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UNFPA West and Central Africa
Acceleration Paper

Innovation to Achieve the 3 Transformative Results

UNFPA

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INTRODUCTION

UNFPA and partners are committed to moving forward faster. This paper is part of a series of "acceleration papers" that analyze 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 by 2030.

This paper is the result of a co-creation by the UNFPA representatives from Sierra Leone, Togo and the UNFPA Innovation Specialist from the regional office.

Innovation can play a critical role in accelerating progress towards UNFPA's three transformative results by disrupting the status quo, providing new insights, finding new and more effective ways to deliver on our mandate, and speeding up the pace of achieving results. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has said that innovation is essential: "Without innovation, we cannot meet the challenges of our time. Innovation across the United Nations system is essential for us to deliver at the scale and pace needed to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. I urge all of you to champion this indispensable mindset throughout your organizations."[1]

The region of West and Central Africa faces enormous challenges in advancing the three transformative results of the UNFPA strategic plan. It is the region furthest left behind. At the same time, the organization's resources do not meet the projected needs: we need to do more with less.

UNFPA is committed to using innovation to help achieve the three transformative results. The organization is actively scanning for new technologies and approaches that can help improve the lives of millions of people in the region. Progress is being made by developing mobile apps that provide women with access to accurate and up-to-date information about sexual and reproductive

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1   United Nations Press Release, SG/SM/19867, 21 November 2019. https://press.un.org/en/2019/sgsm19867.doc.htm

health, by working with partners to develop new ways to deliver family planning services in remote and rural areas, and by supporting research into new ways to prevent and treat violence against women and girls.

UNFPA Country Offices in West and Central Africa have and continue to develop innovative solutions. The UNFPA Regional Office is now starting to build a regional innovation programme. This paper aims to outline a roadmap that operationalizes the global innovation strategy at a regional level.

The paper builds on the series of thematic acceleration papers by highlighting key bottlenecks from each area as well as corresponding solutions. The objective is to provide Country Offices and the Regional Office with clear criteria and a roadmap for identifying the most promising innovations for investment.

1. THE WHAT AND WHERE: SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

The challenges of advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights in West and Central Africa necessitate novel approaches. Simultaneously, megatrends exert both positive and negative influences on the capacity of UNFPA to accelerate progress:

» Positive: The first demographic dividend is a unique opportunity to harness the full potential of the region's youth and support economic development – if the right investments are in place and the power of actual innovation is leveraged.

» Negative: Progress in being hindered by the inequities in access to health and education services, the fragility of many territories of the region and the impacts of climate change.

Innovation can become a vital factor in the success of efforts to accelerate the three transformative results if solutions are suited to the bottlenecks of each transformative result, conducted by the right stakeholders and implemented with the right vision.

1.1. Megatrends and innovation

Many factors influence the capacity of countries to leverage innovation as an efficient accelerator of results. This paper highlights key megatrends that influence the ability of UNFPA to innovate for the achievement of the three transformative results.

1.1.1 The first demographic dividend is a unique window of opportunity

The forces of demographic transition began to take hold of West and Central Africa in the 1980s and continue to shape the region. Sub-Saharan Africa, with more than one billion people, half of whom will be under 25 years old by 2050 (World Bank, 2020), is a diverse continent offering human and natural resources that have the potential to yield inclusive growth and wipe out poverty in the region. Africa, and especially West and Central Africa, has just begun its demographic transition with a significant share of youth (41.1 percent under 15 in 2015), a high fertility rate (4.73 in the period 2010–2015) and a high mortality rate (life expectancy at birth estimated at 60 years in the period 2010–2015). The population of Africa will be more than 2.5 billion by 2050 or about 26 per cent of the world

population. This number will be reached if West and Central Africa maintains its growth rate.[2]

The "youth bulge" in West and Central Africa offers a remarkable opportunity, particularly with regard to innovation and digital solutions. The West and Central Africa "digital natives"[3] are renowned for their agility and creativity, as illustrated by the high number of start-ups in the region: the journal *Jeune Afrique*[4] reported that 2021 was the "year of jackpot" for African start-ups, with 640 start-ups leveraging US$ 5.2 billion through the so-called "fintech" or technology-driven financial services. Statista, a statistics portal for market data, estimated the number of start-ups in Nigeria at around 3,300 in 2020 – the highest number in Africa.[5]

1.1.2 Accelerated economic growth and development trends

Africa is a continent of enormous potential. Africa's general economic outlook is marked by a robust average annual GDP growth rate of 3.9 per cent in 2021 according to the World Bank.[6] With the world's largest free trade area and a potential market of 1.2 billion people, the continent of Africa is creating an entirely new development path, harnessing the potential of its resources and people. By 2030, Africa's workforce will be among the world's largest.

West and Central Africa includes countries with some of the world's lowest rankings in the UNDP Human Development Index.[7] The region has seen its population multiply by four in the past 50 years and is now home to some 470 million inhabitants.[8]

For the decades to come, the challenge will be to successfully realize this economic potential while addressing inequitable access to social services, including access to sexual and reproductive health information and services.

1.1.3 Digitization

Digital transformation is impacting all domains of society. The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) holds significant potential in the region. Digitization has contributed to economic growth, enabling financial inclusion and offering new business models.

In health care, digital tools are transforming African health systems. Although digital health is in its infancy, advances in smartphone connectivity and data management are improving health care delivery. Mobile technology facilitates medical data collection and service improvement, addressing health challenges, especially in fragile states. As of 2019, no fewer than 42 African nations had formulated digital health policies and strategic plans, underpinned by governance structures and frameworks of action.[9]

Young Africans ("digital natives") possess the agility to navigate the digital realm, leveraging minimal infrastructure and collaborating across borders. A surge in startups, notably in Nigeria, highlights this entrepreneurial spirit. Africa's youthful demographic is poised to embrace the digital era, provided there is a commitment from decision-makers to drive socioeconomic growth.

1.1.4 Fragile and conflict-affected situations

The region is also home to countries facing significant humanitarian and security challenges, categorized by the World Bank among the group

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2   UNDESA, 2022. World Population Prospects. Available at https://population.un.org/wpp/. See also Dramani & Konan, 2021.

3   The Oxford Dictionary defines a digital native as a person born or brought up during the age of digital technology and therefore familiar with computers and the internet from an early age.

4   Velluet, Q., 2022. The Africa Report. "The African Startups are Attracting Investors". Available at: www.theafricareport.com/307379/the-african-start-ups-attracting-investors-tomorrows-tech-champions/

5   Statista, April 28, 2023. Number of Startups in Africa in 2022,by country. Available at: www.statista.com/statistics/1290679/number-of-startups-in-africa-by-country/#:~:text=The%20number%20of%20startups%20in,the%20highest%20number%20in%20Africa.

6   World Bank data based on the International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database, data as of June 2022.

7   UNDP. Human Development Index (HDI). Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI

8   United Nations Population Division, World Population Prospects: 2019 Revision cited by the World Bank data, 2022.

9   Vota, Wayan. 2019. Every African Country's National eHealth Strategy or Digital Health Policy. ICT Works. Available at: www.ictworks.org/african-national-ehealth-strategy-policy/

of fragile and conflict-affected situations.[10] Of the 23 countries in the region, nine are currently in this classification and many others have situations within their territories that meet the criteria of the indicators.

For young women and men striving to survive and access basic social services, the reality can seem far from the ideal of the "digital natives" who can grasp the potential of innovation. However, experience also shows that innovative solutions may in some cases be the only way to access certain populations suffering from multiple factors of discrimination and exclusion. Mobile applications, digital education, digital health and social entrepreneurship are bridging services and people.

1.1.5 Climate change: considering planetary health and sustainable solutions

Climate change presents significant health challenges in West and Central Africa. Innovative solutions, such as telemedicine and climate-resilient health-care infrastructure, can enhance the region's capacity to address health-related issues exacerbated by climate change. These innovations ensure continuous access to essential health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, despite extreme weather events and changing disease patterns.

1.2 Innovation and digitization: key determinants of probable futures

Depending on how digital transformation will shape the region's future, digitization can either serve as an accelerator to improve people's lives or exacerbate inequities and divides. In a strategic foresight exercise to inform the next strategic plan, UNFPA identified four future scenarios for 2050: Booming biotech, Connecting poles apart, Reining-in the digital beast and Tested to the limits.[11] Among the questions to be asked are: How can populations left behind the digital wall be protected? What are the best ways to support women's empowerment and rights using digital technology and platforms?[12]

In West and Central Africa, communication innovation and creativity will aid in the implementation of the three transformative results to maximize the impact of their implementation and make use of cutting-edge technological advances in the field.[13] Innovation and creativity are key factors that can influence future scenarios of the

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10 World Bank. Classification of Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations. Available at: www.worldbank.org/en/topic/fragilityconflictviolence/brief/harmonized-list-of-fragile-situations

11 UNFPA. 2022. Four Scenarios for Three Transformative Results. Available at: www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Four%20future%20scenarios%20for%20three%20transformative%20results_UNFPA.pdf

12 Ibid.

13 UNFPA WCARO. 2023. Acceleration Paper #1: Strategic foresight: Pursuit of the ICPD and SDGs in West and Central Africa.

region. If well nurtured, they become critical factors in achieving the three transformative results. On the contrary, inadequate support will accentuate the numerous digital divides along the lines of age, gender, geography and other factors. This would exacerbate the negative scenarios.

1.3. Challenges and opportunities linked to megatrends

1.3.1 Challenge: leaving no one behind and reaching the furthest behind

The achievement of the three transformative results is hindered when women and girls lack access to essential services. The most promising avenue for progress lies in sections of society marked by persistent disadvantage, discrimination and disempowerment, often driven by multiple factors. Reaching these individuals is essential not only as a fundamental United Nations principle, but also as a

catalyst for advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UNFPA's core objectives.

UNFPA recognizes a critical challenge in Western and Central Africa in leaving no one behind (LNOB) and reaching the furthest behind (RFB). The concept of RFB recognizes that those furthest behind endure a multitude of deprivations and disadvantages, suffering the most severe forms of discrimination in one or more areas. The commitment to RFB is central to the mission of UNFPA as the region is one of the areas of the world where the layers of exclusion and discrimination add up the most. Instead of concentrating on specific groups of women and men, UNFPA is emphasizing key factors or characteristics that drive discrimination and inequality, often intersecting with other factors. By primarily focusing on factors, the approach avoids isolating the furthest behind into narrow groups and appreciates the intersectional disadvantages they face.

Figure 1: Reaching the furthest behind (RFB) factors that intersect in West and Central Africa
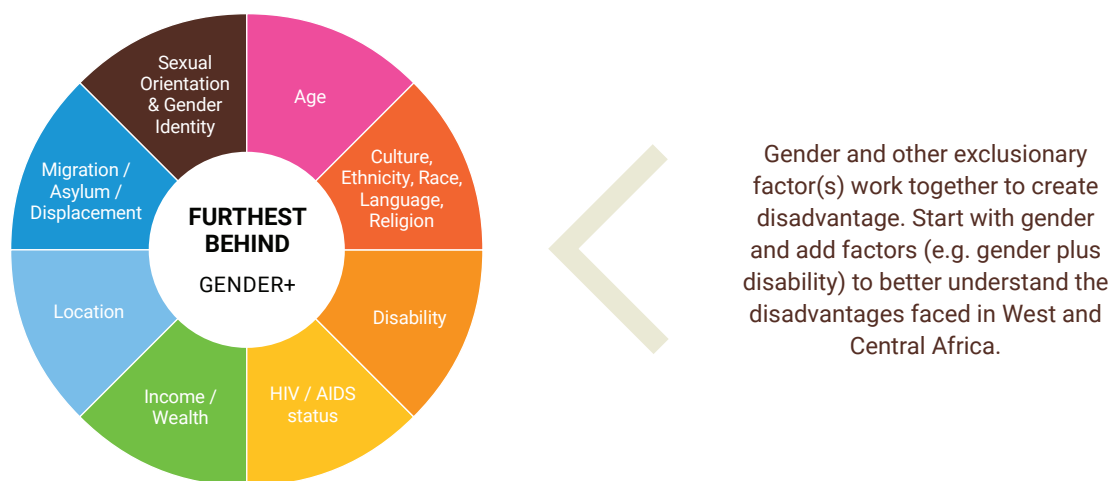
*Income/wealth is a cross-cutting furthest-behind factor that interacts with and exacerbates other factors. Care must be taken to understand why some people are the most poor in a society and not routinely consider poverty as a sole root cause of being furthest behind. See the UNFPA technical brief.

Source: UNFPA (2021). Operational Plan on Leaving No One Behind and Reaching the Furthest Behind, Strategic Plan 2022-2025, Technical Division, 2021.

1.3.2 Opportunity: harnessing the power of youth

West and Central Africa stands to harness the immense potential of its youth population and the ongoing digital revolution. This situation presents a remarkable opportunity to reshape the region and accelerate progress towards the three transformative results. With more than half of the region's population expected to be under 25 by 2050, the demographic dividend and the youth bulge offer a unique opportunity for inclusive growth and development. Digital brands developed by African youth (digital-native brands) and technologies can help overcome historical obstacles, including infrastructure deficits, lack of financial inclusion and limited access to information. Such innovations can operate seamlessly across borders and time zones, providing a competitive edge in regions where traditional businesses are faced with physical and regulatory barriers.

The convergence of a youthful population and digital innovation creates an exciting prospect for the region's transformation and progress towards the SDGs. United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has urged United Nations staff to embrace innovation to address the challenges of our times. This is outlined in the UN Innovation Toolkit, which promotes revolutionary thinking and bold action to tackle global issues.[14]

UNFPA recognizes that innovation disrupts inequalities and ensures rights and choices for all. UNFPA WCARO commits to reaching the furthest behind in alignment with LNOB principles, and to harnessing innovation and digitization to overcome challenges and accelerate progress towards achieving the three transformative results.

2. THE WHY: BOTTLENECK ANALYSIS

2.1 Matrix of bottlenecks and solutions

The series of UNFPA WCARO Acceleration Papers identify key bottlenecks hindering the achievement of the three transformative results. Annex 1 summarizes the most pressing bottlenecks identified in each paper as well areas of innovation that can be used to tackle them. Examples of ongoing experiments in the region are listed for each bottleneck.

Annex 1 highlights several commonalities: bottlenecks across thematic areas point towards challenges related to access to products and services, entrenched societal norms, and lack of timely and accurate data. The proposed solutions frequently leverage digital technology and mobile

platforms as well as partnerships and multi-country initiatives. The emphasis on digital solutions, especially mobile technology, underscores the potential of tech-driven innovations to address the identified bottlenecks in West and Central Africa.

2.2 Clustering countries based on GII score

The Global Innovation Index (GII) is a composite measure of a country's innovation capabilities.[15] The score is calculated by averaging two sub-indices: Innovation Input (institutions, infrastructure, human capital) and Innovation Output (creative outputs, knowledge diffusion, technology adoption). The higher the GII score, the more conducive a country is to be generating and benefiting from innovation.

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14 United Nations. UN Innovation Toolkit. Available at: www.unssc.org/un-innovation-toolkit

15 WIPO. 2022. Global Innovation Index. Available at: www.wipo.int/global_innovation_index/en/

Clustering countries according to their GII score lets us identify the most relevant modes of interventions. Considering the digital divides that exist at sub-national level, as well as the principles of leave no one behind (LNOB) and reach the furthest behind (RFB), it is important to note that such a clustering is indicative, and any intervention should take sub-national disparities into account. In the GII, countries are clustered in three categories of innovation performance (higher innovation performance, moderate innovation performance and countries with innovation input challenges). The country categorization is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Country categorizations

Cluster 1: Countries with innovation input challenges	Cluster 2: Moderate innovation capacity	Cluster 3: Higher innovation capacity
Central African Republic, Chad, Congo-Brazzaville, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone	Cameroon, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Niger	Cabo Verde, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Togo, Benin

While challenges such as maternal health or data availability are universal, the capacity to tackle them through innovative solutions is not. By clustering countries based on their innovation performance and grouping solutions by both bottleneck and cluster, countries are able to tailor interventions, track progress and optimize resources. Countries with high innovation can use cutting-edge tools such as telemedicine, while those facing input challenges might benefit from simpler solutions like mobile messaging. Lower-innovation countries can adapt and learn from their higher-performing peers, fostering knowledge sharing and best practices. And support can be prioritized for countries with stronger innovation foundations, while capacity-building efforts target those still climbing the ladder. The aim is to ensure that interventions are relevant, efficient and impactful, accelerating progress for all countries despite their starting point. Bottlenecks and solutions according to each category are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Matrix of solutions by bottlenecks and country cluster

Bottlenecks/category	Higher innovation performance Benin, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo	Moderate innovation performance Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger	Countries with innovation input challenges Central African Republic, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Republic of the Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone
Access to health care			
Maternal health accessibility and quality	Telemedicine, digital midwife training, e-vouchers, AR/VR training, real-time data collection, drones for health, crowd solutions	Telemedicine, portable devices, digital education and referral, drones for emergency supplies	Telemedicine, digital midwife training, advanced portable devices with offline capabilities
Contraceptive access and stigma	mHealth, digital communications, private sector partnerships, mSupply for last-mile delivery	mHealth, digital communications, community-based distribution and education	Mobile phone messaging campaigns, community outreach
Social challenges			
Harmful practices	Digital messaging targeting and testing, e-learning platforms, GBV mapathons, e-referral pathways	e-learning platforms, data mining and ML analysis of community radio and TV campaigns, peer education programmes	Data mining and ML analysis of community radio, traditional media campaigns, community dialogues, religious leader engagement
Data and information			
Data availability and comparability	Mobile data collection, big data and ML analytics, mobile phone usage monitoring, GIS integration	Mobile data collection, basic data analysis, GIS mapping	Offline digital data collection, basic data analysis
Resource limitations			
Social/human capital investment	Cash transfers, mobile messaging and monitoring, digital savings and loan schemes	Conditional cash transfers, mobile messaging and monitoring, microfinance programmes	
Crisis response and preparedness	Drone technology, blockchain for funding, crowdfunding, big data and real-time data collection, vouchers and cash transfers	Satellite and drone technology, mobile and radio communications	Vouchers and food, including dignity cash transfers

3. THE HOW (WHAT WORKS): TECHNOLOGY

3.1 Areas of technological leapfrogging

The region is experiencing rapid technological leapfrogging to the latest technologies with the potential to improve women's health. Some examples include:

» Telemedicine allows women to access health services remotely, using their cell phones or computers and mobile health apps to obtain information and be connected with relevant services for sexual and reproductive health, including gender-based violence

» Cost-effective drone delivery systems allow for transportation and access to health supplies in remote areas

» Mobile banking services enable faster cash transfers and the ability to pay bills and purchase goods with cell phones – an innovation that is drastically reducing the number of unbanked women[16]

» "The internet of things" (IoT) and wearable devices such as smartwatches can be used to help women track menstrual cycles, fertility and overall health and assist with family planning

» Blockchain technology can be used to improve efficiency, transparency and safety of supply chain management

» 3D printing technologies can be used to locally produce equipment and materials for medical use.

This leapfrogging presents an opportunity for UNFPA to take advantage of digital transformation and new technologies to reach a greater proportion of the population faster and more efficiently.

3.2 Targeting the gender digital divide

Technologies are often introduced on top of existing social norms and structures, presenting a number

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16 World Bank. Opinion by Ousmane Diagana, *Jeune Afrique*. 12 August 2023. Available at: www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2021/08/23/three-paths-to-accelerating-digital-access-in-west-and-central-africa

of opportunities and challenges: technology is a tool that can be used to further the goals of UNFPA, but also to exacerbate harmful practices. It is important to actively target those left behind by the digital divide when developing and investing in innovative solutions.

With the highest growth rate of internet penetration in the world,[17] sub-Saharan Africa is well suited for the deployment of digital solutions. However, digital literacy varies across the population in West and Central Africa. To gauge digital literacy in the region, internet and mobile penetration rates can be juxtaposed to literacy rates (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Internet and mobile penetration rates contrasted with literacy rates
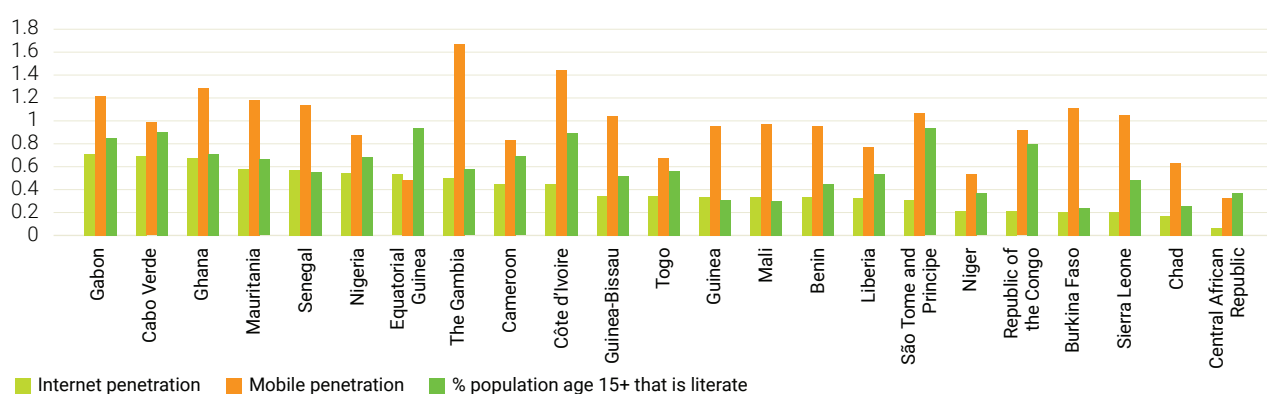
Source: Author created.

Behind the aggregate numbers are large and, in some cases, widening **digital gaps** between urban and rural populations and between genders. Countries where internet penetration is relatively low and mobile penetration is high indicate areas (typically urban) with households with several mobile connections combined with internet. This also indicates (typically rural) lacking both.

Sub-Saharan Africa shows an on average 15 per cent gender gap in mobile ownership, and a 41 per cent gender gap in internet usage. Furthermore, the gender gap in mobile ownership is typically several-fold higher in rural areas compared with urban areas.[18]

Beyond access to devices and literacy, the **gender digital divide** also encompasses who, when and how access to technology is controlled in communities and families, and how and for what purposes different genders use technology. These issues of control and use suggest the importance of understanding and incorporating localized socioeconomic analyses in innovation and technology projects and ensuring that they take into account the gender digital divide.[19]

The populations affected by the digital divide often represent those furthest left behind. Clear criteria are needed for prioritization of innovations to ensure that solutions are tailored to those furthest

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17 GMSA. 2023. The Mobile Economy 2023. Available at: www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/270223-The-Mobile-Econo-my-2023.pdf

18 GSMA. Undated. The mobile gender gap: Africa. Available at: https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-in-Africa.pdf

19 Acilar, A. and Sæbø, Ø. 2023. Towards understanding the gender digital divide: a systematic literature review. Global Knowledge, Memory and Communid cation, Vol. 72 No. 3, pp. 233-249. Available at: https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/GKMC-09-2021-0147/full/html

left behind, including taking into account low-connectivity areas and the gender digital divide.

The digital transformation megatrend risks widening the divide. Persons with access to these technologies have a significant advantage over those who do not. Persons with internet access can learn new skills, expand businesses or find new jobs. Persons with access to AI tools can potentially automate tasks and make better decisions faster.

As these technologies become more powerful, the gap between those who have access to them and those who do not will only grow wider. Interventions should support equal access to technology for all women and girls. With this in mind, interventions should focus on and leverage technological leapfrogging, which offer remarkable opportunities for health systems in the region, and in particular for youth groups.

4. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR UNFPA WCARO?

4.1 Innovate with a clear vision

UNFPA WCARO will embrace innovation as the cornerstone of UNFPA's strategy in West and Central Africa, championing it across all organizational levels. Through innovation, we will meet challenges head-on, accelerating our pace and scaling our efforts to achieve the three transformative results by 2030.

4.2 Develop innovations along two intertwined principles

» The innovation needs to address clear bottleneck(s) for the achievement of the three transformative results.

» The innovation needs to incorporate LNOB and RFB principles.

4.3 Develop innovations by youth for youth

» Priority will be given to co-creation and innovative solutions developed by the youth, for the youth of the region.

» South-South cooperation with youth of other regions will be nurtured as much as possible as it opens for knowledge transfer, fosters creativity and shapes an ecosystem geared towards the attainment of the SDGs.

4.4 Design interventions supported by UNFPA will be designed based on national innovation capacity

UNFPA interventions will range from policy dialogue, to technical assistance, to more hands-on direct interventions, based on a given national innovation capacity (as measured by the GII) that reflects the maturity of the national innovation ecosystem

## 4.5 Pursue the proposed goal and apply the priority interventions

Goal: Nurture a culture and practice of innovation that effectively addresses critical bottlenecks to the three transformative results while putting young people in the driver's seat of the solutions for the region.

Priority interventions: Six areas of priority interventions are identified based on this goal and the recommendations listed above. As shown in Figure 3, They ensure that interventions are SMART (specific, measureable, attainable, relevant and timebound), leverage existing ecosystems, engage key partners, support a regional pipeline of opportunities and explore innovative financing models.

» **Co-design a SMART operational vision for the development of innovations.** Develop a matrix of interventions and experiments to be deployed in the region using multi-stakeholder analyses of bottlenecks, existing ecosystems and RFB perspectives.

» **Connect and engage with innovation ecosystems and create links between youth innovators, academia, government and the private sector to address bottlenecks to the three transformative results.** UNFPA Country Offices will regularly engage with ecosystems to promote the development of solutions that further the three transformative results. The Regional Office will support with the tools, oversight and coordination to facilitate this. Particular attention will be paid to including government stakeholders.

» **Nurture and expand existing strategic partnerships with key national, regional and global partners.** Existing multi-country partnerships such as QG Jeunes, Tech4Youth and Etrilabs already play a crucial role in amplifying capacity to drive impactful initiatives. These partnerships, coupled with alliances with regional and global entities such as UNICEF, ITU, UNCDF and Africa CDC will allow deployment of new solutions at scale. Special emphasis will be placed on leveraging partnerships with the private sector, particularly technology, mobile phone and satellite companies, to harness cutting-edge advancements and broaden reach.

» **Co-develop an idea box of bankable projects for donors.** Identify a living list of bankable ideas that best address bottlenecks according to the above criteria. The idea box will enable Country Offices and the Regional Office to identify projects suitable for funding/donor opportunities in a timely manner.

» **Explore areas for innovative financing.** In close collaboration with senior management, partnership advisors and health economists, explore modalities of innovative financing that suit the capacity and needs of the region.

» **Build a culture and capacity for innovation across all offices, units and staff.** Ensure that priority interventions 1 to 5 are implemented with, by and for the UNFPA staff of West and Central Africa in ways that serve as "learning by doing" capacity-building moments. Continue to nurture the innovation network and support the dissemination of HQ-level innovation challenges, webinars and cross-regional initiatives.

Figure 3: Strategic model of priority intervention areas
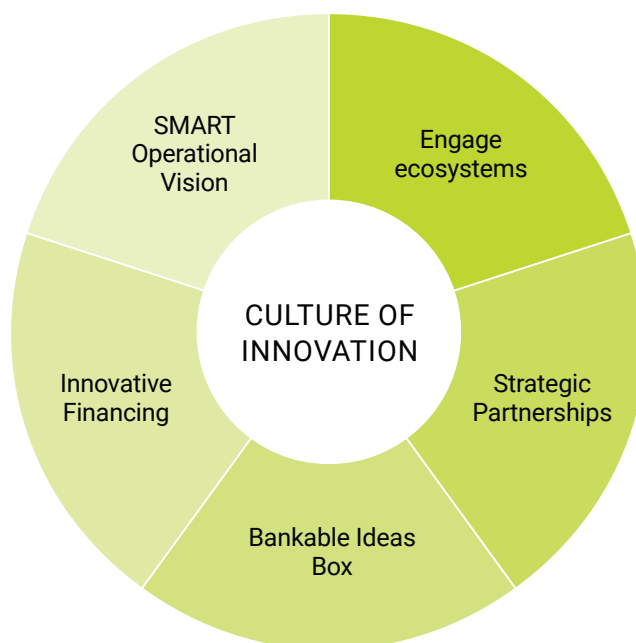
4.6 Modes of interventions by GII categorization

Cluster 1: Countries with Innovation Input Challenges

(no GII score)

In contexts with nascent innovation ecosystems, UNFPA must adopt a hands-on approach. Direct support of innovation initiatives becomes a priority, providing resources and expertise to nurture solutions aligned with our mandate. Building capacity for data collection and analysis through knowledge management empowers informed decision-making. Finally, active partnerships and South-South collaboration are critical in harnessing external expertise to accelerate progress.

Cluster 2: Moderate Innovation Capacity

(GII rank 123-131)

The UNFPA Regional Office will provide technical assistance for Country Offices in this cluster. Technical assistance should be aimed at empowering local stakeholders to develop and implement innovations that address specific bottlenecks hindering the three transformative results.

Cluster 3: Higher Innovation Capacity

(GII rank 91–120)

Countries in this cluster generally have robust innovation ecosystems, and UNFPA's role shifts from leading interventions to influencing existing dynamics. The focus lies on leveraging ongoing investments from external stakeholders like IFIs to avoid duplication and optimize impact. Engagement modes include policy dialogue, ensuring UNFPA priorities are integrated into national programs, and knowledge management, facilitating cross-learning and best practice sharing within the ecosystem. South-south collaboration and strategic partnerships further amplify impact by fostering co-creation and scaling of innovative solutions.

5. CONCLUSION

Innovation will play a pivotal role in accelerating progress towards the three transformative results in West and Central Africa by building upon existing achievements and learning through practical implementations. UNFPA will engage regional networks and foster a culture of innovation, prioritize interventions that address critical bottlenecks while targeting the furthest left behind, and leverage digital technologies while taking divides into account. UNFPA will foster partnerships to enhance access to essential services and information, driving transformative results aligned with the SDGs. Moving forward, a continuous commitment to innovation, collaboration and strategic implementation is essential to unlocking the region's full potential and ensuring that progress is inclusive, sustainable and resilient in the face of emerging challenges and uncertainties.

6. ANNEX 1: MATRIX OF INNOVATION SOLUTIONS BY BOTTLENECK

Area for action, by Acceleration Paper topic	Bottlenecks	Innovation to address bottlenecks	Current/ongoing initiatives in the region
Megatrends (strategic foresight)	Bottlenecks and opportunities are presented by demographics shifts, technological advancements, climate change, and political and economic transformations.	- Predictive analytics to anticipate challenges to access of products/ services related to climate change (e.g. flooding) and forced displacement, among others, combined with agile telemedicine and drone services	- Use of computer-based geographic information services (GIS) and other population data to monitor impact of climate change - Social entrepreneurship for youth resilience and empowerment / preventing violent extremism (PVE) with UNCDF
Zero preventable maternal deaths	The main bottleneck remains the accessibility of maternal health products and services, and quality of care.	Telemedicine - Advances portable devices (e.g. ultrasound) - Tools for digital/remote training of midwives - E-vouchers and new insurance schemes - Digital education and referral to services	- Digital education solutions, including augmented reality and virtual reality (AR/VR) learning technologies for the training of midwives - Real-time data collection for surveillance of maternal deaths - Drones for health for emergency supplies, including blood - Crowd solutions for medical evacuation of obstetric emergencies
Zero unmet need for family planning	The main bottlenecks are the costs and accessibility of contraceptives, as well as entrenched stigma and lack of knowledge around the use of contraceptives.	- mHealth - Digital communications to target correct populations with the correct messages to test and measure rapidly	- Multi-country digital e-learning platform of UNFPA and International Telecommunication Union (ITU) initiative #Tech4Youth and #Tech4Girls - Private sector partnerships with companies on mobile phone for education - Multi-country QG Jeunes, an interactive SRH digital resource for youth - mSupply (eLMIS) supports last mile delivery for reproductive health commodities to prevent shortages/ stock-outs

Zero gender-based violence and harmful practices	The main bottleneck is changing entrenched social norms related to harmful practices.	- Digital technology to target correct sub-populations more effectively with messaging, and to quickly test/measure what messaging is effective for what target audience	- Multi-country UNFPA/ITU initiative #Tech4Girls - Mapathon of gender-based violence (GBV) and girl-friendly services - E-referral pathway to improve service provision for GBV survivors (with UNICEF)
Data to accelerate progress towards the three transformative results	The key bottleneck is the ability to obtain accurate, timely and comparable data across national jurisdictions.	Mobile technology for data collection - Increased in-house capacity for data analysis, e.g. big data, machine learning (ML), mobile phones usage and GIS	- PRESSTRACK pregnancy tracking app collecting data to improve access to services and reduce maternal deaths
Harnessing the demographic dividend	The main bottleneck is lack of investment in social/human capital sectors.	- Cash transfers - Mobile for messaging and monitoring	- Digital financial services solutions for savings and loan scheme (e.g. DigiTontyn)
Humanitarian crises and addressing megatrends	The main bottleneck is the inability to quickly and effectively respond to humanitarian crises as they arise due to lack of resources, lack of capacity, and limited access to up-to-date data on population demographics, health indicators and community needs.	- Drone technology in humanitarian settings - Blockchain for more efficient and transparent funding - Crowdfunding - Big data, ML and real-time data collection	- Vouchers and food, including dignity cash transfers

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