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SUMMARY

Investing in Adolescents and Youth to Realize the Demographic Dividend in West and Central Africa

West and Central Africa's population is predominantly young, representing a huge resource for the region. However, a lack of access to health, education and employment is holding these young people back.

UNFPA recognizes the critical importance of investing in adolescents and youth to harness the demographic dividend in West and Central Africa. The potential of the youth population to positively contribute to the realization of the demographic dividend will only succeed if there are significant investments in lowering fertility rates, improving maternal mortality rates and educating and empowering young people.

UNFPA's West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) has embraced this strategy and is using the organization's four modes of engagement: high-level advocacy and policy dialogue; knowledge management; service delivery and capacity development to bring about the necessary changes.

UNFPA engages in **high-level advocacy and policy dialogue** with key players on the demographic dividend, and has systematically continued to call for Putting Young People First in this process. UNFPA's tireless efforts in this area has seen huge pay-offs with the African Union declaring that



A beach volleyball team prepares for a tournament organized by Summer Tour at Ngor beach, Dakar.
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the African Union Summits in 2017 will be focused on “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in the Youth”.

It has facilitated **knowledge management** by investing in online learning platforms, fostering south-south sharing between countries and conducting regional/sub-regional research and evidence generation on gender, HIV and adolescents and youth issues.

UNFPA supports countries to strengthen their **service delivery** based on the latest evidence on efficiency and effectiveness of various service delivery models. This includes the creation of safe spaces for adolescent girls, comprehensive sexuality education programmes and youth-friendly services.

UNFPA invests in **building capacities** both internally and of partners to ensure long-term sustainability of its' interventions. It aims at reinforcing capacities of staff and partners on how to design, implement and evaluate CSE, HIV and gender programmes

WCARO's regional director renewed UNFPA's pledge to invest in young people at the start of 2016 and the organization has since mobilized AFRIYAN and other youth networks to play a central role in deliberations to harness the demographic dividend through investments in young people.

Existing interventions to end child marriage and FGM are being scaled up and training continues. Going forward, UNFPA is looking to make its initiatives as coherent and integrated as possible, in order to maximise gains and investments and help bring about the demographic dividend.