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UNFPA West and Central Africa  
**Acceleration Paper**

## **The power of data**

to accelerate achievement of the three  
transformative results



Ensuring rights and choices for all



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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 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 by 2030.

This paper is the result of a co-creation by the UNFPA representatives from Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, and the UNFPA advisors from the West and Central Africa regional office.

UNFPA is the lead agency in the United Nations system for promoting the availability and use of population data. This includes population and housing censuses and Civil Registration of Vital Statistics (CRVS), among other resources. The census and the CRVS system are the foundations of a national population data system. In most countries, population censuses remain the primary source of information on the population size, spatial

distribution and demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. This information can be used for producing national and disaggregated subnational data for small geographic areas and population subgroups. Up to 107 of the 231 unique indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals require population data for monitoring, and censuses are a key source.

Informed decision-making and evidence-based policy and programming depend on good data. It is a central piece of programme design, from planning to monitoring, evaluation and reporting. At the planning stage, the use of data helps identify the target population, both in terms of the number and incidence of the issue under consideration (including humanitarian matters). Based on the initial value of the incidence or the population affected, a target to be achieved can be established. In the theory of change perspective, in-depth (quantitative and qualitative) data analyses can help uncover key factors to consider for the programme to be successful. Data serves for monitoring and evaluation purposes during and at the end of the programme implementation.

The objective of this paper is to present challenges inherent to the data itself and to the ability to process it optimally and to present solutions to overcome them. The paper begins with an inventory of the key existing data sources.



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# 1. THE WHAT AND THE WHERE: STOCKTAKING OF UNFPA DATA ECOSYSTEM

UNFPA facilitates the production and dissemination of high-quality population data to empower stakeholders to make informed decisions on crucial development issues, and collaborates closely with national statistical offices (NSOs) to optimize their use of national and sub-national population data to deliver a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled – the mission of UNFPA.

## 1.1 Primary data sources

### 1.1.1 Census

Since its inception, one of UNFPA's core mandates has been to strengthen national census capacity to collect, process, analyse, disseminate and use census data for development. In the 2020 census round, UNFPA's key areas of support include:

- » Providing technical support including Census Technical Advisers, GIS and data processing experts, operations support and technical assistance

- » Generating and sharing knowledge by providing learning and training opportunities
- » Developing census technical and operational guidance tools
- » Brokering South-South cooperation for census support
- » Promoting dissemination and open access to census data, including the [Population Data Portal](#)
- » Leveraging institutional partnerships
- » Mobilizing resources for censuses.

The UNFPA presence in 155 countries, support from six regional offices along with inter-divisional teams at the HQ level have helped to ensure coordinated support to the 2020 census round.

Many countries across West and Central Africa have been supported by UNFPA to implement modern population and housing census during the past three decades. This technical, operational and financial support covers a wide range of activities including support for census costs in some

countries, procurement of IT and other equipment, and technical aspects of capacity building including cartography, data collection, processing, analysis and dissemination, among others. For example, as of 30 November 2023, field enumeration has been conducted with UNFPA support in 10 countries in the West and Central Africa for the 2020 census round, amid significant challenges related to funding shortfalls, security issues and postponements due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most countries in the region are scheduled to conduct their decennial censuses in 2024. Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, has not had a census since 2006. The country was about to do the enumeration in April 2023, but the process was suspended due to the arrival of a new government. In some countries facing security challenges, notably Burkina Faso and Mali, hybrid census methodology has been used with enumeration implemented in the safe part of the country and geospatial estimation has been applied in inaccessible parts to estimate the population of these areas.

### 1.1.2 Administrative data (CRVS and DHIS2)

The UNFPA West and Central Regional Office (WCARO) is ramping up its support to the region to address challenges related to glaring data gaps. The Regional Office will continue working with governments and partners in the region to strengthen the CRVS systems. This support is guided by recommendations from high-level meetings and countries' needs in improving CRVS systems. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) and the UNFPA East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) have recently organized two capacity building workshops with UNFPA WCARO in Accra and Lomé with national statistics offices and CRVS offices. Countries participating in the workshops were encouraged to pursue efforts to improve CRVS data coverage, exhaustivity and quality

as well as CRVS report writing to document the process. A template for writing CRVS reports on an annual basis was adopted during the workshop, in agreement with countries. The WCARO population data team is setting up a mechanism to follow up with countries on writing their reports and provide assistance as needed.

UNFPA is also committed to strengthening the access to and use of detailed data in thematic areas related to health and population issues at district level. A software platform, namely DHIS2<sup>1</sup>, has been developed by the University of Oslo to manage health information systems across 80 low- and middle-income countries including 21 out of 23 countries in West and Central Africa (Equatorial Guinea and Gabon are yet to adopt DHIS2). UNFPA WCARO and data units from UNFPA Country Offices use DHIS2 data to inform decision-making in the areas of various sexual and reproductive health indicators.

### 1.1.3 Nationally representative surveys

Nationally representative surveys conducted in developing countries include Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), Consumption and Poverty surveys, labour force surveys, and Living Standards Measurement Studies (LSMS) among others. Given that DHS and MICS collect information directly related to our mandate, UNFPA generally supports these operations through Country Offices. DHS and MICS provide most of the indicators used for the monitoring of our three transformative results: ending preventable maternal death, ending the unmet need for family planning, and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage.

In contrast to censuses, which collect general sociodemographic characteristics of all the population of a country, surveys collect more

1 DHIS2 is a tool for collection, validation, analysis, and presentation of aggregate and patient-based statistical data, tailored (but not limited) to integrated health information management activities. It is a generic tool rather than a pre-configured database application, with an open meta-data model and a flexible user interface that allows the user to design the contents of a specific information system without the need for programming. DHIS2 is a modular web-based software package built with free and open-source Java frameworks.

detailed information on specific features of the population: sexual and reproductive health outcomes, maternal and child health, population well-being, etc. However, survey data are representative only at the national and regional levels, with limited possibilities to obtain data at further levels of disaggregation.

#### 1.1.4 Projections and COD-PS data for humanitarian preparedness

The [Common Operational Datasets](#) (CODs) are authoritative reference datasets needed to support operations and decision-making for all actors in a humanitarian response. CODs are “best available” datasets that ensure consistency and simplify the discovery and exchange of key data. The COD-PS (Population Statistics) provides an instantaneous and up-to-date picture of the size and structure of the population by age and sex at the lowest possible level of geographical or administrative disaggregation in a given country.<sup>2</sup> The COD-PS is a common resource: it is agreed upon and endorsed by the UN Humanitarian Country Team and then universally adopted to facilitate the use of a single set of basic population data by all humanitarian actors in a given country. COD-PS is intended to support all preparedness, needs assessment and humanitarian response actions. This information is of key importance for West and Central Africa because most countries in the region are facing active or potential humanitarian crises exacerbated by insecurity and climate change.

#### 1.1.5 Specific surveys

Surveys, including both quantitative and qualitative surveys, are conducted to support efforts to plan and monitor and evaluate projects. Evaluations, including both Project Evaluations and Country Programme evaluations, are conducted by Country Offices and the Regional Office under the guidance of the Regional M&E Adviser. Evaluation is a means

to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders on its performance in achieving development results and invested resources. Evaluations support evidence-based decision-making as they provide important lessons learned, expanding the existing knowledge base on how to accelerate implementation of the three transformative results of the ICPD Programme of Action. Similar to other United Nations agencies, evaluations done at UNFPA have to follow OECD DAC criteria. For some programmes, quantitative or qualitative surveys are conducted to assess the effect of the programme on the beneficiaries and their level of satisfaction.

## 1.2 International indicators databases

International databases proved valuable information on economic, climatic, environmental and conflict/security in the region that complements primary data. West and Central Africa is affected by megatrends and different protracted shocks that directly shape the path of achievement of UNFPA’s three transformative results. Information from international databases is important not only to address the issue of inconsistent national data collection, but also to serve as a platform for federating several indicators that are broken down over time (years) and space (countries). Several international organizations have developed interactive online databases to facilitate the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their specific programmes, which often involve several countries. Knowledge of these information sites and their insight into major trends is an asset for UNFPA.

### 1.2.1 World Population Prospects

Population estimates and projections in [World Population Prospects](#) are prepared by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat

2 UNOCHA. Common Operational Datasets. Available at: <https://cod.unocha.org/>. Note: It is generally produced from the latest population projection at the administrative level 2.





(UNDESA).<sup>3</sup> The 2022 Revision presents population estimates from 1950 to the present for 237 countries or areas, underpinned by analyses of historical demographic trends. The projections cover all of the population target groups and indicators relevant to UNFPA's medium- and long-term vision. Among other areas, the projections provide data on:

- » Total population by location (urban/rural) and population growth rate
- » Fertility rate and life expectancy (as the main drivers of population growth)
- » Dependency ratio (non-working age population as a percentage of working age population), which visualizes the demographic dividend window
- » Population structure by age and gender with the possibility to extract different sub-groups
- » Maternal mortality ratio.

### 1.2.2 UNFPA Population Data Portal

The **UNFPA Population Data Portal** (PDP) provides a home for UNFPA's core population, health, and gender indicators.<sup>4</sup> It provides easy-to-use interfaces to manage and analyse these datasets,

making them more broadly accessible to UNFPA users, national statistical offices and the general public. Most importantly, a unique feature of the PDP is that it capitalizes on the increasing availability of geo-referenced census and survey data, enabling a wide range of layering and mapping functions for users that enable every Country Office to produce subnational maps of core indicators and combine data sets by locations. Described as the ultimate data source and tracker for population and development data, it combines the newest population data on sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights, family planning, maternal health and gender-based violence gathered from multiple sources.

The portal contains a large amount of data arranged by country, indicators and tags, with opportunities to visualize statistics via high-resolution maps and charts, download tables and filter data by territory. Indicators from four broad topics pertaining to the UNFPA mandate are presented on the platform: the three transformative results indicators (related to maternal mortality, family planning and gender-based violence and harmful practices) and population trends indicators. The platform is populated with data from various sources including national surveys, the DHS (both standard DHS and

3 UNDESA. 2022 Revision of World Population Prospects. Available at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/>

4 UNFPA. Population Data Portal. Available at: <https://pdp.unfpa.org/>

specific surveys such as AIS and MIS), IPUMS's census series, and global databases such as the SDGs Metadata Repository. The platform has undergone testing from team members and is being extended to Country Offices and other data users.

### 1.3 Development indexes

Development indexes include the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI)<sup>5</sup>, [Human Capital Index](#) (HCI)<sup>6</sup>, [Multidimensional Poverty Index](#) (MPI)<sup>7</sup> and the World Bank [Poverty and Inequality Platform](#) featuring monetary poverty based on the national poverty line. Various resources are available on the webpage for the UNDP Human Development Data Centre.<sup>8</sup> Information on the MPI is also reported by UNDP and is integrated in the computation of the HDI. The World Bank's HCI provides a new definition of human capital and quantifies the contribution of health and education to the productivity of the next generation of workers. Countries can use it to assess how much income they are foregoing because of human capital gaps, and how much faster they can turn these losses into gains for each current investment into human capital. Multiple platforms report data on the monetary poverty line. Up-to-date data on the monetary poverty line based on the national poverty line are available on the World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.4 Economic and financial indicators and indexes

Economic and financial indicators and indexes focus on GDP growth, inflation, government revenue/expenditure, debt, income distribution

and inequalities. These indicators can be found with many data sources especially in the [World Development Indicators](#) (WDI), the World Bank's premier compilation of cross-country comparable data on development.<sup>10</sup> The WDI is a database of global economic conditions across six dimensions: World View, People, Environment, Economy, States and Markets and Global Linkages. There are over 900 indicators for 208 economies from 1960 to present. In addition to the economic performance indicators, the WDI also includes inequalities indicators such as the Gini index and income distribution by deciles. Other data sources such as the African Development Bank's [Data Portal](#) and the International Monetary Fund's [World Economic Outlook databases](#) provide a wide range of economic and financial indicators and index related to GDP growth, inflation, government revenue and expenditure and debt.

### 1.5 Gender inequality index

The [Gender Inequality Index](#) (GII) is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions including reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. A low GII value indicates low inequality between females and males, and vice-versa. Data on the GII are computed from nationally representative household surveys including the DHS, MICS and others, and compiled on various institutional platforms.<sup>11</sup>

### 1.6 Climate change indicators

Many data sources provide global data on historical, present and future climate and are available to

5 UNDP. Undated. Human Development Index. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index-/-/indicies/HDI>

6 World Bank. 2021. The Human Capital Index 2020 Update: Human Capital in the Time of COVID-19. Washington, DC: World Bank. doi:10.1596/978-1-4648-1552-2. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO. Available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/93f8f-bc6-4513-58e7-82ec-af4636380319>

7 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2023. 2023 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI): Unstacking global poverty: Data for high impact action. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-global-multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi-/-/indicies/MPI>

8 UNDP. Human Development Data. Available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center>

9 The World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform. Undated. Available at: <https://pip.worldbank.org/home>

10 The World Bank. Undated. World Development Indicators. Website available at: <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

11 UNDP Global Inequality Index. Undated. Website available at: <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/thematic-composite-indices/gender-inequality-index-/-/indicies/GII>



guide UNFPA-supported interventions. One such example is the **Climate Change Knowledge Portal**.<sup>12</sup> The global climate is projected to continue to change over this century and beyond. This situation can have a negative impact on the health of women and girls and on the achievement of the three transformative results.

### 1.7 Governance indicators

In the framework of the UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025, information on governance is critical: the effectiveness and the efficiency of country programme implementation depend on the quality of the national and local institutions. Governance consists of the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.

The Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) portal reports aggregate and individual governance indicators for over 200 countries and territories

over the period 1996–2021, for six dimensions of governance: voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption.<sup>13</sup> These aggregate indicators combine the views of a large number of enterprise, citizen and expert survey respondents in industrial and developing countries. They are based on more than 30 individual data sources produced by a variety of survey institutes, think tanks, non-governmental organizations, international organizations and private sector firms. Governance indicators are also available on sources such as the Transparency International portal.

<sup>12</sup> The World Bank. Undated. Climate Change Knowledge Portal. Website available at: <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/>

<sup>13</sup> The World Bank. Undated. Worldwide Governance Indicators. Website available at: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/worldwide-governance-indicators>



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## 2. THE WHY: BOTTLENECKS AND CHALLENGES

All data sources come with their own challenges and bottlenecks linked to the accuracy or quality of the information and its regularity and accessibility, among other factors.

### 2.1 Challenges in primary data sources

#### 2.1.1 Quality of data

The first challenge is quality, especially in censuses and surveys. Indeed, if the methodology of data collection is not followed carefully, the required standard of quality cannot be achieved. In the worst-case scenario, that can lead to the rejection of the data (e.g. Côte d'Ivoire 2014 census, Niger 2017 Demographic and Health Survey). But in many situations, the census or survey team will make adjustments, sometimes hidden, that are not brought to the attention of users. Regarding censuses in particular, UNFPA works to ensure their quality by mobilizing the best international technical experts at the key positions.

The main problem for CRVS and other administrative data such as health DHIS2 is coverage. Coverage directly depends on the availability and the use of administrative services by the population. Depending on the existence and quality of administrative services, the coverage rate will be high or low. In some countries, the quality of the DHIS2 is below standards.

#### 2.1.2 Infrequency

Currently, most of the countries of the regions rely on international financial sources to carry out surveys and census. Consequently, time periods between operations are not respected. For example, most countries of the region will not or have not respected the census time interval of ten years for the round 2020 census (the exceptions are Cabo Verde, The Gambia, Mauritania and Senegal). Regarding main national surveys, countries are facing the same challenges.

### 2.1.3 Insufficient analysis – especially geospatial analysis, disaggregation

Analyses rarely go beyond descriptive basic reports. With the use of geospatial technologies to collect data, one would have expected more geospatial analyses of data but that is not actually the case. New analytical tools such as Small Area Estimation combine census and survey data to produce indicators at very low granularity level yet are underutilized. On the other hand, some analyses are more popular. National Transfer Accounts quantify how people at each age acquire and use economic resources to meet their current material needs, to share with others, and to provide for the future. The result of this exercise is still too descriptive while it should be more analytic, however. This lack of analyses leads to data having limited impact on policy and investment cases.

## 2.2 Challenges in the Population Data Portal

While the UNFPA Population Data Portal includes key indicators of the three transformative results, it lacks most of the non-demographic indicators highlighted in the previous section: financial, macroeconomics, governance, humanitarian, etc. Even if they are not UNFPA's main target, they shape the environment in which the organization works.

A second shortcoming of PDP is the Limited Aggregation: In the current version, is it not possible to have aggregated countries such West and Central Africa as a region or many projects that involve many countries (SWEDD, Muskoka, Spotlight, etc.). While the geospatial dimension is well designed for each indicator taken separately, it is difficult to build a table combining multiple indicators, multiple countries and multiple time periods.

## 2.3 Challenges in human resources: skills in data production and analysis

### 2.3.1 Regional Office

The data unit in UNFPA WCARO has only three staff to support the Regional Office, the Country Offices and the countries themselves in all the data subjects. In addition, the data unit staff fulfills other duties as assigned. Fortunately, there is a forthcoming World Bank project on population data that will allow the Regional Office to reinforce the data team.

### 2.3.2 Country Offices

In the Country Offices, generally only one or two people have statistical skills. Apart from census, they are not involved in other data sources such as DHS, administrative data or CRVS. Many of them are not aware of emerging data collection, analysis and dissemination tools such as geographic information system (GIS) data, small area estimation (SAE) and so on. So there is a need for leveraging their skill that we will discuss in section 3.

## 2.4 Challenges in funding data production across government

The production of data and its funding are increasingly important challenges for governments in the region. The main challenge remains the non-prioritization of investing in data production. As a consequence, in most of the countries, censuses and household surveys are not taken at regular defined intervals (e.g. 10 years for censuses, 5 years for household surveys including DHS and MICS). In addition, CRVS systems put in place need major improvements related to low public awareness of the importance of the timely registration of vital events. Recommendations from high-level meetings suggest that governments should pursue efforts to modernize their national statistical offices.

## 2.5 Challenges in coordination among UN agencies

The United Nations system provides technical and financial support for the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of country projects and programmes. Quality data is in high demand by the United Nations, which uses data to better inform choices and assistance plans for countries. Within the framework of data production, the United Nations system provides considerable support in the organization of censuses and DHS. However, challenges are emerging in inter-agency coordination mechanisms, such as those linked to the funding of population censuses. Several countries have been able to organize their censuses with the support of the World Bank, whereas proper coordination should lead to the mobilization of these funds within the United Nations system.

## 2.6 Challenges in data-driven implementation

There are challenges in terms of reinforcing the data-driven implementation of policies and programmes and projects. The formulation and implementation of development policies, programmes and projects requires data availability on a regular basis and in a timely manner. However, censuses and household surveys are not always taken at regular defined intervals. In addition, three key challenges can be identified in terms of the reinforcement of data-driven policy implementation. First, existing data are often incomplete, inaccurate and tardy due to insufficient capacity in the statistical system. Second, it is difficult to identify and prioritize actions at the lower administrative levels as survey data are not representative at levels of disaggregation lower than the region. Third, while censuses allow more data disaggregation, they do not cover most of the indicators' needs for the various development agendas.



## 3. THE HOW: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR UNFPA WCARO?

Concrete actions can be taken to address key challenges in data generation and availability in West and Central Africa. The UNFPA Regional Office will focus on the following measures.

### 3.1 Map expertise in the region

The Regional Office will map expertise in the region both within and outside UNFPA to inform a data capacity strengthening programme, including how to work with other agencies, and promote the emerging role of the office as the lead organization in terms of population data.

Staff with data analytical skills can be found within WCARO and the Country Offices of the region. The Regional Office is planning to conduct a survey to document the available competencies as well as the capacity building needs in Country Offices. This exercise aims to make efficient use of financial and human resources and to increase the involvement of in-house expertise. The result of this exercise will be to establish a regional UNFPA WCARO Active Group on Data and Research.

Inter-agency collaboration is expected around data access, analysis, contributions to data collections undertaken by other agencies in the region, and good practices sharing. For example, an analysis on the impact of megatrends on socioeconomic and SRHR indicators is planned. It will require data from other United Nations agencies including food security data from the World Food Programme (WFP) and agriculture and food-related data from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).<sup>14</sup> The role of the collaborations will be:

- » Cross capacity strengthening of members
- » Organization of regular technical seminars

- » Quality control on ToRs, methodologies, studies and researches related to data.

UNFPA collaboration with academic and research institutions is extensive. These institutions specialize in advanced statistical modelling and novel methods of qualitative analyses. The new orientation UNFPA will be prioritizing in terms of collaboration is to pursue the mapping of potential implementing partners (IPs) in addition to the existing list. This activity will also help UNFPA update its databases of IPs, regarding new orientations and technical assistance needs for future collaboration. This mapping has already started. For example, the Senegalese National Statistical and Demographic Office (ANSD in French) has a pool of experts who have been mobilized to support the 2020 round of census in other countries of the region. UNFPA WCARO is also collaborating with – among others – the school of statistics and economic studies (ENSEA) in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire; Institute of Population, Development and Reproductive Health (IPDSR), Dakar, Senegal; and the Regional Consortium for Research in Generational Economics (CREG) based in Thiès, Senegal. The next step is to scale up this practice and include other research centres and universities.

Once appropriate institutions are identified, the Regional Office will liaise with the research institution in order to: (a) develop a pool of expertise for our intellectual or technical productions and support to countries in West and Central Africa; and (b) ensure quality control of technical guides and tools produced by the UNFPA Regional Office and Country Offices, and the expertise provided to countries.

14 United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization. Undated. Website available at: [www.fao.org/statistics/data-dissemination/agrifood-systems/en](http://www.fao.org/statistics/data-dissemination/agrifood-systems/en)

### 3.2 Strengthening relationships and coordination

Another area of action includes strengthening the relationships and coordination with other United Nations agencies, bilateral partners and international NGOs, and many other partners that have a high degree of interest in data. Data interventions in the region are already being supported by UNECA, UNICEF, OCHA, UNWOMEN, UNHCR, Plan International, Population Council as well as the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and USAID, the United States Agency for International Development. Data interventions are also being supported by technical and financial partners including the World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

UNFPA has already worked with most of these institutions, but the partnerships and collaboration were on a casual or task basis. Strategic and long-term collaboration with these institutions are needed to strengthen coordination, efficiency and effectiveness. A good example of long-term collaboration is the five-year joint project on the census and CRVS under negotiation between UNFPA WCARO and the World Bank. The Regional Offices is also working closely with UNECA on joint capacity strengthening and country support on census and CRVS, although this collaboration needs to be formalized. At the regional level, there is a need to revive the interagency group on data, which will enable better coordination and information sharing.

### 3.3 Promote the use of analytical tools

UNFPA will promote the use of GIS, SAE and other analytical tools to improve programme targeting. Even with existing data, however, a common challenge in West and Central Africa is the lack of in-depth analysis and use of data from census, surveys, CRVS, NTAs, etc. beyond their descriptive statistics. This weakness is all the more evident in this era of rapid development of

innovative statistical methods, models and tools. To fill this gap, the Regional Office will build on the collaboration with research institutions and other UN agencies to develop SAE, GIS and enhanced statistical modelling (general/partial equilibrium modelling, geospatial Bayesian modelling). Such data resources will help to address key challenges for the UNFPA Strategic Plan's three transformative results and to guide countries in implementing policies and programmes to achieve the ICPD Programme of Action, the Sustainable Development Goals, and Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development (AADPD) and the African Union's Agenda 2063.

More than 40 per cent of countries in the region have conducted the 2020 round of census with the use of GIS technology both for cartography and enumeration. However, none have conducted geospatial analysis, mostly because NSO lacks internal expertise. The vast potential of census geospatial analysis deserves to be realized.

Census data become outdated a few years after their collection and need to be updated through population projections. If at the national level projections are of good quality, they become more complicated at the first, second or third administrative levels, because of the change in the migration patterns. Until recently, it was difficult to ascertain the quality of demographic projections below the national level. The availability of high-resolution imagery almost in real time makes it possible to have an accurate spatial distribution of the population in any country every year – and so to produce improved sub-national projections. Through its centre of excellence, the Regional Office will be able to provide geospatial modelling support to countries for these improved projections.

In the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project, there is a lot of information generated around National Transfer Accounts and the demographic dividend, but most of the products are descriptive without any in-depth analytical approach. Using simulation and general or partial equilibrium modelling can





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help provide more robust data analysis that can be used to inform sound recommendations regarding social, demographic and economic policies.

In order to accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results, impact evaluation studies could be conducted in collaboration with identified implementing partners. In this era where UNFPA is promoting the shift from funding to financing, impact evaluations can help identify what works at a micro level, then advocate for scaling up.

In addition to quantitative, qualitative approaches tools are important to target, monitor and evaluate our programmes. Most UNFPA-supported interventions touch on norms, values and behaviours. There is a need to deeply understand their foundations in order to build effective interventions. Generally, sociological tools such as qualitative surveys, focus groups, etc. are implemented. To be more efficient and accelerate the realization of strategic plan outcome, there is a need to renew qualitative approaches based on participatory research, action research and other methods of qualitative research.

### 3.4 Enhanced support to census and CRVS

The intensive use of information and communication technologies (ICT) and geospatial data and its related technologies carries tremendous potential for enhancing census processes and data quality. It also requires NSOs and other census authorities to develop modern technical and operational capacity. Currently, UNFPA is providing, as far as possible, technical assistance to all countries of the region at different phases of the census: conception, cartography, enumeration, post-enumeration, data analyses and data dissemination. This technical support is often provided by hiring individual consultants in different domains. Through the joint project with the World Bank, UNFPA will be able to secure long-term experts who can be sent to the countries to rigorously control the quality of census activities and provide additional technical assistance. At the end of each census, UNFPA will be able to certify the overall quality based on objective quality indicators.

Regarding civil registration and vital statistics, UNFPA will leverage on the UNFPA Centre of Excellence on CRVS Systems (hosted at UNFPA headquarters), to undertake the following activities to improve the coverage and the quality of data:

- » assure a coordinated review of the status of CRVS data systems in the West and Central Africa Region in partnership with UNICEF and the World Health Organization
- » develop a regional CRVS strategy
- » support the generation and publication of annual vital statistics based on civil registration
- » support the generation of disaggregated estimates of civil registration data completeness (births, deaths, marriages, divorces)
- » support the generation of knowledge products on gender dimensions of CRVS in the region
- » strengthen national capacities to produce routine vital statistics from incomplete and deficient civil registration systems.

In each of the above areas, UNFPA will capitalize on existing partnerships supporting CRVS capacity strengthening through the SDG3 Data and Digital Accelerator as well as the Health Data Collaborative.

### 3.5 Build a one-stop-shop data platform for the region

UNFPA will build a one-stop-shop data platform for the region with “real time” country and regional profiles. The new version of the PDP, known as PDP 2.0, was released in the first quarter of 2023. The new release features a more powerful data

visualization and analytical functions, as well as a more user-friendly interface. It has also been designed to be easily customized to produce regional or country views. The PDP team is willing to support the Regional Office to produce the regional version of the population data platform. One issue to be addressed is that, as mentioned above, the current version of the platform of course contains most of the population indicators, but is missing many in the economic, social and financial domains. Discussions are needed with PDP for the integration of these indicators in the WCARO regional platform.

In this paper, there are two types of activities: (1) scientific/technical support and production and (2) frameworks, e.g. UNFPA WCARO Active Group on Data and Research, UNFPA Regional Virtual Centre of Excellence, Population Data Platform. The proposed timeline is for the frameworks, given that the scientific activities will be boosted when all the frameworks are set up.

Activities planned:

- » Conduct mapping of expertise within UNFPA
- » Conduct mapping of expertise with regional institutions (e.g. NSOs, research institutions, universities)
- » Develop the PDP-based regional data platform and keep it up-to-date.





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## 4. CONCLUSION

The UNFPA Strategic Plan, 2022–2025 calls for action to accelerate the achievement of the three transformative results: ending the unmet need for family planning, ending preventable maternal deaths and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices. Over the past few years, the Regional Office has undergone a comprehensive restructuring process to better position itself to achieve that objective. Data is at the centre of this acceleration process. This paper shows that a number of challenges must be addressed for data to effectively play key roles. One of the most important challenges is in human resources, with few staff allocated to within the Regional Office. Data-related requests that are necessary to support countries' programme implementation are increasing, yet they are not always addressed in a timely manner.

A number of realistic solutions have been proposed to enhance the use of data in decision-making in the region. The first solution is to carry out an internal mapping (within UNFPA) and external mapping (with NSOs, universities and other United Nations agencies and partners present in the region) to

identify the areas of expertise that can be mobilized to support data-related activities. Another solution is to establish a centre of excellence and regular workshops to keep this pool of expertise active. Through this centre of excellence, which will create an important leverage effect, UNFPA will be able to effectively use innovative tools and techniques to produce the most appropriate analyses for programming. Also, the Regional Office will work closely with headquarters to adapt a regional version of the global Population Data Platform. This regional platform will centralize indicators (socioeconomic, financial and institutional) from both secondary data and primary data from the office's projects, providing a powerful data resource for the region.



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