The first DD will peak around the year 2045, depending on the pace and pattern of fertility.

The high population growth and youth dependency ratio varying across countries, however, tend to pose serious social and economic challenges and undermine development efforts. Furthermore, the covid-19 pandemic and other phenomena such as climate change, the humanitarian crisis in the Sahel region have reversed economic gains made by countries in the past few years. The Gross domestic product (GDP) in West Africa contracted by 0.9 per cent in 2020, compared to an increase of 3.3 per cent in 2019⁹. The pandemic has caused tremendous disruptions to healthcare, education, and other social services. This coupled with the threat of the Ukraine-Russia crisis, jeopardises the prospect of achieving the DD if countries do not embark on robust evidence-based policy actions. These will include, but not limited to, the formulation and implementation of evidence-based policies that will accelerate and help realise the demographic benefits. These include appropriate investment in digital skills and technology to promote virtual learning; improvement of productivity and job creation; support for family planning; investment in reproductive health services and in women and youth's empowerment and employability; and adoption of environment-friendly consumption behaviour.

While the value of research is becoming more widely recognized, the uptake of research evidence by policy makers to solve problems or enhance implementation effectiveness remains weak worldwide¹⁰ more so in low- and middle-income regions like West Africa. For example, evidence suggests that translating clinical discoveries into practice takes 17 to 20 years, with fewer than half of clinical innovations ever making it into general practice. Several factors have been documented to affect translation of research into policy. These include lack of policy-oriented research, poor linkages between researchers and policy makers, and the lack of appropriate strategies in disseminating research results to influence policy.¹¹ To this end, the ECA Subregional Office for West Africa, through its Center for DDD, seeks to bridge the gap between research and policy by strengthening research capacity to respond adequately to the current policy needs in the subregion. Consequently, the Office conducted

⁵ Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo

⁶ United Nations (2019) World population prospects.

⁷ ECA (2021) "Demographic for development: Factsheet"

⁸ ECA (2020) "Population dynamics, demographic dividends and sustainable development in West Africa"

⁹ ECA (2021), West Africa Economic and Social Survey in 2021

¹⁰ Erismann *et al. Health Res Policy Sys (2021) 19:29*

¹¹ Uzochukwu *et al. (2016) "The challenge of bridging the gap between researchers and policy makers: experiences of a Health Policy Research Group in Nigeria". Glob Health. 2016;12(1):67.*

a survey of researchers from a wide range of sectors in all Member States, to explore the extent to which knowledge producers are conducting and translating policy-oriented research and to seek their views on the best strategies to bridging the research-policy gap.

The results of the survey indicated that though a good number of researchers conduct policy-oriented research, they face many obstacles in translating research findings. Key barriers reported include lack of engagement on the part of policymakers, inadequate skills, and platforms to engage and lack of funding and institutional support. To translate their research effectively to influence policy, researchers called for, i) capacity building in research communication and dissemination, ii) increased funding, and iii) facilitated platforms to engage policy makers.

In response, the ECA's Centre for DDD in collaboration with the Regional Institute for Population Studies (RIPS) and the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) proposes to organize a seminar with key knowledge producers including think tanks, universities, independent researchers, and with a cross section of policy makers within the sub-region to exchange knowledge and discuss ways to improve evidence-based policy making more specifically for demographic dynamics for development.

Objectives

The main objective of this seminar is to accelerate progress towards achieving the demographic dividend by stimulating policy-oriented research and translation, to strengthen evidence-based policy making and implementation in the West African subregion.

Specific objectives

- To engage researchers and discuss their roles in responding to policy needs in the sub region.
- To further unpack the results of the survey and facilitate knowledge sharing and peer mentoring.
- To facilitate experience and knowledge sharing, peer mentoring and collaboration among researchers to promote evidence-based policy making.
- To strengthen the network between the ECA-SRO-WA, knowledge producers and policy makers in the sub region.

Expected outcomes

The seminar is expected to strengthen the network of researchers and foster knowledge exchange and peer mentoring among them. Participants will also enrich their skills in research communication and gain insight into development issues requiring policy attention in the subregion. The interactions will also facilitate the meaningful engagement and participation of researchers in evidence-based policy and programs towards achieving the demographic dividend. Finally, it is expected to promote multi-country collaborative research in common priority areas of interest.

Format and target participants

The event will be an in-person four-day seminar. The target participants include think tanks, universities, research institutions, individual researchers, and intergovernmental organizations (IGO's) at the forefront of cutting-edge research in the West Africa subregion. Selected policy makers will also be invited to join the conversation.

Date and venue

The event is scheduled to take place from 28th September to 1st October 2022 in Accra, Ghana.

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