

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



# BACKGROUND

West and Central Africa's population is predominantly young. More than 64 percent are under the age of 24. These young people are a tremendous resource for the region but they face considerable challenges. Their potential will only be realized when the right investments are made in their health, education, skills and empowerment.

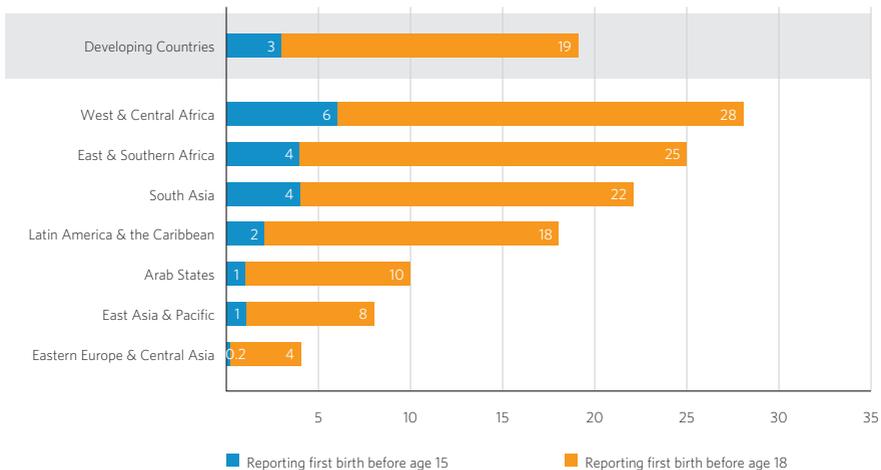
Currently, the region has some of the highest levels of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and, especially amongst adolescents, maternal mortality rates in the world. Two out of five young girls are married before the age of 18 and the percentage of women giving birth before 15 and 18 years old are higher than anywhere else in the world.<sup>1</sup>

UNFPA recognizes the critical importance of investing in adolescents and youth to harness the demographic dividend in West and Central Africa (WCA). In line with the UNFPA Global Strategy on Adolescents and Youth, the UNFPA WCA Regional Office (WCARO) seeks to advance this agenda by engaging in high-level advocacy, policy dialogue and strategic partnerships on child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM); human rights; adolescent sexual and reproductive health (ASRH), including HIV, and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).

UNFPA plays a strategic role in bringing together partners from governments, regional bodies, UN agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), and young people to support multi-sectoral interventions and increase investments in young people, particularly adolescent girls.

1 Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the Challenge of Adolescent Pregnancy. State of the World's Population 2013.

## PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 20 AND 24 REPORTING A BIRTH BEFORE AGE 18 AND BEFORE AGE 15



Source: UNFPA, 2013. Calculated based on data for 81 countries, representing more than 83 per cent of the population covered in these regions, using data collected between 1995 and 2011.

The organization also plays a critical role in supporting governments and other partners to prioritize, strategize and invest in policies and programmes that will improve the lives of young people. It aims to publish papers and articles that highlight the challenges in the region and the work being undertaken by UNFPA and partners to address them.

This paper outlines the main highlights of these strategic interventions. While it does not comprehensively cover all the regional and country initiatives on adolescent and youth work in WCA, it does give an overall picture of the work that UNFPA undertakes in the region as a global leader in the field of adolescent and youth development. The 'Modes of Engagement' graphic at the end of this paper provides a summary of the range of interventions.

# UNFPA STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH

In line with the New Africa Agenda of 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals Framework, UNFPA has strengthened and scaled up its work on adolescents and youth in WCA through:

- **Advocacy and policy dialogue:** UNFPA advocates and engages in high level policy dialogue with key players on the demographic dividend and has systematically called for young people to be put first in this process. These efforts have seen huge pay-offs, with the African Union declaring that the 2017 AU Summits will focus on Investments in Youth and Harnessing the Demographic Dividend. Advocacy and policy efforts in 2015-2016 included the high level meeting with Faith-Based Organizations in October 2015; the 5th UN Pan-African Youth Summit in Libreville in May 2016; the Banjul +10 Summit on the African Youth Charter in May 2016; the high level symposium on demographic dividend in June 2016; and the AU Summit in Kigali in July 2016.
- **Knowledge management:** UNFPA facilitates the exchange of knowledge and good practices within and beyond the organization. Internally, UNFPA invests in online learning platforms that foster south-south sharing between countries and conducts regional and sub-regional research and evidence generation on gender, HIV and adolescents and youth issues. It has also organized a south-south cooperation dialogue between China and several UNFPA offices.

- **Service delivery:** UNFPA supports countries to strengthen service delivery using the latest evidence on the efficiency and effectiveness of various service delivery models. This includes the creation of safe spaces for adolescent girls who are already married or at risk of child marriage; CSE programmes shown to be effective in reducing adolescent pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs); and youth-friendly services including programmes that integrate HIV into SRH services for young people.
- **Capacity development:** UNFPA invests in building both its and its partners' capacity to ensure long-term sustainability of interventions. It aims at reinforcing the capacity of staff and partners to effectively use evidence and integrate human rights in programmes and plans, as well as how to design, implement and evaluate CSE, HIV and gender programmes.

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UNFPA has engaged with governments and partners around the issues impacting young people due to the conflicts and instability in the Lake Chad Basin countries. The organization is working with governments in these countries to encourage the development of initiatives for young people, to reduce the risk of radicalization and



ensure that they can become agents of change and contributors to the development of their countries.

Drawing on the countries' National Recovery Strategies, and building on capacities and resources already harnessed for the Ebola response, UNFPA is partnering with the Mano River Union and the countries most affected by Ebola to develop an initiative for young people in these countries.

The Youth Empowerment for Demographic Dividend (YE4DD) uses the demographic dividend as a framework to increase investments in young people's health, education, employment, equality and empowerment, and ensure a multi-sectoral approach that will make inclusive economic growth a reality in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

In November 2013, Niger President Mahamadou Issoufou highlighted the strong link between the region's fragility, population dynamics and gender inequality. He pointed out that high fertility rates occur where there is weak availability and demand for

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contraceptive methods, high numbers of early marriage and limited education levels (especially for girls).

This call resonated and became the impetus for the Sahel Women Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project (SWEDD). The overarching goal of the project is to reduce fertility and child mortality and achieve the broader goal of triggering the demographic dividend and reducing gender inequality.

Specifically, the development objectives of the project are to improve women and adolescent girls' empowerment and their access to quality reproductive, child and maternal health services, by improving regional knowledge generation and sharing, as well as regional capacity and coordination.

UNFPA's strategic partnership with the African Union (AU) was further strengthened through targeted high-level advocacy and policy engagement at the first-ever African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage, where it was one of the main financial and technical partners.

It also collaborated with the AU to provide two continental-wide trainings for member states on ending harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and FGM.

The Summit brought together more than 1,000 participants from across the continent and beyond, including government representatives and young people. UNFPA led and contributed to parallel sessions spanning a range of subjects that are central to its mandate including CSE, SRH services and empowering youth leaders.

Addressing child marriage in the region will not only change the lives of millions of girls, it will provide a critical window of opportunity for harnessing Africa's demographic dividend.

To this end, UNFPA is the co-lead of the Global Joint Programme on Child Marriage, along with UNICEF. This programme covers five countries in the region: Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana.

The programme's strategic work has already begun to show results, with Burkina Faso launching a national strategy to end child marriage in 2015 and Ghana launching a similar national campaign in 2016, both with the support of UNFPA, UNICEF and CSOs.

In terms of service delivery, country offices have scaled up service delivery to adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, as well as already-married adolescent girls, through creation of safe spaces and the provision of health and protection services. In Niger alone, more than 10,000 girls enrolled in the programme for adolescent girls and nearly 89 per cent – almost 9,000 – completed it. Other results included:

- At the programme's outset, 69 percent had never attended school; by the end, 25 percent had reached a satisfactory level of above average at reading.
- At the programme's outset, 7 percent used a modern method of family planning; by the end, 13.2% used a modern method of family planning.
- More than 40,000 people participated in 858 community dialogues on early marriage and its harmful consequences.
- Adolescent girls who graduated from the programme expressed a wish not to marry before they reached 19 years of age and not to give birth before 21 years of age.
- 57 adolescents were sufficiently empowered to be able to say no to an early marriage planned for them during the programme.

High-level advocacy to end FGM has also paid off. Several countries have passed national legislation against FGM with technical support and advocacy from UNFPA and UNICEF, acting as co-leads of the Joint

Programme on FGM. This includes Guinea Bissau in 2011 and Nigeria and the Islamic Republic of the Gambia in 2015. In Senegal alone, over 5,470 communities have abandoned FGM and post public declaration follow up mechanisms are in place.

Under the umbrella of the French Muskoka inter-agency framework, UNFPA works with UNICEF, WHO and UN Women to use innovative methods to reduce maternal and child mortality in eight countries in the region: Benin, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo. Through the Muskoka mechanism, UNFPA has further strengthened its interventions on adolescent sexual and reproductive health by promoting and documenting evidence-based programming on comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly health services, and investing in innovative approaches such as the TV soap-opera 'C'est La vie' that uses the power of multimedia to change attitudes and behaviours towards adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

In terms of knowledge management and strengthening, in 2015 UNFPA commissioned the development of a comprehensive compendium of resources on

A joint campaign Summer Tour #FagaruJotna performed sexual and reproductive health outreach to youth on the beaches of Senegal.  
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child marriage and FGM, in order to strengthen evidence-based programming for adolescents and youth. UNFPA also created an e-group of adolescent and youth focal points in the region to improve knowledge sharing and foster south-south exchanges on gender, HIV and adolescent and youth issues.

To build capacities both within UNFPA and with external partners, UNFPA organized a regional workshop in 2015 to strengthen evidence-based programming on child marriage, FGM and human papillomavirus (HPV). The workshop provided country office colleagues with the latest evidence on these issues and led to south-south sharing and cross-programme learning. It also showcased UNFPA's efforts to collaborate more closely within and outside the organization.

A beach volleyball team prepares for a tournament organized by Summer Tour at Ngor beach, Dakar.  
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As part of a longer-term strategy to build support within the region for CSE, UNESCO, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF and Evidence 2 Action brought together representatives from education and health ministries from 17 WCA countries. The outcome was a region-wide call to action to scale up and strengthen CSE in the region.

UNFPA also works closely with WCA governments to develop, implement and scale up CSE programmes. For example, it is partnering with the Ministry of Education, UNESCO and other key partners in Senegal to develop a Reproductive Health Education programme. In Benin, the Ministry of Education, with the support of the UNFPA and UNESCO regional offices and the UNFPA country office, is developing a CSE programme. The UNFPA Country Office in Togo has long been involved in efforts to advance this work in the country and is currently working with the government to develop a national sexuality education programme, together with UNESCO, Plan International and IPPF.

# UNFPA SCALING UP ACTION IN 2016 AND BEYOND

UNFPA started 2016 by renewing its pledge to invest in young people at an event attended live by more than 100 young people and via social media by another 1,000-plus.

The event, a dialogue organised with AFRIYAN, a network of young African leaders in WCA, was just one of a number of ways UNFPA has reached out to youth networks to involve them in planning and mobilization.

Other initiatives included launching the social media campaign #PutYoungPeopleFirst and giving young people a voice at key regional consultations such as the 5th UN Pan-African Youth Summit in Libreville and the Banjul +10 Summit on the African Youth Charter, both in May 2016. At the high level Symposium on the Demographic Dividend organized by UNFPA in June 2016, UNFPA ensured that AFRIYAN played a key role and was given a high level of visibility to make their call – on behalf of young people from the continent – for commitments from decision makers to invest in them.

As the co-lead in the Joint Programmes on Child Marriage and FGM, UNFPA is building on hard-won successes in the region and challenging barriers to ending these harmful traditional practices. UNFPA and UNICEF country offices are also scaling up their interventions to accelerate change to end child marriage and FGM.

UNFPA will continue to engage with partners to scale up CSE programmes through investments in quality curriculum development; implementation of programmes adhering to international standards; teacher training;

monitoring and evaluation; and involvement of young people in the development and roll-out of these programmes.

UNFPA builds on its long history and comparative advantage in the field of sexual and reproductive health to support the scale up of youth-friendly health services through trainings for health care workers; strengthening reproductive health commodities supply chains; and advocating for enabling legal and policy environments that enable adolescents to access health services.

Going forward, UNFPA will also seek to ensure greater coherence and integration of adolescent and youth programming within the organization, through linking efforts to strengthen CSE with ASRH service delivery; HIV interventions with SRH; addressing common key drivers of child marriage and FGM and building young people's capacity to be partners and agents of change.

Furthermore, UNFPA will leverage its strategic partnership with the AU and other partners to enable greater investments in adolescents and youth, capitalizing on the existing regional momentum to harness the demographic dividend which has been underlined by its selection as the theme of the 2017 AU Summit.

### High-level Advocacy, Policy Dialogue and Advise

- High level policy engagement on the demographic dividend, including through the regional projects for the Sahel and for the Mano River Basin countries
- Strategic engagement with the African Union and other regional partners on child marriage, FGM and demographic dividend
- Policy and legislative change to create enabling environments for young people

### Knowledge Management

- Development of a compendium of resources
- Creation of a south-south platform of AY focal points in WCA
- Conduct regional/sub-regional research on gender, HIV and adolescents and youth issues

## Modes of Engagement for Adolescents and Youth

### Service Delivery

- Creation of safe spaces for adolescent girls who are already married or at risk of child marriage
- Comprehensive sexuality education programmes
- youth-friendly health services, including innovative programmes integrating HIV into SRH services for young people

### Capacity Development

- of UNFPA staff and partners on how to effectively use evidence and integrate human rights in programmes and plans
- building capacities of government partners to design, implement and evaluate CSE, HIV and gender programmes

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Publication Date November 2016

Key words UNFPA mode of engagement, Adolescent and Youth

Coverphotos Students in Daoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, Young people are poised to transform the country's future. But to do so, they must be empowered, educated and employed. © UNFPA Côte d'Ivoire

A young refugee of Sagnioniogo Camp in Burkina Faso. © UNFPA/Théo Somda



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