



# 1

UNFPA West and Central Africa  
**Acceleration Paper**

## **Strategic foresight:**

Pursuit of the ICPD and SDGs in West and Central Africa



Ensuring rights and choices for all



---

This paper was prepared by Alain Akpadji, Gilena Andrade, Francesco Galtieri, Olivier Kambala wa Kambala, Pauline Pratt and Nadia Rasheed.

United Nations Population Fund West and Central Africa Regional Office

©UNFPA June 2024

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1. THE WHAT AND WHERE: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 ICPD Programme of Action	5
1.2 Sustainable Development Goals	5
1.3 The three transformative results	7
1.3.1 Learning from the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018–2021	7
1.3.2 Learning from the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025	7
<b>2. THE WHY: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Profile of West and Central Africa	7
2.2 Sociopolitical analysis inherent to the three transformative results	8
2.2.1 Entrenched societal norms and power structures (cultural and religious influences)	8
2.2.2 Political instability and its pervasive effects	8
2.2.3 Deep-rooted inequalities	9
2.2.4 Poverty and lack of socioeconomic development	9
2.3 Population dynamics analysis	9
<b>3. THE HOW: STRATEGIC FORESIGHT</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 UNFPA global foresight scenarios	11
Assumptions:	11
Four future scenarios:	12
3.2 Proposed strategic foresight for the region	12
3.3 Futures for the three transformative results	13
3.3.1 Probable futures for the three transformative results	13
3.3.2 Possible futures for the three transformative results	13
3.3.3 Preferable futures for the three transformative results	13
<b>4. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR UNFPA WCARO?</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1 Mindshift in the way we work	14
4.2 Tactical approaches adapting to the change in environment	14
<b>5. CONCLUSION</b>	<b>15</b>



## INTRODUCTION

UNFPA and partners are committed to moving forward faster. This paper is part of a series of “acceleration papers” that analyse bottlenecks and identify priority focus areas at regional and country level in West and Central Africa. The aim is to accelerate efforts to implement the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and UNFPA’s three transformative results: ending preventable maternal deaths, ending the unmet need for family planning and ending gender-based violence and all harmful practices. As UNFPA assesses progress in a midterm review of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, these papers call for an acceleration of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

This paper provides a forecast of West and Central Africa and its potential implications for the mandate of UNFPA in the region. This exercise is intended to promote reflection on the diverse set of approaches required to achieve the three transformative results of the UNFPA strategic plan within the

framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These approaches should include the integration, localization and scaling up of the three transformative results, as well as the ICPD Programme of Action. They should also promote coherence within the United Nations system and the involvement of multilateral stakeholders as part of efforts to effectively recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and realign with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The scenarios included in this strategic foresight exercise align with the 12 high impact initiatives of the United Nations development system (Box 1).<sup>1</sup> These initiatives aim to make transformative progress in the face of challenging global conditions as well as mobilize additional leadership and investment to accelerate progress by 2030. The initiatives take into account the relevant policy processes initiated by the African Union concerning Agenda 2063 and to benchmark continental progress around its seven aspirations.<sup>2</sup>

1 Website available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/SDGSummitActions/HII>

2 African Union. Undated. Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want. Available at: <https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview>. The seven aspirations are as follows: (1) A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development; (2) An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa’s Renaissance; (3) An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law; (4) A peaceful and secure Africa; (5) An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics; (6) An Africa, whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children; (7) Africa as a strong, united, resilient and influential global player and partner.

# 1. THE WHAT AND WHERE: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The issues of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) remain sensitive in the region, as shown in research findings<sup>3</sup>:

- » Sexual and reproductive health issues are rarely discussed in families.
- » In many cultures, openly discussing sexuality and sexual relationships is frowned upon.
- » Several members of the nuclear family never discuss sexual and reproductive issues.
- » Only those deemed ready for marriage are counseled on how to behave in their marriages.
- » Sexual and reproductive health is learned through observation with people from the opposite sex, peers, public health educators, friends and to a lesser extent relatives.
- » The proliferation of different information platforms across traditional and new media has increased the content, form and variety of sexual and reproductive health information, and raised concerns about inaccuracy.

## 1.1 ICPD Programme of Action

The ICPD Programme of Action presents a potential avenue for West and Central African countries to effectively integrate population dynamics into their development strategies. It has been domesticated into continental legal frameworks through the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development, yet its implementation is still facing multilayered obstacles:

- » Cultural and religious perspectives often challenge fundamental elements of

transformative approaches to population dynamics, including the availability of safe abortion, comprehensive sexuality education, sexual and reproductive health and rights and gender equality. Moreover, these perspectives impede the implementation of progressive policies and practices.

- » Political commitment/will is absent from the government regarding action to prioritize the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action by mainstreaming into national and regional development plans, strategies and policies.
- » Governments do not invest sufficient and meaningful resources. Financial constraints pose a significant impediment to countries' capacity to effectively tackle pressing matters such as enhancing health care facilities, expanding family planning programmes and reducing maternal mortality.

The 56th session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development in April 2023 saw a notable display of politicization and resistance among delegates, resulting in the failure to reach consensus on the adoption of a draft resolution pertaining to the session's central theme: the interplay between population dynamics, education and sustainable development.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Sustainable Development Goals

In April 2023, the United Nations Secretary-General reported that progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals is encountering

<sup>3</sup> Some of these inferences are drawn from research conducted by the African Population and Health Research Center, <https://aphrc.org/>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Meetings Coverage and Press Releases. 2023. Disagreeing over References to Comprehensive Sexual Education, Delegates Fail to Adopt Draft Resolution as Commission on Population and Development Concludes Session | UN Press. 14 April 2023. Available at: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/pop1109.doc.htm>

significant challenges.<sup>5</sup> Several important facts support this conclusion: First, only 12 per cent of the targets are projected to be accomplished by 2030. Second, there is a failure observed across all three dimensions of sustainability, namely economic, social and environmental. Third, increasing poverty rates undermine the aspiration of inclusivity, as the goal of leaving no one behind becomes increasingly elusive. Lastly, the triple planetary crises of the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating prices due to fallout from the conflict in Ukraine and climate change are inflicting severe consequences on the most vulnerable populations. The midway review of the 2030 Agenda provides an important opportunity to realign the trajectory of the SDGs

with a focus on the 12 high impact initiatives. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs is unlikely to be completed unless policies are refocused in terms of shared accountability and ownership .

The issue of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) remains sensitive in the region. The ICPD Programme of Action presents a potential avenue for the countries of West and Central African to effectively integrate population dynamics into their development strategies. The halfway review of the 2030 Agenda provides an important opportunity to realign the trajectory of the SDGs with a focus on the 12 high impact initiatives.

### Box 1: High impact initiatives

The United Nations development system is mobilizing behind 12 high impact initiatives that provide a platform to help take SDG progress to scale

1. Energy Compacts: Scaling up ambition to deliver on SDG7
2. Nature Driving Economic Transformation: Leveraging the power of biodiversity and nature to drive equitable economic progress
3. Food Systems Transformation: Transforming food systems for a sustainable world without hunger
4. Transforming Education: Learning to build a better future for all
5. Global Accelerator: The Global Accelerator on jobs and social protection for just transitions
6. Digital Public Infrastructure: Scaling inclusive and open digital ecosystems for the SDGs
7. The SDG Stimulus: Scaling up long-term affordable financing for the SDGs
8. Transforming4Trade: Paradigm shift to boost economic development
9. Local2030 Coalition: Pushing key transitions and achieving the SDGs by 2030
10. FutureGov: Building public sector capabilities for the future
11. Power of Data: Unlocking the data dividend for the SDGs
12. Spotlight Initiative: To eliminate violence against women and girls

Source: Bringing SDG Solutions to Scale. <https://sdgs.un.org/SDGSummitActions/HII>

5 United Nations General Assembly Economic and Social Council. .2023. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Towards a Rescue Plan for People and Planet: Report of the Secretary-General (Special Edition). April 2023. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/report/2023/secretary-general-sdg-report-2023-EN.pdf> [https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/SDG\\_Progress\\_Report\\_Special\\_Edition.pdf?\\_gl=1\\*16kivde\\*\\_ga\\*Ndk5NzQwMDYwLjE3MjM4NjA3Nzk\\_\\*\\_ga\\_TK9BOL5X7Z\\*MTcwMzg2MjA5Ny4xLjEuMTcwMzg2MjI2MC4wLjAuMA](https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/SDG_Progress_Report_Special_Edition.pdf?_gl=1*16kivde*_ga*Ndk5NzQwMDYwLjE3MjM4NjA3Nzk_*_ga_TK9BOL5X7Z*MTcwMzg2MjA5Ny4xLjEuMTcwMzg2MjI2MC4wLjAuMA).

## 1.3 The three transformative results

### 1.3.1 Learning from the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018–2021

Analysis of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2018–2021 in West and Central Africa noted progress<sup>6</sup> despite operating in a context of growing humanitarian needs, geopolitical insecurity and COVID-19 along with a persistently high maternal mortality ratio ranging from 42 to 1,047 deaths per 100,000 live births.<sup>7</sup> The UNFPA West and Central Regional Office (WCARO) reported a number of areas of progress towards meeting the three transformative results in “Strengthening Resilience for Sexual and Reproductive Health in West and Central Africa”, the 2018–2021 programme cycle report. Results were demonstrated in the region for several key results:

- » Contraceptive use increased by one point, bringing the contraceptive prevalence rate to 22 per cent, with a significant improvement in the adolescent birth rate, which fell from 115 to 108 births per 1,000 women aged 15–19 years.
- » Child marriage by age 18 decreased by one percentage point, from 42 per cent in 2018

to 39 per cent in 2021; however, the practice increased in some countries in the region.

- » Female genital mutilation decreased by one percentage point from 24 per cent in 2018 to 23 per cent in 2021 of women aged 15–49 years who have undergone FGM.

### 1.3.2 Learning from the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025

The UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 emphasizes the need for immediate action to ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health services, to protect reproductive rights for all individuals, and to accelerate the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. The plan outlines the organization’s specific areas of focus, which include investigating key approaches and tactics to accelerate the realization of the three transformative results. UNFPA seeks to position its achievement within the larger context of the ICPD Programme of Action and its renewed call to action following the COVID-19 pandemic. This era necessitates efforts to “build forward better” and reclaim lost ground and accelerate progress.

## 2. THE WHY: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

This section will focus on understanding the key factors influencing the strategic plan’s implementation from 2022 to 2025. It will focus on the sociopolitical aspects of the three transformative results and population dynamics, which are critical to achieving the ICPD Programme of Action in West and Central Africa. It will then establish a foresight projection for the realization

of the three transformative results and present scenarios that can manifest in the face of the current sociopolitical and population dynamics analysis.

### 2.1 Profile of West and Central Africa

The 23 countries of West and Central Africa have a combined population of approximately 552 million

6 UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office. 2022. Strengthening resilience for for sexual and reproductive health in West and Central Africa, 2018-2021 Programme Cycle Report. Available at: [https://wcaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2018-2021\\_unfpa\\_wca\\_programme\\_cycle\\_report\\_29\\_12\\_2022.pdf](https://wcaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2018-2021_unfpa_wca_programme_cycle_report_29_12_2022.pdf)

7 World Health Organization. 2023. Trends in maternal mortality 2000 to 2020 Estimates by WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA, World Bank Group and UNDESA/Population Division. Available at: [www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240068759](http://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240068759) and UNDESA/Population Division.

people. The region has the highest population growth in the world.<sup>8</sup> Economic activity is expected to grow by 3.4 per cent in the region in 2023.<sup>9</sup> The region will have more than 2.9 million refugees<sup>10</sup> and 1.7 million internally displaced people as of 2023. These figures are expected to rise as a result of a new wave of instability in the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger) and with the withdrawal of the countries' membership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which will increase inflation and economic uncertainty.

Six constitutional disruptions have occurred in the region (Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Mali and Niger), exacerbating political instability and feeding the existing patterns of insecurity. The region's migrant population has more than doubled in the last 30 years, while unemployment or vulnerable jobs account for 50 to 90 per cent of the total labour force.<sup>11</sup> Unemployment affects more young people and women. With two thirds of the population under the age of 35, this is the youngest region in the world. With the right investment in human capital, the region can benefit from the demographic dividend. Food insecurity affects more than 75 million people.<sup>12</sup> A massive rural exodus is occurring as a result of a lack of basic services, resulting in a new layer of poor and informal dwellers in major cities.

## 2.2 Sociopolitical analysis inherent to the three transformative results

### 2.2.1 Entrenched societal norms and power structures (cultural and religious influences)

The West and Central African region has a wide range of societal norms depicting statutes and positions; , from the historical legacy of colonialism to traditional beliefs, entrenched

systemic power structures impact the implementation of initiatives to accelerate progress towards the three transformative results and prevent the full realization of the ICPD Programme of Action. Religious beliefs and cultural practices shape issues concerning contraception, family planning and reproductive health across communities and religious groups. Patriarchal norms, social castes, religious weight and gender stereotypes restrict women's access to education, health care, economic opportunities and decision-making processes. Sociocultural and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage exacerbate gender disparities and the poverty cycle.

### 2.2.2 Political instability and its pervasive effects

Conflicts, social unrest and governmental transitions have all contributed to varying degrees of political instability in West and Central Africa, exacerbating vulnerabilities, particularly for women, girls and those furthest left behind. These issues have destabilized governance, stymied development initiatives, and impeded the implementation of population and reproductive health policies and programmes and progress towards the SDGs. In the last decade, West and Central Africa has experienced social unrest and terrorism (Central African Republic and Mali), armed conflicts (Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Mali, Niger and the Gulf of Guinea countries), transitional administrations (Burkina Faso, Chad, Gabon, Guinea, Mali and Niger) and spillover from countries impacted by the social unrest (Benin, Ghana and Togo).

8 International Fund for Agricultural Development. Undated. West and Central Africa. Webpage available at: [www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/regions/wca](http://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/regions/wca)

9 The World Bank. Undated. The World Bank in Western and Central Africa. Webpage available at: [www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/western-and-central-africa](http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/afr/western-and-central-africa)

10 UNHCR Global Focus. Undated. Sahel Situation. Webpage available at: <https://reporting.unhcr.org/operational/situations/sahel-situation>

11 International Fund for Agricultural Development. Undated. West and Central Africa. Webpage available at: [www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/regions/wca/West-and-Central-Africa](http://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/regions/wca/West-and-Central-Africa)

12 UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. 2023. *West and Central Africa | Situation Reports*. Webpage available at: <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/west-central-africa/>



### 2.2.3 Deep-rooted inequalities

Complex layers of inequalities are rooted in a variety of factors such as poverty, gender inequality, health and socioeconomic inequalities across the region. Women frequently face barriers to education, health care, economic opportunity and power in decision-making. Harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation continue to be practiced in some areas, undermining gender equality and women's rights. Poverty and economic inequality are major concerns in the region. Many people and communities have inadequate access to essential amenities including health care, education, clean water and sanitation. The rich-poor divide is growing wider, resulting in unequal access to opportunities and resources.

Access to high-quality education remains unequal in West and Central Africa. Children and adolescents in rural or marginalized areas frequently face educational challenges, such as a lack of school facilities and a shortage of teachers as well as sociocultural norms that favour boys' education over girls' education. Gender gaps in educational attainment persist, limiting opportunities for girls and perpetuating injustice. Across the region, disparities in health outcomes and access to health care persist.

Many people, particularly those living in distant locations or in hard to reach communities, lack access to crucial health services such as maternity and reproductive health care. High rates of maternal and infant mortality, as well as the presence of diseases such as malaria underscore the region's health inequities. The region is still far from the recommendation of the Abuja Declaration to allocate 15 per cent of the national budget to health care.

Power inequalities and little political engagement have a negative influence on marginalized populations in West and Central Africa. Minority ethnic and religious groups, indigenous

communities and socially disadvantaged groups may encounter discrimination, exclusion and limited representation in decision-making processes. The result of inequalities in the region is also massive illegal migration; the massive exodus that many men, women and young Africans embark on has its roots in manifesting gaps in human rights, civil liberties, sociopolitical stability, education quality, life expectancy, earning capacity and the prevalence of violent conflict.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2.4 Poverty and lack of socioeconomic development

The confluence of deeply ingrained societal norms, political volatility and persistent inequalities has resulted in a state of poverty and a deterioration in socioeconomic development within the region. The present circumstances can be characterized by various factors, including but not limited to: an unstable and unequal distribution of income, restricted availability of economic prospects, a high prevalence of low-skilled employment opportunities, insufficient infrastructure development, particularly in rural and marginalized regions, inadequate market systems, a predominant reliance on the informal sector, limited social safety nets for the majority of the population, and restricted access to fundamental services such as education, health care, clean water, sanitation and electricity.

## 2.3 Population dynamics analysis

The region continues to experience multidimensional fragility as violent conflict, climate change impacts and food insecurity affect a large number of countries. The population of West and Central Africa continues to increase at a 2.6 per cent annual rate, with the exception of Cabo Verde. Fertility rates are still significantly higher than the global average of 2.3 children per woman, although they have decreased from 6.3 children per woman in 1994 to 4.8 in 2023, with the majority of the decline occurring among girls aged 15–19

<sup>13</sup> Glor, Oded. *The Journey of Humanity: A New History of Wealth and Inequality with Implications for our Future*. Dutton, 2023, p.127.

years. Less than 10 per cent of the population uses modern contraception, and more than half of all marriages involve minors.

Urbanization, conflict, climate change, food insecurity and pandemics all contribute to the multifaceted fragility of the region. Public health researchers have estimated that by 2022, up to 5.6 per cent of the population of the Central African Republic have perished as a result of decades of instability and fighting.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding climate change impacts on population dynamics, the Sahel and the Congo Rainforest, two distinctive natural features of the West and Central African region, are subject to different effects of climate change but have a significant impact on the local population.

- » Increased temperatures: The region's average temperature has risen throughout the years, resulting in heatwaves and extreme weather occurrences. Higher temperatures have had a negative impact on agriculture, health and overall human productivity.
- » Changing rainfall patterns: Droughts, floods and unpredictable meteorological conditions have an impact on water availability and agricultural output and can lead to increased humanitarian needs.<sup>15</sup>
- » Desertification: Desertification is caused by increased aridity and land degradation, which affect livelihoods, biodiversity and food security. The Sahel region extends eastward from the Atlantic Ocean via northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, Mali's great

Niger River bend, Burkina Faso, southern Niger, northeastern Nigeria, south-central Chad and into Sudan.<sup>16</sup> According to reports, anthropogenic factors are to blame for aridity in the Sahel strip.<sup>17</sup>

- » Sea-level rise: Coastal areas in West and Central Africa are vulnerable to sea-level rise, threatening residents and critical infrastructure. Rising sea levels pose a hazard to low-lying coastal areas, causing erosion, saltwater intrusion, and loss of land and property. This can lead to population displacement and greater vulnerability to natural catastrophes like hurricanes and floods.<sup>18</sup>
- » Impact on agriculture: Agriculture is an important economic sector in West and Central Africa. Agriculture provides 30 to 50 per cent of GDP in most countries and income and livelihoods for 70 to 80 per cent of the population.<sup>19</sup> Temperature and rainfall patterns can have an impact on crop yields and livestock production, resulting in lower agricultural productivity and income for farmers.<sup>20</sup> Climate change poses a substantial danger to food security.
- » Biodiversity loss: Climate change leads to biodiversity loss in the forests, savannahs and coastal areas of West and Central Africa. Rising temperatures, habitat degradation and changed rainfall patterns destabilize ecosystems and endanger the existence of many plant and animal species in these unique habitats. This biodiversity loss has

14 Columbia Mailman School of Public Health. 2023. Extreme Mortality Rate Found in Central African Republic. Webpage citing the journal Conflict and Health available at: [www.publichealth.columbia.edu/news/extreme-mortality-rate-found-central-african-republic](http://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/news/extreme-mortality-rate-found-central-african-republic)

15 Institute for Security Studies. 2010. The Impact of Climate Change in Africa. Available at: [www.files.ethz.ch/isn/136704/PAPER220.pdf](http://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/136704/PAPER220.pdf). See also, United Nations Climate Change. 2020. Climate Change Is an Increasing Threat to Africa. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/news/climate-change-is-an-increasing-threat-to-africa>

16 Britannica. Undated. Sahel. Available at: [www.britannica.com/place/Sahel](http://www.britannica.com/place/Sahel)

17 In the second half of the 20th century, the Sahel was increasingly afflicted by soil erosion and desertification resulting from growing human populations that made more demands upon the land than previously. See Britannica, undated. Sahel. Available at: [www.britannica.com/place/Sahel](http://www.britannica.com/place/Sahel)

18 Africa Center for Strategic Studies. 2022. Rising sea levels besieging Africa's booming coastal cities. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/rising-sea-levels-besieging-africas-booming-coastal-cities-lagos-dakar-alexandria-maputo-nile/>

19 International Fund for Agricultural Development. Undated. West and Central Africa. Webpage available at: [www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/regions/wca](http://www.ifad.org/en/web/operations/regions/wca)

20 International Livestock Research Institute. 2022. Climate change in Africa: What will it mean for agriculture and food security? Available at: [www.ilri.org/news/climate-change-africa-what-will-it-mean-agriculture-and-food-security#](http://www.ilri.org/news/climate-change-africa-what-will-it-mean-agriculture-and-food-security#)



consequences for both ecological equilibrium and human livelihoods.<sup>21</sup>

- » SRHR and gender-based violence (GBV) impacts: Climate change directly and indirectly impacts women and girls and their sexual and reproductive health. Heat, air pollution and climate-related diseases adversely impact maternal and newborn health outcomes. In addition, climate-related loss of livelihoods increases poverty and food insecurity, which further negatively affects maternal and newborn health and

well-being. The impacts of climate change often result in disruptions to essential services while simultaneously creating conditions of vulnerability that increase the risk of GBV and harmful practices such as child marriage. As a region highly prone to droughts, food insecurity and human displacements, there is a need for region-specific interventions that address the underlying structures and vulnerabilities, which, if left unaddressed, are likely to further worsen existing gender and health inequalities.

## 3. THE HOW: STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

This section will propose probable futures, possible futures and preferable futures and summarize the UNFPA global foresight conducted in the lead up to the finalization of the current strategic plan.

Scenario thinking lends itself well to strategic planning. It utilizes the inherent human capacity for imagining futures to better understand the present and identify new strategic options. Scenario thinking works with a set of scenarios, each of which is a plausible, relevant and challenging story about the future. By looking at multiple scenarios of the future, each with its own characteristics, scenario thinking has offered UNFPA a broader range of strategic options to consider. The scenarios presented here are set in 2050. The longer time frame was deliberately chosen to help scenario builders reframe their thinking, challenge assumptions and develop useful scenarios that may help deliver resilient and sustainable strategies.

### 3.1 UNFPA global foresight scenarios

In the context of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, UNFPA developed several foresight scenarios<sup>22</sup> grounded on a number of assumptions.

#### Assumptions:

- » The world is in the middle of turbulence, uncertainty, novelty and ambiguity (TUNA).
- » The business of accelerating progress in achieving the three transformative results is integral to UNFPA's ability to understand what the future may look like and to prepare to face it.
- » UNFPA needs to become more aware of changes in the global environment and be more adaptable in the face of these changes.
- » The UNFPA mandate is facing further large-scale disruptions caused by climate change, political tensions, protracted crises, environmental factors and social factors.

21 African Center for Strategic Studies. 2022. African Biodiversity Loss Raises Risk to Human Security. Available at: <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/african-biodiversity-loss-risk-human-security/>

22 UNFPA. 2023. Four future scenarios for three transformative results. Available at: [www.unfpa.org/publications/four-future-scenarios-three-transformative-results](http://www.unfpa.org/publications/four-future-scenarios-three-transformative-results)

#### Four future scenarios:

- » **Booming biotech:** Due to the conviction that advancements in science, technology and cooperative efforts can advance humanity, the field of biotechnology is expanding quickly. However, it is critical to recognize that there are several approaches to achieving this goal.
- » **Connecting poles apart:** In a hypothetical scenario, people from various backgrounds band together to form distinct groups based on shared ideals, with distinct indicators of group affiliation established to uphold these principles.
- » **Reining in the digital beast:** The digital sphere is an emerging battleground for soft-power competition/rivalry, marked by the imposition of digital reliance and a pervasive atmosphere of mistrust.
- » **Tested to the limits:** The occurrence of environmental disasters has prompted communities and states to take a more introspective approach. As a result, there has been a resurgence of ethnic consciousness and religious fervor, accompanied by an increase in the presence of missionaries attempting to alleviate the human suffering that has resulted.

### 3.2 Proposed strategic foresight for the region

Given current circumstances, the future outlook for West and Central Africa appears challenging. The analysis and trends indicate a troubling increase in factors including high debt, inflation, unemployment, urbanization, forced migration, political instability and the lack of governmental capacity to manage the youth bulge. Additional challenges include a rise in poverty, widening inequalities, increased humanitarian crises and a worsening environmental protection situation in the region. All of these issues contribute to countries competing for limited donor resources.

Financially, many countries in the region face a bleak outlook due to high levels of debt, ranging from 33 per cent to over 100 per cent of total GDP. This high debt, coupled with a high inflation rate in several countries, is expected to increase inequality and perpetuate the cycle of poverty, especially among vulnerable populations who struggle to prioritize basic human needs such as food, water, shelter and education.

Global instability along with cross-border and geopolitical issues in the region has heightened the need for internal security. This, in turn, requires more resources, diverting funds away from human capital development. Furthermore, the shrinking fiscal space is influenced by donor support shifting from social services and job creation to global security investments.

Population dynamics and megatrends significantly impact development in the region. While the youth bulge could be an asset with the right investments, the current forecast suggests a negative impact on sustainable development. Rural-to-urban migration reduces the capacity of rural areas to produce crops and results in illegal settlements in urban areas, contributing to increased poverty and limited access to essential social services and decent jobs, particularly affecting young people and children forced to migrate for a better life.

Although there is substantial potential for leveraging natural resources, countries in the region are not adequately investing in advancing their use. Instead, there is a depletion of natural resources due to rudimentary practices in agriculture and mining, hindering the transformation of these resources into benefits such as food security and job creation.

Looking ahead, strategic investment in human capital and adaptation to the new environment through innovation and foresight thinking is essential. Without it, the situation in the next 10 years is unlikely to improve.

### 3.3 Futures for the three transformative results

#### 3.3.1 Probable futures for the three transformative results

Likely to happen or be true but not certain: In the probable futures of the three transformative results, their delivery is in the contexts and obstacles described throughout this paper. This is a situation in which predictability and expectations are in sync. In this scenario, the three transformative results will be accepted as part of the West and Central Africa profile, will be in sync with the sociopolitical analysis, will be an enabler for population dynamics, and will take into account the unique effects of climate change in the region.

The following are the likely scenarios of the probable futures relative to the three transformative results:

- » The three transformative results have a solid and distinct strategic positioning in national policy frameworks.
- » The three transformative results will be streamlined using evidence-based programming, taking into account the context.
- » The three transformative results will be implemented during complex business continuity plans. This reflects the requirement of duty of care for staff members and programmes in times of instability that the region will be accustomed to managing and mitigating.
- » Resource mobilization will always be favourable to every country in West and Central Africa in support of implementing the three transformative results.

- » Communication, innovation and creativity will maximize the impact of implementation and make use of cutting-edge technological advances in the field.
- » The three transformative results are part of systems-thinking and coherence across the United Nations, UNFPA and UNFPA WCARO and will be part of the UN system projections to refocus the attainment of the SDGs through (a) the 12 high impact initiatives, (b) a successful review of the ICPD30 process and (c) renewing political commitment for the SDGs during the Summit of the Future.

#### 3.3.2 Possible futures for the three transformative results

Able to be done; able to happen or exist: In West and Central Africa, it is possible that delivery of the three transformative results is not mastering and not factoring in the contexts and obstacles described throughout this paper. The possible futures are likely to be the continuation of business as usual, although adjustments will be made on occasion to adapt to the context, always catching up with the rapidly changing environment.

#### 3.3.3 Preferable futures for the three transformative results

More desirable: The preferable futures for the three transformative results will be the intersection of the probable and possible futures, built around the UNFPA WCARO leadership and bringing out the best in the team.

## 4. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR UNFPA WCARO?

The contextual and backdrop circumstances in which the future scenarios are formulated appear to be unfavourable. The analysis portrays the various obstacles (past, contemporary, and prospective) that hinder the execution of the West and Central Africa Regional Programme (2022–2025).<sup>23</sup> Within the framework of the Midterm Review of the Strategic Plan for the period 2022–2025, the strategic foresight outlined in this document necessitates that UNFPA WCARO take into account the subsequent potential courses of action that address a mindset shift in the way we work.

### 4.1 Mindshift in the way we work

- » Avoid regret and instead adopt a reality-checking attitude. Redefine what success for the region should look like while pursuing the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action and advancing the three transformative results: these are flagship choices from the larger picture of the population–development nexus.
- » Adopt a sensemaking approach and a purpose-driven spirit. These are required to effectively implement the three transformative results outlined in the ICPD Programme of Action. This approach should prioritize transformative critical realization, which can be accomplished through two interconnected strategies: (1) regenerating, adopting and disseminating policies; and (2) fostering behavioural change within West and Central African social stratifications. By focusing on these strategies, the ICPD Programme of Action can become relevant

in the identified commonplaces, where the three transformative results will be integral components of the regenerated social norms.

### 4.2 Tactical approaches adapting to the change in environment

#### Stakeholder engagement

- » Employ a strategic foresight approach to identify and engage with diverse stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, local communities and partners.
- » Facilitate multisectoral dialogues to understand evolving social norms, cultural dynamics and the unique challenges faced by different communities regarding SRHR and GBV.

#### Investment in human capital and awareness

- » Employ strategic foresight to identify emerging trends in education and communication methods.
- » Implement awareness campaigns and educational programmes that address changing social norms and gender roles and empower communities with knowledge about SRHR and GBV.

#### Community-centered approaches

- » Employ strategic foresight techniques to understand community-specific needs and preferences.
- » Tailor SRHR and GBV interventions to local contexts, incorporating community-driven strategies and promoting inclusivity.

<sup>23</sup> UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022-2025 (DP/FPA/2021/8). Annex 4 Global and regional programmes 7. West and Central Africa regional programme (2022-2025) [www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/DP.FPA\\_2021.8\\_-\\_UNFPA\\_strategic\\_plan\\_2022-2025\\_-\\_Annex.7\\_-\\_West\\_and\\_Central\\_Africa\\_-\\_FINAL\\_-\\_23Jul21.pdf](http://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/board-documents/DP.FPA_2021.8_-_UNFPA_strategic_plan_2022-2025_-_Annex.7_-_West_and_Central_Africa_-_FINAL_-_23Jul21.pdf)



©UNFPA – Youri Lenquette

#### Data and research

- » Invest in data collection and research methodologies that provide real-time insight into changing dynamics and trends.
- » Use strategic foresight to identify emerging research priorities in the field of SRHR and GBV.

- » By integrating strategic foresight into these tactical approaches, UNFPA can proactively navigate the complex and dynamic landscape of SRHR and GBV in West and Central Africa, fostering sustainable and adaptable solutions.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The cost of inaction is high. If UNFPA and its many valued partners in government, civil society, non-governmental organizations, academia, the private sector and other United Nations agencies fail to contemplate future scenarios, the window for action on 2030 goals will close. Without thinking about future scenarios, and the impact of megatrends on realizing the ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs, we are ill-prepared for a world of turbulence, uncertainty, novelty and

ambiguity (TUNA). Accelerating progress in achieving the three transformative results might not happen unless UNFPA as an organization at global, regional and country levels understands what the future may look like and is prepared for it. The organization must be more aware of changes in the global environment, more responsive to future planning, and more adaptable in a diverse and changing world.



Ensuring rights and choices for all

Facebook: [UNFPAWCARO](#)

Instagram: [@unfpawcaro](#)

LinkedIn: [UNFPA West and Central Africa](#)

Twitter: [UNFPA\\_WCARO](#)