



# Islam, Demographic Dividend, and Family Wellbeing

Preliminary reflections on the Ndjamena  
International Symposium  
25-27 July, 2017



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# Introduction

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An international symposium on **“Islam, Demographic Dividend and Family Wellbeing”** took place in Ndjamen, Chad, from 25 to 27 July 2017, at the initiative of the Government of the Republic of Chad and the Chadian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (CSAI), and with the financial and technical support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Bank. The event brought together “more than 1,200 Muslim leaders”<sup>1</sup>.

This paper presents an independent observer’s preliminary reflections, based primarily on three sources:

- Review of introductory documents presented in plenary;
- Discussions in the three working

groups set up to review the introductory documents<sup>2</sup>;

- Analysis of the **Ndjamen Declaration** adopted at the end of the symposium proceedings.

The paper revolves around five points. After this introduction, the first chapter dwells on the symposium’s innovative methodology. The following three chapters focus on the main results of the symposium, and respectively. The paper clarifies a number of concepts on the symposium’s theme areas, highlight a number of key and consensual messages on the issues, and review recommendations from the working groups and how these are addressed in the Ndjamen Declaration. The last chapter presents recommendations.

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<sup>1</sup> Symposium newsletter published on 27 July 2017

<sup>2</sup> These three groups focused on (a) women empowerment and factors of maternal and child mortality, (b) youth education, employment and radicalisation, (c) the role of Muslim religious leaders in implementing the AU roadmap on demographic dividend



# Chapter 1

## The Ndjamena symposium: an innovative methodology

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The symposium had two objectives, which are stated in the preamble of the Ndjamena Declaration. These were to: ***“harness the potential of religious leaders to contribute towards DD capture; and, “strengthen the capacities of the religious leaders to enrich debates on family planning issues”***. While these objectives are not particularly innovative, the methodology chosen to achieve them was not lacking in originality.



This methodology had three characteristics:

**1. The symposium was designed as a deliberative, not a decision-making forum.** The initiators organised it as a platform for dialogue between several actors and stakeholders involved in the three major subjects for discussion, namely:

- Women empowerment and factors of maternal and child mortality, birth spacing and demographic transition;
- Youth education, empowerment, employment and radicalisation;
- Role of Muslim leaders in implementing the African Union (AU) roadmap on “Harnessing the demographic dividend through investment in the youth”

This dialogue brought together several categories of actors, two of whom rarely gather on the same platforms: Muslim scholars (anxious never to question the dogma at the heart of Islam) and researchers for whom science should ignore dogma or, at the very least, not stop on the threshold of dogma.

The dialogue had one goal: to reach agreement and consensus on key issues regarding the symposium’s theme areas. This option for a symposium designed for dialogue was a bet and, in this case, a risky bet, because the subject is particularly sensitive. Furthermore, such a dialogue or a dialogue designed in this manner was unprecedented in Chad.

In retrospect, such dialogue would apparently not have been possible without the commitment of all the stakeholders, and without trust between





the initiators and the respect they had for one another. A particularly noteworthy aspect in this regard is the exemplary collaborative ties that have been forged in Chad between the Government of Chad, civil society organisations, including faith-based associations, UNFPA and the World Bank. UNFPA's Country Programme 2017-2021 seeks to strengthen behaviour change communication on Family Planning (FP) with the involvement of traditional and religious leaders, and in partnership with the World Bank-funded "Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project", which aims to help accelerate demographic transition to harness the demographic dividend.

In hindsight, no venue would have been more conducive for this symposium than the capital of Chad.<sup>3</sup>

In many respects, Chad is a flagship country on the Demographic Dividend. President Idriss Deby Itno, President of the Republic of Chad, is one of Africa's strongest voices on the Demographic Dividend. He not only put this issue on the AU's agenda during his tenure as Chairperson in 2016-2017, but also took part actively in UNFPA's high-level meeting on 19 September 2016 in New York at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly. Mrs. Ngarmbatina Carmel Sou IV, Chad's Public Health Minister, mentioned in her statement at the opening of the Symposium that the issue is of particular interest to President Idriss Deby Itno, for whom "*improving public wellbeing can stimulate national economies, beginning with the household economy.*" It is in this regard that many of Chad's public policy<sup>4</sup> documents factor in the demographic dividend.

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<sup>3</sup> To realize this, one barely needs to read chapter II, entitled Why in Chad? in the Symposium's background paper from which the elements presented here have been extracted.

<sup>4</sup> Among these are Vision 2030 "the Chad we want" and the Five-Year Plan 2017-2021 which focus on catalysing a drop in fertility.

The First Lady is also very committed on several fronts to efforts that contribute towards the empowerment of women and girls through investments in their education, training and health, all of which are essential for economic growth, poverty eradication and the meaningful participation of these social groups in making decisions that affect their lives.

Outside the political arena, Chad's Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs<sup>5</sup> (CSAI) and a large number of its affiliate Islamic associations are particularly dynamic and pursue a progressive vision that is very open to DD and FWB issues. In the words of Sheikh Houssein Hassan Abakar, President of CSAI, "*Islam encourages family planning and any initiative for women's wellbeing*". This interest in women's wellbeing is attested by the existence of an Islamic health centre in Ndjamenas main mosque, which includes a section for mothers and children. But nothing better illustrates this spirit of openness in Chad's Muslim community than the existence of a corps of female preachers, which has a membership of over 3,000. Their presence, with delegates from 23 regions, gave the Ndjamenas symposium a particular, and even unique touch. To our knowledge, no other African country had witnessed such a strong presence of women in a symposium of this nature.

Establishing convergence in the interests of actors from such diverse backgrounds was certainly not going to be effortless, and certainly not easy. One need not have been in the inner works of the

various sponsoring organisations to figure out that the project surely encountered reservations, even resistance, that the initiators could only have overcome after deploying great intellectual and human qualities. In retrospect, it is clear the reluctance of some, coupled with the misunderstandings and/or overemphasis on the risks associated with this dialogue, could have caused the project to fail ab initio.

The courageous and innovative character of the initiative need therefore be underlined, applauded, and its architects commended. The best way to do so would be to "transform the test", i.e. to consolidate the Ndjamenas symposium's success by organising other meetings that draw on its methodological approach. This is a point we need to revisit in the recommendations.

**2.** To enrich the dialogue, which, as we know, was the Ndjamenas symposium's end-goal and modality of choice, **the proceedings were premised on diversity.** There was diversity at three levels:

- First, in **epistemology**: each theme area had a panel of theology experts and secular experts on the subject.
- Next, in **geographic scope** for each theme area, with African and non-African experts.
- Lastly, in some measure of **gender parity** with the organisers inviting men and women speakers on each theme.

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<sup>5</sup> It was created in 1990 to bring together all Muslims on the same so-called platform for middle path Islam. The Council aims also to protect Chad's faithful from extremism.

### **3. The symposium was informed by a combination of practical case studies and theoretical/conceptual documents.**

The confrontation and/or iterations between the trestles of theory and the asperities of reality offered a premise to assess the problems we face in various fields, including both the general aspects and those specific to particular environments.

The deliberations around this methodology achieved three results which are covered in the chapters below:

- conceptual clarification,
- identification of key messages, and
- recommendations of an operational nature.



# Chapter 2

# Conceptual clarification

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Many of the concepts used during the symposium are subject to controversy because they are polysemic by nature. This is the case, for example, with the Demographic Dividend (DD) and Family Well-Being (FWB), to mention just two problematic concepts in the title of the symposium. Another equally problematic notion is that of family planning (FP). And precisely because these three concepts are problematic, they could not fail to trigger discussion. Those held in Ndjamená helped clarify their meaning and content.

Thus for **DD**, it was agreed this is an opportunity for economic growth tied to changes in population structure relating to the demographic transition. But it was considered also that such potential can be achieved only with proactive public policies. Hence, there can be no automaticity or simultaneity between the demographic transition and the demographic dividend.

As for **FWB**, it is realised when the family decides freely to have the desired number of children suitable for its resources, so every family member (man, woman and child) enjoys their rights according to the teachings of Islam. It cannot be achieved through an approach centred on women alone. It will be through holistic and inclusive approaches with full male involvement in maternal and neonatal mortality reduction, family planning and women empowerment. This holistic approach is all the more necessary because FWB is a “total fact”<sup>6</sup> that is multidimensional with economic, social, political, environmental, cultural and technological aspects.

Lastly, with regard to **family planning**, it has been established very clearly and over a very long time that it cannot mean birth control, a notion with which it is confused all too often. However, Islam, just as clearly, “allows people to delay the process of birth temporarily in order to space pregnancy periods, or stop them for a given period of time”<sup>7</sup>.

Even if it is not possible, or necessary to

exhaustively discuss these concepts, let us bear in mind that the heuristic value of such concepts was stressed at the close of all those discussions. These concepts and notions are means for exploring and understanding complex realities, and not norms a society must accept.

Apparently, if the concepts of DD, FWB and FP are considered from this angle, they are not ignored in Islam. Quite on the contrary, Islam not only recognises them, but it actually prescribes them on the condition that they are conceived as an exclusive right of the two spouses, and not as a right of the community, or as a constraint on the couple.

A point also worth highlighting is the role of the extended or expanded family in shaping the values that inform the above concepts. The notion of family as a nuclear entity comprised of a couple and their biological children does not capture the complex and layered yet rich lived experience of family in the Islamic and more directly Chadian society. It is important to note that the family often comprises several generations who not only share values but play an important role in shaping the values which inform the social capital at the heart of a demographic dividend. The kinship ties which bind members of a family transect age, gender and often class. The intimacy generated therein, as part of an intangible capital resource, is often overlooked as a real dividend which crosscuts DD, FWB and FP as intertwined notions in the realization of positive human development and wealth.

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<sup>6</sup> In the sociological sense of the concept; see the works of Marcel Mauss

<sup>7</sup> Imam El Hadj Moustapha GUEYE, Imam Mouhamadou Takhियou KANE, Argumentaire Islamique sur l'espacement des naissances, la planification familiale selon l'Islam, January 2015, World Faiths Development Dialogue

# Chapter 3

## A consensus on three key messages

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### 1. FP is a tool for achieving Family WB

If well designed as a means to avoid the "4 excesses" that cause imbalances and trigger tensions or instability in resource allocation, FP is accepted by Islam for birth spacing and maternal health. It is deemed appropriate if it seeks to adapt family size to available resources and, in doing so, to improve the quality of life of family members. In such cases, it must be a deliberate choice made by the spouses. Therefore, even if the state has the right to advise citizens and try to convince them that family planning is useful and to their benefit, *"it cannot make family planning a general principle and oblige citizens to apply it."*<sup>8</sup>

### 2. The empowerment of women, as well as that of youth, should be conceived as a means to strengthen social cohesion,

to reduce the inequalities which cause social fragmentation harmful to stability in societies. It should be part of a development policy that is integrated, integral and inclusive. These three aspects of development are at the heart of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda. . In the context of this meeting, it is important to acknowledge the social innovation realized in the creation of enabling environments for inclusion of women and youth in religious spaces through the location of clinic facilities in the Mosque. This not only debunked the myth of a gender exclusive Mosque but also the idea that Muslim leaders are resistant to the idea of women and girls accessing the space of males, namely the Mosque. Further, the fact that males continue to be critically engaged in the shaping of the wellbeing of their wives and daughters

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<sup>8</sup> opus cite

and other female members of the community suggests that the narrative of an indifferent male and or patriarch in the Muslim family is one which will need revision given these emerging examples of inclusive and integrated practices (see also photo on page 11).

**3.** The DD that Africa seeks to capture will have even more chances of success as it will be the work of all. **Religious leaders**, who play a major role in the education, training and moral leadership of societies, **should strengthen their capacities and their status to be the architects of the world of peace, justice and love** to which Africans aspire and that is referenced in the vision of Agenda 2063.







# Chapter 4

## Recommendations of an operational and strategic nature

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The recommendations from the symposium's three working groups, which form the basis of the N'djamena Declaration, have three characteristics:

# 1. They cover not one but several categories of actors.

There are four target groups, namely:

- **Religious leaders:** they are expected to be on the forefront of efforts for the information and awareness of faith communities, two key activities we will address subsequently. This is especially true for women preachers.
- **African governments:** their role is vital in creating an enabling environment for freedom of expression, democratization of relations between social groups, and compliance with human rights. Moreover, they are the only ones
- **Aid agencies:** with a special responsibility assigned to UNFPA and the World Bank, project leaders and/or privileged partners of the Government of Chad and CSAI in organising the symposium.
- **The African Union,** because of its role in building momentum around DD and developing a roadmap which has the merit of highlighting the importance of demographics in Agenda 2063.

who can formulate public policies, particularly on education, health and employment, without which there can be no DD.



## **2. These recommendations cover five registers with limits that are not always clearly defined.**

- **Some of the recommendations include advocacy/awareness activities.**

The activities for creating an enabling environment to promote FP, launching initiatives for maternal health and FWB, designing and/or implementing actions and policies to eradicate all forms of violence against women, fall under this category. Interesting experiences in this regard were reported from countries such as Indonesia, Egypt, Mauritania and Chad. The reports tend to reinforce the idea that religious education on maternal health, birth spacing and women empowerment, combating gender-based violence, including FGM,

and education for safe and healthy living would contribute in capturing the demographic dividend in the developing countries. The potential for success would increase if the actions in question were carried out in collaboration with the ministerial departments for health, education and gender. These seem to be the initiatives which enabled a country like Indonesia, with a predominantly Muslim population, to capture the demographic dividend and be a benchmark in this area.

- **Some recommendations consist in promoting a holistic conception of FWB which accords equal importance to economic, social, political, environmental, cultural and technological issues.**



This approach would be particularly relevant to strategies for the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism which pose a severe threat to the West and Central Africa regions. Obviously, security responses, on their own, would not overcome radicalisation and extremism, which originate as much from social inequalities, geographical and spatial disparities as they do from poorly functioning institutions and/or the instrumentalisation/manipulation of cultural and axiological referents. The UNFPA experience in preventing radicalisation among young people in Cameroon's Far North province<sup>9</sup> suggests that education, information, skill development and job creation for youth empowerment are important factors of deradicalisation. There is need also to lay stress on giving adolescents and young people access to Koranic education which values knowledge, encourages the acquisition of knowledge and condemns all forms of violence.

- **Some of the recommendations include scaling-up:** A good example of such a recommendation is the reference made to the SWEDD project. The recommendation is to scale up this initiative, which appears to be yielding good results and contributing substantially to capture the demographic dividend (DD) because its current coverage area is limited to 7 countries. Even in the countries where the project is ongoing, some regions that should be covered are still not covered.
- **Some recommendations seek to introduce innovations and launch new**

**initiatives.** This is the case for using **Zakat** to promote FWB on a large scale. Experiments of this nature have been conducted but they have never been tested in Africa, even though there is considerable potential in countries with a predominantly Muslim population. It is interesting to note that contrary to the market and consumerist culture driven advertising industry's promotion of individual choice and consumption as the ultimate state of happiness, there are many African societies which consistently demonstrate the affirmation and happiness derived from sharing resources including capital in their kinship and community networks. These have in some ways been acknowledged with the creation of social media apps which enable sharing resources such as mobile credit, creation of community platforms and groups which enable exchange of information and other resources. These have provided the youth with opportunities not only to generate new avenues for networking but also for innovative entrepreneurship transcending barriers such as national borders and language. These have also provided for the rapid development of archives and family networks including digitization of knowledge and inclusion of others hitherto separated by distance and other factors.

- **Lastly, some recommendations highlight the need to monitor/evaluate** ongoing initiatives in order to draw lessons that can be shared, or to make adjustments where variances exist between the initial objectives and results of projects.

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<sup>9</sup> The subject was introduced by Professor Soilihou Mforainen in the second day of the symposium.

### 3. To implement the recommendations made, a key first step is to make reforms or adjustments in four priority areas:

- **Macroeconomic frameworks** need to be reconceptualised. The use of Zakat, for example, which was recommended strongly, cannot be achieved without revising fiscal policies, which are an essential aspect of macroeconomic stability.
- Because of their importance in meeting the basic needs of African communities, the **codes governing access to natural resources** (land, fisheries, mining, etc.) should, in many cases, be revised to enable underprivileged groups to gain access to them and enhance family well-being. Particular attention will have to be given to information because information is an increasingly important factor of production.
- **Education and health system reform** will be necessary for underprivileged groups to have access to social resources. Employment should also be subject to bold and innovative policies if we are committed to creating the 10-12 million decent jobs required each year to meet demand. The youth, in particular, need a technology enabled and infused education which will enable greater inclusion for learners in rural and mobile communities. Examples of on-line and distance learning programmes piloted elsewhere suggest that not only young learners but even adults gain from accessing learning tailored for settings other than urban areas which always invariably enjoy greater infrastructure investments.
- Lastly, **improvements in governance**, considered as a set of interactions between the State and citizens and among the citizens themselves, are absolutely necessary. These improvements in governance are necessary at the macro level, but they need not overlook the family unit because these families are where FWB is realized or not realized, for they are the foundations of life in society. Additionally, families, apart from being economic entities – considering they are production, consumption and wealth distribution units – offer the setting for biological and social reproduction in society. Their governance therefore becomes a major issue of concern for those who wish to achieve economic emergence, social justice, or intra- and inter-generational solidarity.

Let us not forget that these four areas are also crucial priorities for poverty eradication. This comes as no surprise because poverty, to a very large extent, is a major obstacle to FWB.

To conclude the chapters above, it is worth noting that the Ndjamenan symposium was an innovative, and even a first of its kind experience in terms of methodology. Apart from being innovative, the symposium provided clarification on a number of concepts, delivered high-impact policy messages, and identified avenues for strategic action. What the initiators need to do next is transform the Ndjamenan experiment. It is to this end that the recommendations below have been issued.



# Chapter 5

# Recommendations

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To identify and nurture a broad range of DD actors, the efforts initiated in Ndjamena must continue, **expand and intensify**. Five recommendations deserve particular attention in this regard.

## **1. Advocacy work should continue**

The West and Central Africa Regional Office has made enormous and successful efforts to put DD issues on the agenda of several national, regional or international meetings. In the process, it developed strategic partnerships with various social groups, ranging from young people to religious groups, women, parliamentarians and news agencies. But the struggle is far from over, as extremists and obscurantists have not given up. On the contrary, radicalisation is continuing and intensifying in several places. Mobilizing all would-be social forces must continue to be a priority, especially in the Sahel zone where persistent poverty creates the conditions conducive to the spread of human insecurity. In this context, special attention must be paid to women, for they play an essential role in social reproduction and obviously in biological reproduction, as they are the ones who give life and almost exclusively care for new-borns. From this perspective, one can assert that DD will not be achieved unless women are involved and made to participate fully in FP activities, for they are a primary component of reproduction. Their role in social reproduction is vital because they are key accelerators or deterrents in the transmission of values, hence the importance of women preachers. The innovative nature of Chad's experience should spread, especially at a time when there is a tendency towards voluntary or forceful enlistment of women in extremist movements, leaving them with little choice before those who force them to be victims or agents of violence.

Advocacy towards bilateral or multilateral aid agencies should also be maintained, and even stepped up. These latter are facing a scarcity of ODA resources and grappling with the need to make cornelian choices. In this difficult phase, the priority is often on initiatives that yield immediate and quickly visible returns. Since this is not the case for many DD activities, it is necessary to find ways and means of convincing cooperation agencies that very close linkages exist between the SDGs and efforts to capture the demographic dividend. It must be demonstrated that without capturing DD, the SDGs will not be achieved, and that, DD is one of the pivotal pathways to the SDGs.

These advocacy efforts are all the more likely to succeed since African governments themselves will be contributing their own resources to activities that fall within this framework, or will accept to allocate to them a share of the external resources they mobilize from within the international community as grants or loans. The SWEDD example should spread and gain momentum.

## **2. Meetings such as the Ndjama Symposium should be institutionalised.**

DD issues, as they relate to Islam, or the other revealed or traditional religions, should be a subject of regular debate. The issues should cease to be a moment in the life of projects and become a cross-cutting dimension in development planning, particularly those designed for capturing DD.



### **3. Research should keep its place, and its full role in future meetings.**

The processes of social and societal transformation are always complex, because the factors that come into play or determine them are more and more numerous and increasingly entangled. Finding the breadcrumb trail to disentangle the hank tends to be a necessary but difficult exercise. How were religious leaders able to play such a positive role in Chad as advocates for FWB, and why is it so difficult elsewhere to involve them in initiatives with similar objectives? Would the consultations on FWB or contraceptive methods at the Fayçal Centre have been as successful if the health centre was not located inside the mosque? What place do variables such as age, ethnicity, social origin of religious leaders and/or women preachers have in the decisions couples make on family planning? How can deep and layered histories and embedded knowledge resources in the idea of the family be tapped to inform the modern day family as it manages the deluge on new and multifaceted information? How can parenting remain intimate and about the nurturing of intimacy in the digital age where new technologies promote lone ranger cultures? These are some of the questions that need to be asked, and to which well-research answers should be provided.

### **4. Knowledge sharing should remain a modality of preference for building a DD movement.**

However, the cycle of dialogue needs to be broadened to include economists,

sociologists, politicians, cultural heritage practitioners and experts and planners so that FWB and maternal health issues are taken out of the restricted space, or even ghetto setting, where they tend to be confined. While, as we often heard during the symposium, health and reproductive issues are also human issues, and FWB issues are development issues, there needs to be a better balance in the professional profiles of the participants in upcoming meetings. This is particularly important to ensure that the knowledge of the elderly in areas such as nutrition, maternal and child health and care are factored into the discourse as part of a more inclusive acknowledgement of indigenous and traditional knowledge.

### **5. Efforts to capture DD should be planned**

To achieve this, DD needs to be planned at all levels. From the family setting to the continental level, actions should be implemented based on the synergies resulting from DD. The latter will not come from the demographic transition alone. It will not be the product of economic emergence alone. It will not be the fruit of institutional transformations alone. It will not be the outcome of women empowerment alone. It will not result from the initiatives of religious leaders alone. Perhaps in modeling new ways of interactions and critical conversations platforms the Ndjamena symposium and experience provides us with avenues towards developing programmes and creating learning commons for and with communities. The insights gained from the co-

production of knowledge at the symposium suggests that there are opportunities for innovation and knowledge development in settings where perhaps our perceptions have been blurred by misconceptions.

DD cannot be the sole business of governments, or CSOs, or the private sector. It will only come from the planned and concerted action of all. For this to happen, there needs to be agreement on a family, national or regional project, because *“if one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favourable.”*<sup>10</sup> Setting sail to the right harbour and finding the means to get there at the lowest cost - which is the essence of planning - makes sense only when the right port is known. This way of defining the right port cannot be done in an arbitrary and authoritative manner. On FWB, it will make sense only if it is the fruit of a consensus achieved after dialogue at a pace that cannot be determined beforehand. An important sector to place at the heart of these conversations will always be children and

the youth. The idea of DD is oftentimes premised on the idea that they are our targets and beneficiaries whilst the reality is also that it is about legacies and how societies realize their affirmations in the spaces between cradle and grave. As Mandela is often quoted: Every society will be judged on how it treats its children [check exact quote]. Likewise, Hampté Ba’s oft quoted saying that “When an elderly person dies in Africa, a library burns” succinctly capture the essence of valuing the deep time in family histories and cultural values which inform and influence what direction individual and collective family and kin members will take in the path of well-being and wealth-being.

Agreeing on these prolegomena is vital because it is the price to pay to ensure planning is no longer an activity for technocrats and can become a tool for achieving a desired collective project, a future desired not by a single elite group, no matter how enlightened and legitimate they may be, but rather by the greatest number of citizens, and couples in this case.

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<sup>10</sup> According to Seneque, the philosopher

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Delivering a world where  
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potential is fulfilled



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