

Amplifying Understanding of the Demographic Dividend in Uganda

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The Issue of Policy Prioritization and Agenda Operationalization

Background: The Demographic Dividend Across Sectors

The demographic dividend (DD)—the potential for accelerated economic growth that begins with changes in the age structure of a country's population—is a concept that is increasingly popular among policymakers. The DD is defined as the accelerated economic growth that can occur as a population age structure matures and the dependency ratio falls, generating an increase in the proportion of the working-age population. With fewer dependents for each household to support, national and family income will rise; incomes can grow even faster when strategic investments are in place that promote human capital development and facilitate savings, investment, and economic transformation.¹

The first required step for a country to achieve a DD is to advance through the demographic transition, the shift from high to low mortality and fertility rates. The demographic transition is facilitated by social sector investments such as child health and voluntary family planning (FP). In many countries, the role of such programs in driving the DD may be little-known outside the public health sector. Therefore, to build a broader base of support for priority DD interventions, it is critical to amplify understanding of the benefits of demographic change among decisionmakers outside the family planning sector.

While the connections between demographic change and development have long been apparent, new research has expanded the concept of the DD to demonstrate potential benefits derived from age structure change across four different sectors. In addition to economic growth, countries can experience “dividends” in child survival, education, and political stability. A country's likelihood of making substantial gains in each of these four sectors is tied to its age structure, which can be easily measured through median age—the age at which half the population is older and half is younger.

Statistical analysis based on the experience of countries that have passed through the demographic transition shows that specific development benchmarks in each sector become available as fertility declines and median age rises. While not addressing other contextual factors that apply to specific countries, the results show that for any generic country:

- **Education:** At a median age of 25, countries are 50% likely to attain a secondary school enrollment rate of 60%.²
- **Political Stability:** At a median age of 27, countries are 50% likely to be free of revolutionary conflict for at least five years.
- **Health:** At a median age of 29, countries are 50% likely to attain the Sustainable Development Goals target for child survival—an under-five mortality rate at or below 25 deaths per 1,000 live births.
- **Economy:** At a median age of 31, countries are 50% likely to attain upper-middle income status.

Each of these “dividends” becomes more likely as fertility rates decline and age structures mature. For example, at a median age of 16 years—the current median age of Uganda—a given country has only a 10% likelihood of reaching lower-middle income status and a 1% likelihood of being classified as upper-middle income. However, a country with a median age of 26 years, like South Africa, has an 82% likelihood of being lower-middle income and a 20% likelihood of being upper-middle income.

The window of opportunity when these benefits begin to become more likely than not starts at a median age of 25 to 26. With only a single exception, every country that had achieved such a median age in 2015 had a fertility rate of 2.8 children per woman or less.³

Uganda’s Policy Framework for the Demographic Dividend

Uganda offers many opportunities for DD-related policy change. The total fertility rate of 5.4 children per woman results in a very youthful age structure, with half of the population under age 15.⁴ If fertility declines significantly and median age rises, the window of opportunity for a demographic dividend will open.

This aligns with Uganda’s Vision 2040 goals, which include “a transformed Ugandan society from a peasant to a modern and prosperous country within 30 years.”⁵ However, as in other countries, policymakers are generally unfamiliar with the associations between changing age structure and achievement of development benchmarks.

Within the Government of Uganda (GOU), the National Population Council (NPC) holds an institutional mandate to coordinate implementation of the National Population Policy and to advocate for the integration of population dynamics in development planning. The GOU is currently undertaking the mid-term review of the second National Development Plan and planning for the third National Development Plan (NDPIII), which will guide development policy across sectors. NPC is mandated to participate in the mid-term review, which presents an opportunity to ensure that population dynamics inform a key national strategy.

Program Objectives

NPC has partnered with the Population Reference Bureau (PRB) through the Policy, Advocacy, and Communication Enhanced for Population and Reproductive Health (PACE) project to broaden the conversation about demographic change and measures of national development in Uganda by engaging policymakers in the education, economic growth, and governance sectors. This partnership aims to introduce compelling messages and evidence about the association between progress through the demographic transition and achievement of key development objectives in multiple sectors. Engaging policymakers from outside the health sector in targeted advocacy will increase their appreciation for and commitment to the importance of FP as a key development investment.

NPC and the National Planning Authority recently launched Uganda’s first Demographic Dividend Roadmap, which integrates demographic modeling and indicators into policy mechanisms across sectors.⁶ The Roadmap has been disseminated in multiple districts across Uganda in 2019, with a focus on encouraging local government authorities to allocate funding to DD-relevant programs.

Program Activities

To ensure that population dynamics are a key component of development policy across sectors, including the sector budget framework processes and the third National Development Plan, NPC and PACE developed a suite of advocacy materials in 2019. As a first step, NPC organized a stakeholder consultation workshop with Uganda's DD Sector Working Group to develop multisectoral, evidence-based advocacy messages related to the DD. Inputs were solicited from representatives from key government ministries including: health, economy, environment, housing, urban development, education, governance, gender, social development, and agriculture. The working group also includes representatives of parliament, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), universities, and multilateral organizations.

The stakeholders represented determined that a short video accompanied by a supplementary fact sheet would be most effective in reaching decisionmakers across multiple sectors, including at the district level. NPC technical staff integrated this input into a concept note outlining the proposed content and design of the new advocacy materials, to be developed by PRB, and developed a communication plan for the materials. NPC then developed a video script, with technical assistance from PRB. NPC facilitated a validation review of the video script and fact sheet by the DD Sector Working Group and relevant communications experts, and integrated comments and recommendations into the final script and production. In addition, NPC identified a local production company to provide voiceover services for the video narration.

The resulting materials, titled "Building a Stronger Uganda Through Investment in People," introduce challenges related to high dependency burden, low contraceptive use, high rates of teenage pregnancy, high rates of school dropout and low funding allocations for family planning. They outline specific priority policy recommendations for decisionmakers in the health, education, economic, and government sectors, linking changes in population age structure to achievement of broader benefits in line with Uganda's national development goals. These materials allow NPC to test new strategies for communicating the sectoral benefits of the DD, including use of statistical analytical approaches, to diverse policy audiences.

Program Results

Upon completion of the materials, NPC convened a meeting with representatives from the Ministry of Finance to promote inclusion of the new advocacy materials on the agenda of the regional Budget Framework Conferences. The video was accepted as part of the agenda of the regional conferences, which took place from September 16 – October 4, 2019. NPC participated in a total of 24 regional conferences covering five regions of Uganda. Budget conference participants included local decision-makers such as district chair-persons and resident district commissioners, local government technical teams, finance officers, and district planners. As a result of dissemination at the regional budget conferences, the NPC has been invited to present and participate in several district budget conferences where district-level budgets are allocated. NPC has also been invited to participate in a dialogue meeting with the National Planning Authority to encourage inclusion of the DD interventions in the NDPIII. Finally, NPC was invited to share the video during the annual conference of the Network of African Parliamentary Committees of Health scheduled for October 30-31, 2019.

The results of this partnership demonstrate the potential for tailored, evidence-driven advocacy materials to improve understanding of the broader implications of demographic change and drive support for related policy interventions across multiple sectors, including at the subnational level.

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¹ James Gribble and Jason Bremner, *The Challenge of Attaining the Demographic Dividend* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 2012).

² *The Four Dividends: How Age Structure Change Can Benefit Development*. Population Reference Bureau. Accessed at: <http://thepaceproject.org/4dividends/>; Richard Cincotta and Elizabeth Leahy Madsen, "The Four Dividends: The Age-Structural Timing of Transitions in Child Survival, Education Attainment, and Political Stability," 2017, Paper presented at the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population International Population Conference, Cape Town, South Africa.

³ Cincotta and Madsen 2017.

⁴ Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) and ICF. 2018. *Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2016*. Kampala, Uganda and Rockville, Maryland, USA: UBOS and ICF.

⁵ *Uganda Vision 2040*. Government of Uganda. Accessed at: <http://npa.go.ug/wp-content/themes/npatheme/documents/vision2040.pdf>

⁶ *Uganda Demographic Dividend Roadmap: Transforming Uganda's Economy: Opportunities to Harness the Demographic Dividend for Sustainable Development*. National Population Council of Uganda (December 2018).