

Demographic Dividend in Africa: insights from the Status of African Youth Report.

Abstract

The Status of African Youth Report (SoAYR) paints a picture of the current situation of Africa's youth and the youth development landscape. With the aid of available data and existing literature, it suggests relevant policy options and programs needed to address youth related issues within African Union (AU) Member States. It also delivers structured evidence to guide interventions and optimize policy design in order to strengthen the capacity of AU Member States to effectively harness the demographic dividend and produce more desirable results. The SoAYR is therefore crucial in delivering the goal of youth development and empowerment, which is sacrosanct to the overall development of the continent. This paper is comprised of a comprehensive account of the current state of Africa's youth based on indicators aligned to the pillars (Employment and Entrepreneurship, Education and Skills Development, Health and Wellbeing, Rights, Governance and Youth Empowerment) of the demographic dividend. It's[the paper] key message is that the population structures of AU Member States remain disparate albeit with one common factor: that given the status quo, Africa as a continent is far from benefitting from the demographic dividend. However, to speed up the process of growth and development by harnessing the demographic dividend several policy interventions will be needed in varied combinations from one country to another.

Key Words: Demographic Dividends, Youth, Africa, Africa Union

Methodology

State of the African Youth Report (SoAYR) Indicators were developed by a reference group based on issues being faced by the youth across the continent. These indicators are derived from the four pillars of demographic dividends as defined in the African Union Demographic Dividend (AUDD) Roadmap. The African Union Demographic Dividend (AUDD) Roadmap identifies four key interconnected Pillars most critical to increasing investment in youth, driving change and setting African countries on the path towards harnessing the demographic dividend. In addition, the AUDD roadmap further recognizes the enabling environment as another important aspect in harnessing the demographic dividend. The enabling environment serves an important role as it provides a framework within which the efficient youth friendly policies and investments could better deliver desired results.

Calculation and Analysis of the first SoAYR indicators was done by a team of youth researchers based at the African Union Commission (AUC). Data was collected and refined by the team, aligned with the Commonwealth National and Regional Youth Development Index (YDI) toolkit.

The research team then approached National Statistics Offices (NSOs) to be contributors to this report by providing official country level data by sex and age for the initial list of indicators. The research team explored the data availability, source, and operational definition, the collection and computational methodology. Also was the disaggregation of data by age and sex. With regards to the disaggregation, the AU's youth definition as stipulated in the African Youth Charter (AYC) 15-35-year-old (or the closest to the AYC's Youth Definition/most appropriate age group), Sex (female, male and both sexes) and country. A review of indicators available was conducted for the Demographic Dividend Pillars, with the inclusion of indicators for the Enabling Environment.

Results over time across the regions of Africa differ. This paper seeks to give an overview of key indicators in the four pillars across the five regions. It is important to note the following:

1. These results are based on averaging country results, which have not always been calculated using the same methods and do not include results for all countries, given the scarcity and heterogeneity of data across countries. It therefore should be a guide only, with further investigation needed to accurately gauge the complete picture of youth development across the continent.
2. Breakdown by gender has not been included but can be calculated using the dashboard which accompanies this report. This is recommended as the results for many indicators greatly varies across the sexes.
3. Rate in figures in these sections are an average of the countries' rates, NOT a rate for the region.
4. Reasons behind data unavailability cannot be provided in this section without further review of the reasons behind individual countries situations behind this data.

Key findings

1. Youth Population in African Countries

Africa is a home to a large number of youth (453 million 15-35-year olds in 2018), and is projected to continue to total over 1 billion by 2063. While the population dynamics vary between countries,

most countries have a similarly shaped population structures. However, the number of young people in the African Union member states and the intensity of the issues faced by the youth vary. As a result, these countries are at different stages towards harnessing the demographic dividends.

2. Employment and Entrepreneurship

In Africa, more indicators for Employment and Entrepreneurship improved between 2013 and 2017, but The Rate of Youth Unemployment and Youth Not in Education, Employment or Training both showed worsening trends, suggesting a need for policy adaptation and or new policy instruments to target these areas.

Challenges youth face gaining decent employment include inadequate skills, lack of work experience, mismatch of skills taught and those needed in the market, job insecurity, and lack of access to credit. These factors often result in vulnerable, indecent, or precarious forms of employment, and underemployment.

3. Youth Education and Skills Development

Education is foundational and fundamental to adolescent and youth development in every continent. Access to quality education helps prepare young people for a productive life and opens up many opportunities, improving outcomes over the life course. However, in Africa there are still many young people who lack basic literacy skills, and opportunities are disproportionately limited for specific populations, such as girls and young women, rural youth, and young people with disabilities.

The African data on education show many substantial improvements in the Education and Skills Development indicators across Africa. However, Completion rates, particularly for Upper Secondary Education, remain low. Also, Government Expenditure on Education is still very low in many African countries, below 5% of GDP as set out by the African Union.

4. Health and Wellbeing

The health of young people has emerged as a priority issue in global development. Healthy young people will contribute to healthy communities, productive nations, and the region in overall. Health and wellbeing constitute key capabilities for youth. It is during the period of youth development

that many health-related behaviors are adopted that persist into adulthood and have important implications throughout life and for the health of the next generation.

While health services have been improving across Africa leading to a reduction in the mortality rates for youth, many indicators show a need for stronger actions. It is also important to note that there is insufficient data collection in Africa on other global health risks for youth, such as mental health.

5. Rights, Governance and Youth Empowerment

Rights, governance and youth empowerment is one of the four Pillars for harnessing the demographic dividend because they are crucial in effectively addressing youth issues. Youth need to be actively involved in governance issues in their local and national communities and empowered to be part of development and decision-making processes.

The data on Rights, Governance and Youth Empowerment indicates that much needs to be done to properly engage and include young people in the governance process. Nevertheless, data on indicators for this pillar are acutely deficient.

6. Enabling Environment

The enabling environment handles the crosscutting issues that impact all four Pillars of the AUDD, ensuring that policies are aligned with the needs of Africa's youth. The enabling environment includes indicators related to youth inclusion in entrepreneurship, education, health, rights, and governance.

Additionally, the enabling environment seeks to the effectiveness of member states' joint ministerial committee on the demographic dividend and if the policies are aligned with the AUDD for those that have one and to advocate for one where there is not. The enabling environment also looks at the existence of the National Youth Development Funds. The main drivers to ensure implementation of the AUDD roadmap include adequate policies, frameworks and funding; capacity-building and partnerships. While many countries have been unable to supply data for these indicators their importance warrants the inclusion of the limited dataset we have managed to put together.