

Why addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy is essential

to achieving the demographic dividend in West and Central Africa





United Nations Population Fund

Why addressing child marriage and adolescent pregnancy is essential

to achieving the demographic dividend
in West and Central Africa

Acknowledgements

UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office (WCARO) commissioned this position paper within the framework of the UNFPA-UNICEF Global Programme on Accelerating Actions to End Child Marriage which is generously supported by the Governments of Canada, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the European Union.

The paper was authored by Petrina Lee Poy, an independent consultant, under the technical guidance and coordination of Anandita Philipose, Adolescent and Youth Specialist at UNFPA WCARO.

UNFPA WCARO Senior management and the Team Leader for Adolescents and Youth, Idrissa Ouedraogo, provided overall leadership and guidance for the development of this paper. Additional valuable inputs were received from the following regional office colleagues: Beatrice Mutali, Gilena Andrade, Waly Sene and Jacob Eben.

We wish to acknowledge the tireless efforts of governments, regional bodies, parliamentarians, young people and civil society organizations to end child marriage, reduce adolescent pregnancies and achieve the demographic dividend in West and Central Africa.

Author: Petrina Lee Poy

Graphic Design: LS Graphic Design

Table of Contents

Regional Director Foreword	6
Background	7
1. What is the Demographic Dividend?	8
2. Importance of the demographic dividend in West and Central Africa	12
3. Defining child marriage and adolescent pregnancy	14
4. Child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and the demographic dividend	16
5. Child marriage and adolescent pregnancy in the West and Central Africa context	17
6. Implications of current levels of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy on achieving the demographic dividend	20
7. Projections of child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, and the risk of missing the demographic dividend	21
8. Recommendations for UNFPA and Partners to Address Child Marriage within the Larger Framework of Achieving the Demographic Dividend	24
References	26

Regional Director Foreword

Over the last ten years, it has become evident that the demographic dividend framework offers a strategic basis for focusing and prioritizing investments in people in general and youth in particular, in order to achieve sustainable development. The demographic dividend framework is in line with Africa's Agenda 2063 and its 'First Ten-Year Implementation Plan' which together lay a strong foundation for the vision of African leaders in all facets of the continent's development. Likewise, it also underpins the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Young people comprise a significant percentage of the population. While many countries have already made progress in investing in young people, they must do much more if they want to harness the demo-

graphic dividend in this region. Young people in West and Central Africa face considerable challenges. This region has some of the world's highest levels of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy and maternal mortality rates (especially among adolescents). Young people often do not have access or opportunities for the right education that provides them the knowledge and skills to protect their health, or to prepare them adequately for the labour market.

This position paper presents several strong arguments about why it is imperative to address child marriage and adolescent pregnancy, if we want to succeed in harnessing the demographic dividend in West and Central Africa. It also provides recommendations on the key actions different stakeholder groups can take to make this a reality. UNFPA is committed to supporting Governments and other stakeholders to harness the demographic dividend including through actions to end child marriage and reduce adolescent pregnancies in the region.



Background

The West and Central Africa region¹ has 506.4 million people thus accounting for about 43 percent of Africa's population. This is expected to increase to 756.2 million people by 2030.² In addition, the population of West and Central Africa 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 in terms of their health, education, employment and empowerment.

Women and girls in West and Central Africa are vulnerable to a disproportionate range of risks, particularly to their sexual and reproductive health. Girls are subject to

child marriage, female genital mutilation and limited education and are denied equal opportunities. Women bear an average of 5.5 children,³ their use of modern contraception is low and more than 50 percent of births happen without skilled health care. Thus, they find themselves trapped in a trajectory of limited opportunities, capabilities and poor health.

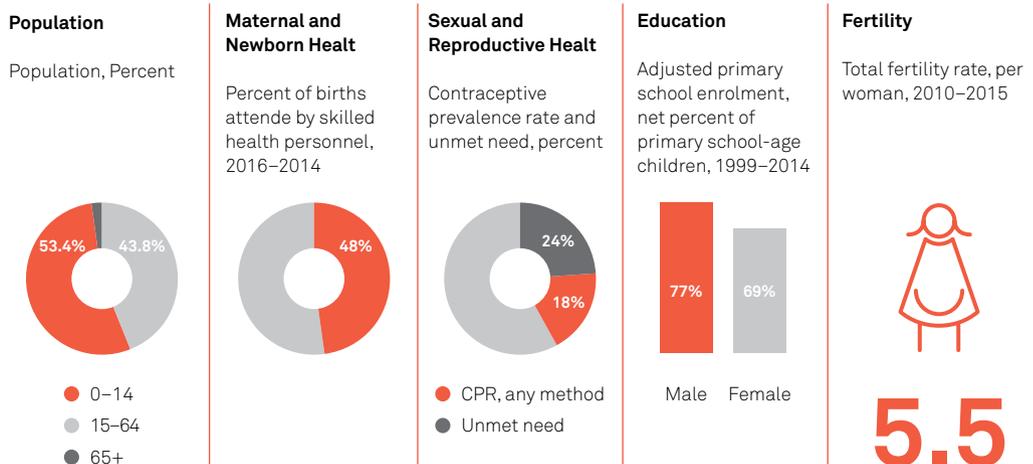
1. Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, the Gambia, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome e Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo. For some data in this document, the Democratic Republic of Congo is also included.
2. United Nations World Population Prospects, accessed 24 July 2017.
3. UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Office, 2017.

Figure 1



Figure 2

West and Central Africa Demographic Data – SWOP 2015



At the beginning of 2016, the African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government underlined a commitment to put young people and women first by agreeing to focus on “Harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth” throughout 2017 and beyond.⁴

Investments made today in youth, who represent Africa’s greatest asset, will determine the development trajectory of Africa over the next 50 years and position the continent towards realizing the “Africa We Want,” a strong, united and influential global player as envisioned in Agenda 2063.⁵ This agenda makes several calls for focusing specifically on youth and women in realizing its’ vision of “an Africa where development is people-driven, unleashing the potential of its women and youth.”

In line with the New Africa Agenda of 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals Framework,⁶ UNFPA in West and Central Africa recognizes the critical importance of investing in adolescents and youth, particularly adolescent girls. UNFPA uses the demographic dividend as a framework and strategic focus for its’ work. It draws a clear link between the empowerment of young women and the provision of sexual and reproductive health and rights and sustainable economic development. UNFPA wants to create a conducive environment for harnessing the demographic dividend and has strengthened and scaled up its work on adolescents and youth within this framework. The key to achieving the demographic dividend is enabling young people- and adolescent girls in particular- to achieve their potential.

1. What is the Demographic Dividend?

The demographic dividend is the boost in economic growth resulting from changes in a country’s population age structure. As fertility rates decrease, a country’s working age population grows larger relative to the young dependent population. With more people in the labor force and fewer children to support, a country has a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth if the right social and economic investments and policies are made in health, education, governance, and the economy.

The demographic dividend is the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population’s age structure, mainly when the share of the working-age population (15 to 64) is larger than the non-working-age share of the population (14 and younger, and 65 and older).

Changes in the population structure and dependency ratio are necessary for harnessing the demographic dividend.

For a country to realize a demographic dividend, it must first undergo a demographic transition, which means a shift from high fertility and mortality to low fertility and mortality. This creates a working-age population that is larger than the dependent generations both preceding and following it. This transition is a critical moment in the development of opportunities for families and countries. If countries succeed in planning and making the necessary investments in young people during the demographic transition, they can create a virtuous cycle of improving education, human capital and economic productivity.

The demographic transition describes two trends: the decline in birth rates as the need or desire for larger numbers of children diminishes and the decline in death rates as public health initiatives and modern medicine lengthen life. A widespread decrease in mortality occurs with improved nutrition and the control and eradication of infectious communicable diseases which are major causes of death for children under five in the developing world. As a result, national populations become significantly younger in age, on average, as infant mortality drops and more children survive.

When child survival improves, parents typically feel more confident about having smaller families, and this contributes to a gradual reduction in fertility rates which is the next stage of the demographic transition. Fewer children mean more resources are available to invest in ways that can raise household income.

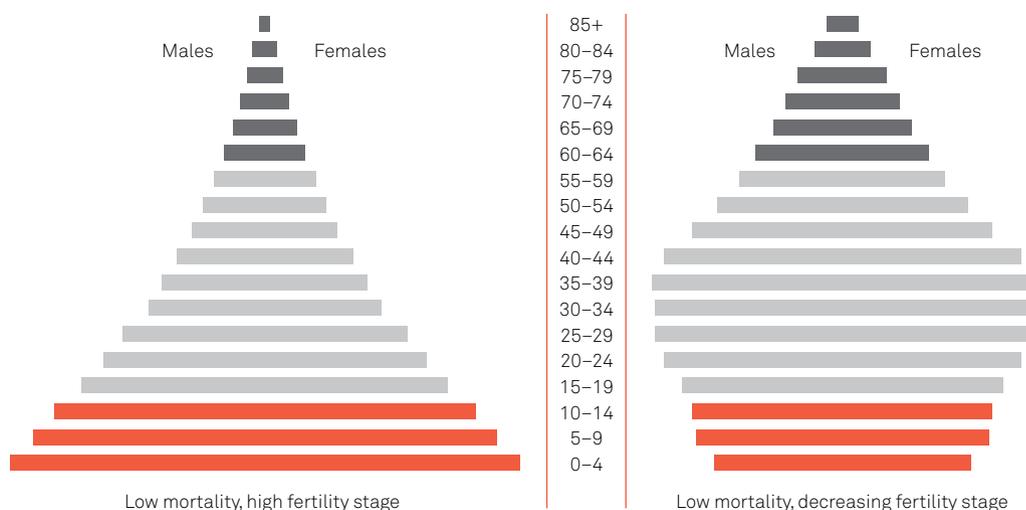
The lag between the mortality and fertility declines leads to an increase in the number of young children in the population. That

growth is seen in the age pyramid on the left panel of Figure 3 in which new births are added each year to the base. If fertility declines, the base narrows and a “youth bulge” is created, as seen on the right panel of Figure 3.

4. Africa Union Assembly Decision (Assembly/AU/Dec.601 (XXVI) of January 2016
5. Agenda 2063 is a strategic framework for the socio-economic transformation of the continent over the next 50 years. It builds on, and seeks to accelerate the implementation of past and existing continental initiatives for growth and sustainable development.
6. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. These 17 Goals build on the successes of the Millennium Development Goals, while including new areas such as climate change, reducing economic inequality, promoting innovation, sustainable production and consumption, jobs creation, peace and justice, among other priorities. The goals are interconnected – often the key to success on one will involve tackling issues more commonly associated with another.

Figure 3

Theoretical Population Pyramids



When there is a rise in the proportion of the population of working age, other things being held constant, there is a fall in what is called the ‘dependency ratio’. It is based on the population's age structure. It is the ratio between the number of individuals who “depend economically” on others in their day-to-day life i.e. are not working (mainly the young and older people) - and the number of people who are working. This is defined as the ratio of the elderly (ages 65 and older) plus the young (under age 15) to the population in the working ages (ages 15 to 64).

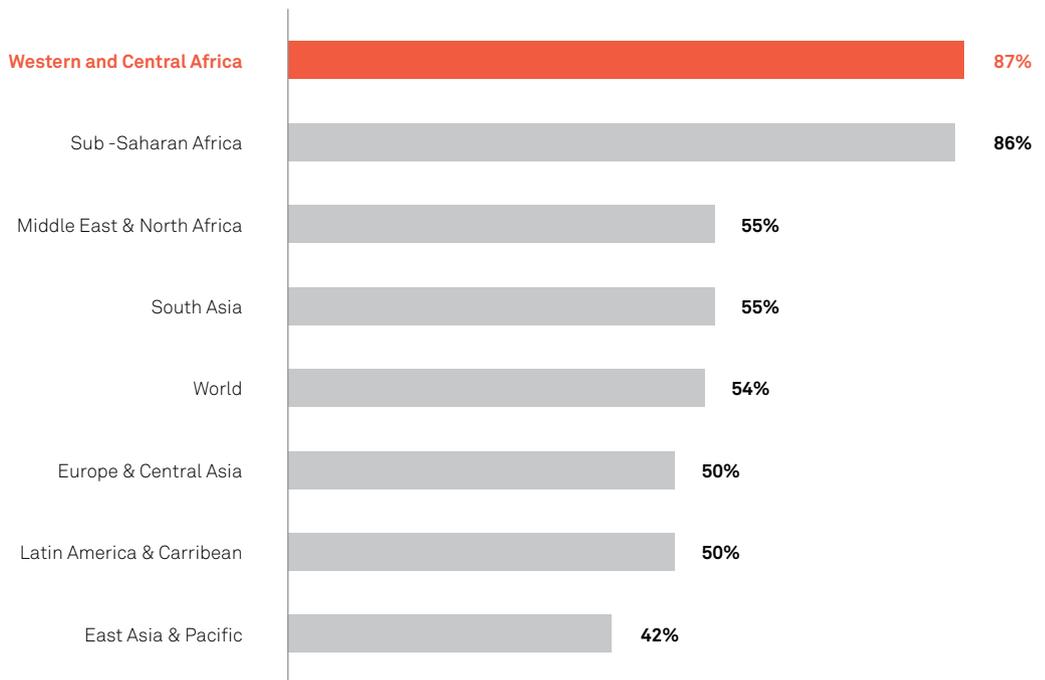
Graph 1 shows population dependency ratio for the West and Central Africa region. The dependency ratio is high in the region (87.2 %) because of the high level of youth dependency due to a long history of high fertility. In comparison, for example, the dependency ratio is much lower in the Middle

East and North Africa region (55%). Niger has the highest dependency ratio in the world - 113 “dependents” for every 100 people of working age. It should also be noted that Niger has the highest fertility rates and highest child marriage rates in the world.

Reducing fertility to accelerate the demographic transition and to lower the dependency ratio is essential for the demographic dividend to occur. It has also been described as a demographic bonus or a demographic window of opportunity. The key word here is opportunity – economic growth is not a given. In order to realize a lasting demographic dividend, governments need to implement strategic investments and prioritize development and implementation of policies and strategies in the following areas: family planning, sexual and reproductive health information and services to reduce maternal

Graph 1

Dependency Ratio



and child mortality; , comprehensive sexual-ity education for young people to prevent unwanted pregnancies; education particularly for girls; and, sound policies and laws against early marriage which will assist in reducing adolescent pregnancy and in turn also decrease fertility. Additional priorities could include placing job creation strategies at the centre of economic growth policies; investments in post-primary education and addressing education quality and skills development challenges; investments in improving the health status of the population to enhance productivity; and, enhancing good governance and accountability to close the gap between policy development and policy implementation.

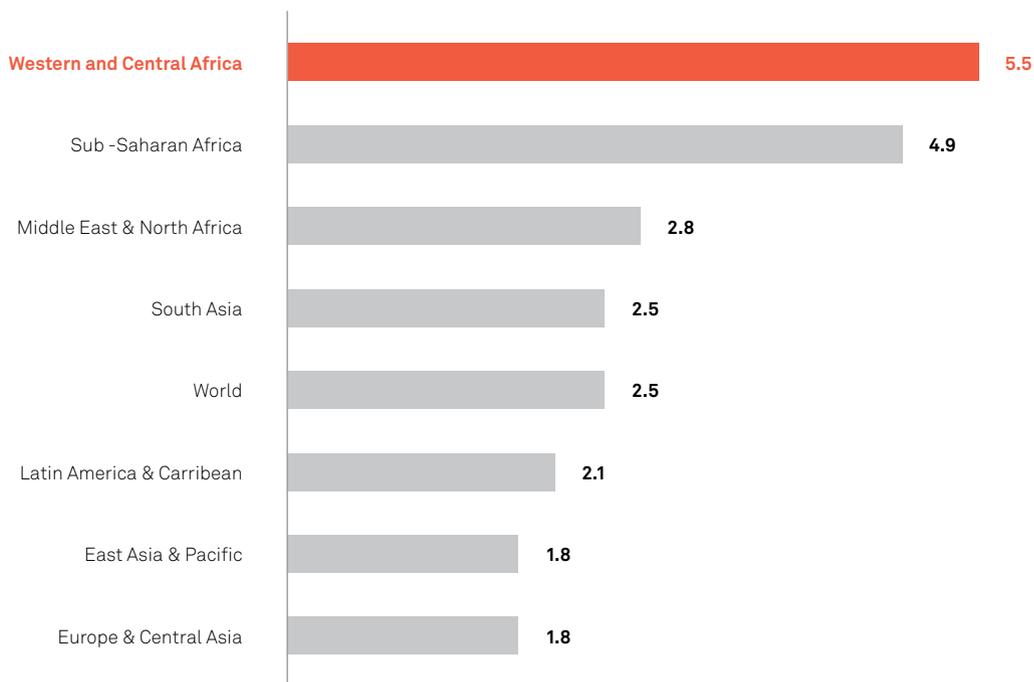
With a fast transformation in the age structure and a decline in dependency ratios, there is a potential for economic growth

spurred by the increased labour income and increased savings. This can also lead to improvements in human capital as: (i) lower fertility is usually associated with delayed age of first birth and longer intervals between births, both of which improve maternal and child health; (ii) fewer children allows families to invest more per child; and (iii) lower fertility increases the potential for female education and employment and hence empowerment.

Between 1970 and 2000, most of the developing regions - specifically East and South-east Asia and Latin America where the demographic transition was quick - benefited from this “demographic dividend”. However, this transition still has not occurred in West and Central Africa, primarily because the birth rate remains high. The region has the highest birth rates in the world, averaging more than five children per woman.

Graph 2

Fertility Rate



2. Importance of the Demographic Dividend in West and Central Africa

Studies have shown that no country has developed socio-economically without a parallel decline in birth rates. The Asian Tigers (South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore) had the same profile and demographic status in the 1960s as many sub-Saharan African countries have today. This demographic advantage in the Asian countries is largely due to the decline in mortality and fertility, thus creating a favorable age pyramid with a high proportion of active people in relation to the number of dependents. In addition, the Asian Tigers have benefited from the demographic dividend by investing heavily and extensively in human capital including family planning, education and employment.⁷

The countries of West Africa currently have life expectancies at birth generally between 50 and 60 years (versus 35 to 40 years in the 1960s) and levels of fertility per woman between 4 and 6 children. As such, it is safe to say that the first phase of demographic transition (lower mortality) is well advanced. However, the second phase of the transition, characterized by declining fertility, is still largely in its infancy and remains very slow.⁸





The demographic dividend is important to West and Central Africa because of its strong population growth. The region has the highest population growth rates in the world with the majority of countries having annual growth rates above 2 percent, implying a population “doubling time” of 20 to 30 years.

Statistically speaking, here are some figures:

- The total population was at 506 million in 2015
- The total population is projected to reach 756 million by 2030
- The population of young people was 6 million in 2010 and is projected to reach 10 million by 2030

Niger, Mali, and Nigeria are among the top 10 countries with the largest absolute, and percentage projected, increases in children and adolescents from 2010-2050.

This cohort of young people in West and Central Africa can become an advantage if the proportion of dependents (children and the elderly) per worker (aged 15 to 64 years) decreases due to a decline in fertility. With a decline of the “dependency ratio”, the working population will be able to decrease their spending on children (their primary expense) and devote a larger share of their income to savings and productive investment. In turn, this will help stimulate economic growth.

7. African Institute for the Development Policy. United Nations Population Fund. 2015. “Synthesis Report on the Demographic Dividend in Africa.” AFIDEP & UNFPA
8. Guengant, J.-P., & Kamara, Y. 2012. “How Can We Capitalize on the Demographic Dividend?” (A. Savoir, Trans.): Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD)

3. Defining Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy

The harmful traditional practice of child marriage persists globally. Defined as a customary, religious or legal marriage of anyone under the age of 18 years, child marriage occurs before the girl is physically and psychologically ready for the responsibilities of marriage and childbearing. Child marriage is a violation of human rights, one that is addressed in multiple human rights declarations and conventions:

- Child marriage is a violation of Article 16(2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that “Marriage shall be entered into only with the free full consent of the intending spouses.”
- Article 16 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that women should have the same rights as men to “freely choose a spouse and to enter into marriage only with their free and full consent”, and that the “betrothal and marriage of a child shall have no legal effect.”
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child states (Art.21): “Government should do what they can to stop harmful social and cultural practices, such as child marriage, that affect the welfare and dignity of children.”

Factors that interact to place a girl child at risk of marriage include poverty, the desire to ‘protect’ girls from out-of-wedlock pregnancies and the desire of parents to protect family honor due to cultural and traditional mores.

Pregnancies among girls 18 years or below are adolescent pregnancies. Among developing regions, West and Central Africa has the largest percentage (28 percent) of women between the ages of 20 and 24 who reported a birth before age 18.⁹

Early marriage leads to early childbearing. In a set of 26 countries that account for a majority of child marriages and early child-births in the world, of which 6 are located in West and Central Africa, 84 percent of children born to mothers younger than 18 are likely to be due to child marriage. In that same data set, it was found that three in four women who had their first child before 18 probably did so because they married as children.¹⁰ Having many pregnancies at an early age is dangerous for both mother and child, as young mothers’ bodies are usually not mature enough to carry a baby. Moreover, child marriage has negative effects on girls’ education and life opportunities; often such a marriage puts an end to girl’s education.

-
9. Motherhood in Childhood : Facing the Challenge of Adolescent Pregnancy. UNFPA State of the World’s Population 2013.
 10. Wodon, Q., Onagoruwa, Adenike; Yedan, Ali; and Edmeades, Jeff. 2017. “Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Fertility and Population Growth”. Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.



4. Child Marriage, Adolescent Pregnancy and the Demographic Dividend

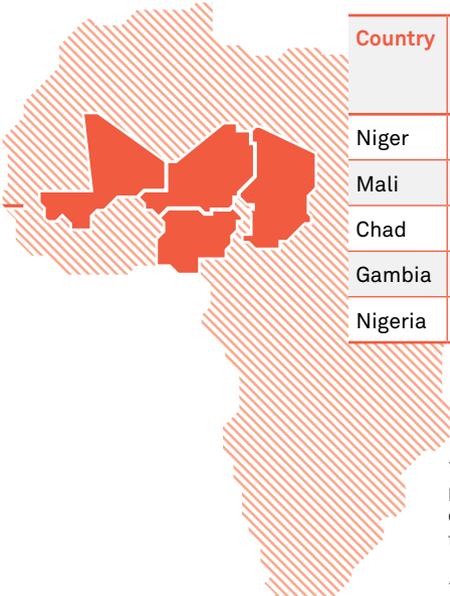
Countries with some of the highest fertility rates are also those with some of the highest child marriage rates in the world. In these contexts, child marriage is a driving factor for adolescent pregnancies and child-bearing and also for total fertility rates. As such, the pressure to become pregnant once married can be intense, and child brides typically end up having many children to care for. Child marriage derails a girl's future and means she has no control over her fertility, thus attributing to high fertility rates that make achieving the demographic dividend a more unlikely possibility.

Table 1 presents the five countries in the region with the highest fertility rates and the accompanying adolescent pregnancy rates, dependency ratios and child marriage rates.

The data shows that adolescent girls and young women are the most vulnerable in the region as this region has some of the highest child marriage and adolescent child bearing rates in the world which act as an impediment to achieving the demographic dividend. This is a violation of a girl's rights, and can impact her health, education and employment opportunities adversely. In addition, this region also has high levels of female genital mutilation and gender-based violence.

Education and learning can play an important part in countering harmful traditional practices. Girls are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to education—less than half go to school. However, education—especially at the secondary level—helps delay marriage and first pregnancy. Women who marry later tend to have fewer children than women who marry at a young age. Women who are educated are also more likely to work outside the home—increasing the size of the labor force and the potential for economic development.

Table 1



Country	Fertility rate* (%)	Adolescent Fertility rate** (%)	Dependency Ratio (%)	Child marriage rate (%)
Niger	7.63	208.5	113.0	76
Mali	6.35	178.8	100.2	55
Chad	6.31	152.0	100.7	68
Gambia	5.78	115.8	94.2	30
Nigeria	5.74	117.1	87.5	43

* **Total Fertility Rate:** Number of children who would be born per woman if she lived to the end of her childbearing years and bore children at each age in accordance with prevailing age-specific fertility rates.

** **Adolescent Fertility Rate:** Births per 1,000 women ages 15–19

Although gender equality has improved in the region, the situation is not the same for all women and adolescent girls. Progress has been slow and limited for women and girls in very poor countries. A gender-equitable environment is critical to achieving a demographic transition because in such a setting, women are free to access and use family planning without many of the barriers they currently face. Such an environment also enables women and couples to choose the number, timing, and spacing of children and allows women to participate in the labor force and contribute more to the family's economic well-being.

This investment in women and youth is the cornerstone to achieve a demographic divided and sustainable development.

5. Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy in the West and Central Africa Context

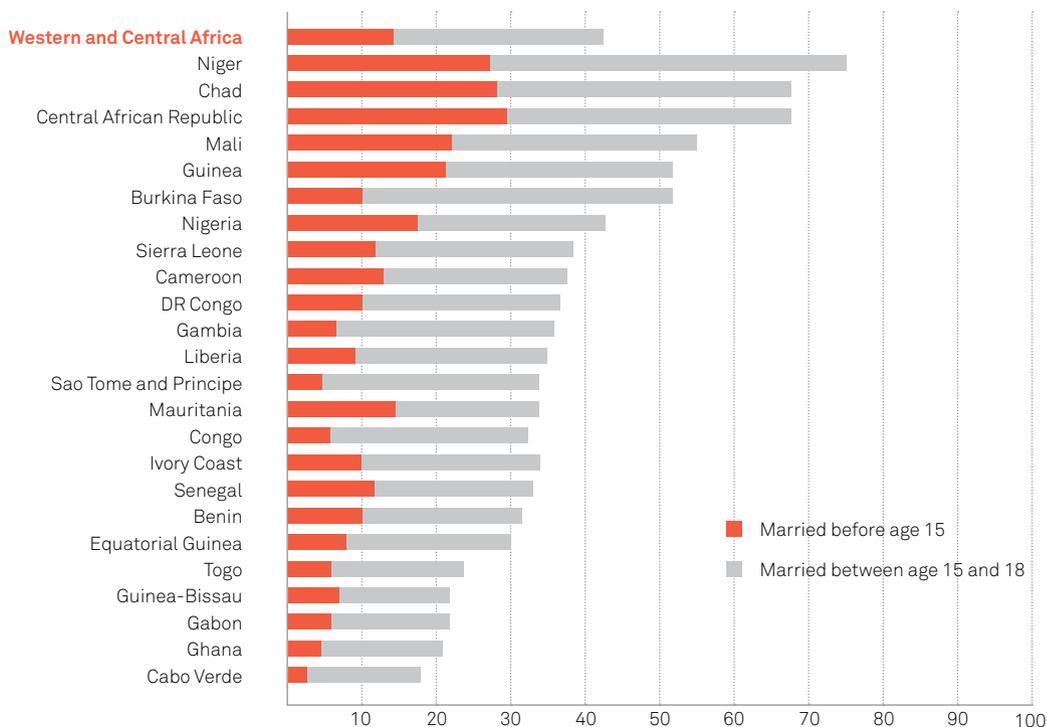
Recent estimates conducted with 158 countries in the world have shown that the risk that an adolescent is married is higher in Africa than in other continents.¹¹ Child marriage is widespread in West and Central Africa, where 42 percent of young women were married before their 18th birthday (see Figure 4) and 14 percent were married before age 15.

11. Regional Demographic Profiles Compared: West and Central Africa's Position. October 2016.

Figure 4

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2014

Percentage of women aged 20 to 24 years who were married or in union before ages 15 and 18



Six of the ten countries with the highest rates of child marriage are located in the region – Burkina Faso, Chad, Central African Republic, Guinea, Mali and, Niger (see Table 2). Niger has the highest overall prevalence of child marriage in the world at a rate of 76 percent.

In terms of absolute numbers, around 8 million young women aged 20-24 were married as children. One in three of these child brides live in Nigeria (see Figure 5).

Despite many African countries setting the legal age of marriage at 18 years, laws are rarely enforced, since the practice of marrying young girls is upheld by tradition and social norms. Child marriage is deeply rooted in poverty, gender inequality, persistent gender-based violence and gender discrimination. The practice is most common in rural areas, where prospects for girls can be limited. In many cases, parents arrange

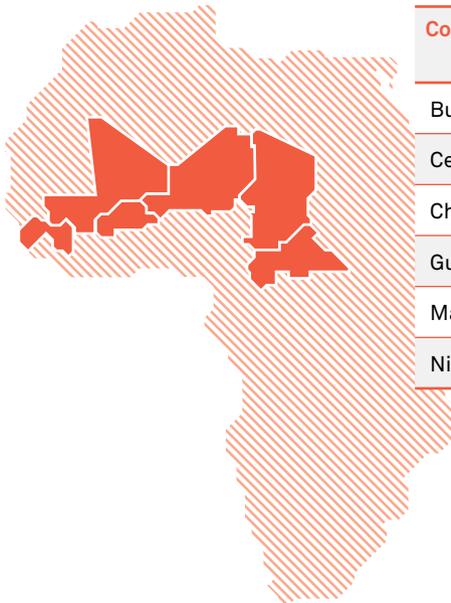
these marriages, and young girls have no choice. Child marriage leads to school drop-out, lower levels of education among girls and the inter-generational transmission of poverty.

Because rural West and Central Africa is characterized by high poverty rates, girls perceive very few alternatives to marriage within the community and quickly become the subject of transactional negotiations between families. Women and girls in particular, are often viewed as an economic burden, as their low status prevents them from being viable wage earners. The many economic reasons for a poor family to decide to marry off a daughter include avoiding education costs, easing the financial load of a child, getting rid of debts and supplementing household income.

As with child marriage, West and Central African countries have some of the highest

Table 1

Child Marriage Percentages



Country	Married by 15 (%)	Married by 18 (%)
Burkina Faso	10	52
Central African Republic	29	68
Chad	29	68
Guinea	21	52
Mali	15	55
Niger	28	76

adolescent birth rates in the world, at close to 129 live births per 1,000 girls. In other parts of the world, adolescent fertility rates vary from 18 live births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years in Europe and central Asia, to 38.7 live births in North Africa and the Middle East.

Child marriage and pregnancies are major factors underpinning high maternal and child mortality rates in the region. Complications from pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death in adolescent girls and young mothers are more at risk of suffering obstetric fistula. Use of sexual and reproductive health services is generally low in the region and even lower among adolescents, married or unmarried. In West and Central Africa the modern contraceptive prevalence rate for married girls (15-19 years old) is the lowest in the world at 4 percent against 15 percent worldwide.¹² 20 percent of the married girls in West and Central

Africa have an unmet need for contraception. Research indicates that a larger percentage of young women who marry later (age 18 or older) use contraceptives related to those who marry earlier. For example, in Nigeria, older brides are three times more likely to use modern contraception.¹³

12. UNFPA. Facing the Facts. Adolescent girls and contraception. 2016.

13. UNICEF. 2015. Child Marriage, Adolescent Pregnancy and Family Formation in West and Central Africa. Senegal: UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office.

Figure 5

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2014

Number of women aged 20 to 24 who were married or in union before age 18

Nigeria	3,155,000	Benin	151,000
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1,144,000	Sierra Leone	107,000
Niger	542,000	Togo	81,000
Cameroon	409,000	Liberia	66,000
Burkina Faso	393,000	Congo	62,000
Chad	391,000	Mauritania	60,000
Mali	353,000	Gambia	31,000
Ivory Coast	304,000	Guinea-Bissau	17,000
Guinea	276,000	Gabon	17,000
Ghana	253,000	Equatorial Guinea	10,000
Senegal	219,000	Cabo Verde	5,000
Central African Republic	152,000	Sao Tome and Principe	3,000
Western & Central Africa		8,200,000	

Note: Figures in this table have been rounded

6. Impact of Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy on Achieving the Demographic Dividend

There is a strong relationship between child marriage and fertility. In large part, this is because child brides begin having children at younger ages compared to those who marry even a few years later and therefore have a longer period of their lives during which they are having children. In West and Central Africa, the total fertility rate remains high at 5.5 children per women which results in demographic dependency levels that are relatively higher.

Child marriage has also been shown to reduce contraceptive use, which can lead to both shorter birth spacing and a later end to childbearing. Power imbalances in child marriage may impact a married adolescent's ability to negotiate for safe sexual practices and the use of family planning which may also play a role in leading child brides to have more children. In short, child brides usually have more children on average than women who marry later in life.

As mentioned earlier, a combination of low mortality and fertility is critical for harnessing the demographic dividend. While child mortality rates in West and Central Africa have declined from 196 in 1990 to 112 in 2015 (per 1,000 live births), the total fertility rates are still high. It is important to note that changes in the population and the population's characteristics depend primarily on changes in the fertility rate. The impact of changes on other variables, even if not negligible, is nonetheless much less important.

The effects that child marriage has on fertility have implications for both individual women and their respective countries, as it directly influences the rate at which the size of the population increases. Because child brides have a higher number of chil-

dren, child marriage contributes to population growth. Depending on the age at marriage, child marriage increases total fertility for women by 17 percent to 26 percent.¹⁴ High adolescent fertility rates and the accompanying unmet need for family planning – which is one of the reasons for the high fertility – could delay or jeopardize the harnessing of the demographic dividend.

14. Wodon, Q., Onagoruwa, Adenike; Yedan, Ali; and Edmeades, Jeff. 2017. "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Fertility and Population Growth". Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.

7. Projections of Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancy, and the Risk of Missing the Demographic Dividend

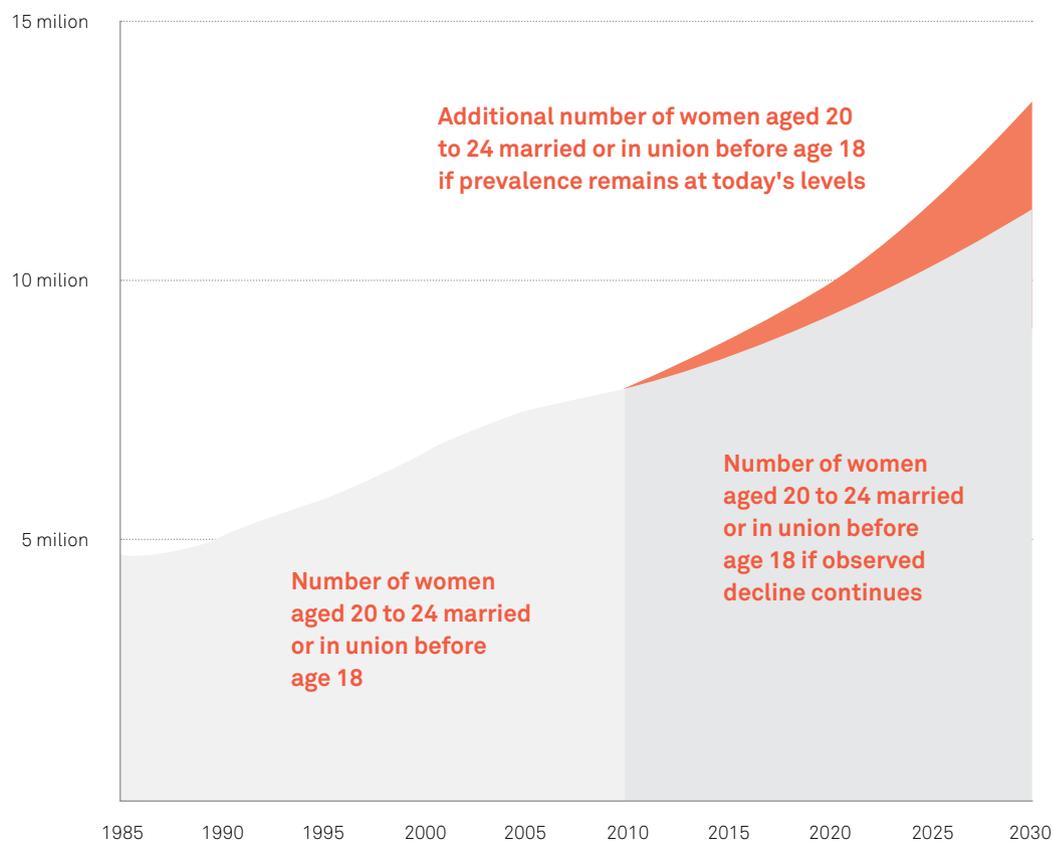
It should be noted that the prevalence of child marriage is slowly declining in West and Central Africa. The percentage of young women married before age 18 has dropped from 52 percent to 42 percent over the past thirty years. However, due to population growth, the numbers of child brides will continue to grow in West and Central Africa in the coming years. If the decline contin-

ues at the current pace there will be about 11.7 million child brides by 2030. However if there is no further decline the number of child brides will continue to rise significantly and will reach about 13.5 million child brides in 2030 (See Graph 3).

Graph 3

Source: UNICEF global databases, 2014

Predicted number of child marriages by 2030



Extra efforts will therefore be required to sustain the reduction in the total number of girls affected by child marriage. In addition, even under the best possible scenario, it should be assumed that a certain percentage of girls will be married before age 18; this highlights the importance of interventions for already-married girls as well.

The greatest increase in pregnancy among adolescent girls (under the age of 18 years) over the next 15 years is likely to happen in sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁵ More specifically, in West and Central Africa, the number of pregnancies among adolescent girls (under the age of 18 years) could increase by 52 percent, from 2.7 million in 2015 to 4.1 million in 2030.¹⁶

A recent study examining the economic impact of child marriage determined that when taking into account the rate of child marriage in the country and the characteristics of the girls who marry early, ending child marriage would bring about a reduction in total fertility of 11 percent from current conditions, a rather large effect.¹⁷ This suggests that ending child marriage would significantly speed up the transitions to lower fertility rates in many countries.

Consequently, ending child marriage and early childbirths could reduce population growth. On average, across 15 countries of which 6 are in the Western and Central Africa region, population sizes would be 2.45 percent smaller by 2030 if all child marriages and adolescent pregnancies were ended today. For example, Niger is projected by the United Nations to be the country with the largest percentage increase in population by the year 2030: its total population is expected to grow from roughly 20 million people in 2015 to 36 million in 2030. Ending child marriage and early childbirths would lead to reductions in the country's total population by more than 5 percent. In countries with lower incidences of child marriage, the impact on demographic growth would be smaller, but still substantial.¹⁸

Studies examining these trends have shown that delaying marriage has a positive outcome on women's social development: it allows women to complete their education, build labor force skills and motivate women to limit family size and/or widen the spacing of their children.¹⁹

Family planning use in West and Central Africa, however, is lagging. Less than 10 percent of married women in these regions use modern contraceptives, and use has increased only slightly over the last two decades. Underfunded and inadequately managed family planning programs do not meet current or future needs of the rapidly growing population. If current trends continue, the large size of the young population in relation to the working-age population will delay a demographic dividend for decades. However, if these countries increase current investments in family planning by three to five times their current levels and meet women's needs for family planning, they could stabilize births by 2030 and establish the conditions to capitalize on the demographic dividend. Slower progress will delay or may even cause countries to miss their window of opportunity for a demographic dividend.²⁰

In countries at the beginning of the transition, with declining mortality rates but no accompanying drop in fertility, and with relatively large dependency ratios, investments to empower girls and women through education and health, including sexual and reproductive health, become even more important. Actions are also needed to protect individuals' rights, including reproductive rights, by ensuring adolescent girls and young women have the power and the means to decide freely and responsibly whether, when or how often to become pregnant. Expanding access to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, including contraception and SRH information, is key. In general, measures that build the human capital of women and girls and enable them to exercise all their human rights also lead to lower fertility rates and can lead in the long run to smaller dependency ratios, which are critical to capturing a demographic dividend.

15. UNFPA. Adolescent Pregnancy : A Review of the Evidence. 2013.
16. UNFPA. Facing the Facts. Adolescent girls and contraception. 2016.
17. Wodon, Quentin; Male, Chata; Nayihouba, Ada; Onagorwa, Adenike; Savadogo, Aboudrahyme ; Yedan, Ali; Edmeades, Jeff; Kes, Aslihan ; John, Neetu; Murithi, Lydia; Steinhaus, Mara and Petroni, Suzanne. 2017. "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report", Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.
18. Ibid
19. UNICEF. 2015. Child Marriage, Adolescent Pregnancy and Family Formation in West and Central Africa. Senegal: UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office
20. Population Reference Bureau. Fact sheet: Attaining the Demographic Dividend. November 2012.



8. Recommendations to Address Child Marriage within the Larger Framework of Achieving the Demographic Dividend

A combination of low mortality and fertility is critical element for achieving the demographic dividend. While child mortality rates in West and Central Africa have declined from 196 in 1990 to 112 in 2015 (per 1,000 live births), the total fertility rates are still high.

Child marriage derails a girl's future and means that she has no control over her fertility. High adolescent fertility rates and the accompanying unmet need for family planning - which is one of the reasons for high fertility - could delay or jeopardize the harnessing of a demographic dividend. The World Bank-ICRW study looking at the economic impact of child marriage also found that by 2030, ending child marriage will lead to lower population growth and would

generate more than \$500 billion in benefits annually at a global level. Countries would also save on their health and education budgets.²¹ The magnitude of the threat child marriage poses to global development is highlighted by the fact that its elimination is one of the specific targets for achieving goal number five of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals: gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

-
21. Petroni, Suzanne and Wodon, Quentin.. The rippling economic impacts of child marriage. Web article. July 25, 2017.



Key recommendations to address child marriage as a critical strategy to achieve the demographic dividend include:

Generate an enabling legal and policy environment

Legislation against child marriage, and accompanying sound policies, are critical elements of a comprehensive human rights approach to address child marriage and adolescent pregnancies.

Improve girls' access to quality formal education

Education remains a powerful way to prevent child marriage. Girls' education, especially at the secondary level, is strongly associated with delays in age at marriage. Research has suggested that girls with secondary schooling are up to six times less likely to marry under the age of 18 years compared to girls with little or no education.²²

Empower girls by building their skills and enhancing their social assets

Using an empowerment approach can lead to positive outcomes for girls and their families by supporting girls to become agents of change and helping them envisage what alternative roles could look like in their communities.

Among the successful programmes are those that empower girls at risk of child marriage through, for example, life skills training, provision of safe spaces for girls to discuss their futures, provision of health and education services for young girls, and the development of support networks. Such interventions can equip girls with knowledge and skills in areas relevant to their lives, including sexual and reproductive health and their rights under the law. It is important to also have empowerment programmes for girls already in child marriages.

Expand access to sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception, for young people

Across Africa, barriers limiting young people's access to sexual and reproductive health information and services continue to persist, particularly for young girls. Addressing unmet need for contraception among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa alone would reduce unintended pregnancies and abortions by 70 per cent, along with significant reductions in maternal death and morbidities.²³ Thus, access to sexual and reproductive health services, including modern contraceptives, and comprehensive sexuality education could be a lifesaver for many women and adolescent girls.

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.

22. UNFPA. *Marrying Too Young. End Child Marriage.* 2012

23. Guttmacher Institute. *Adding it Up: Costs and Benefits of Meeting the Contraceptive Needs of Adolescents In Sub-Saharan Africa.* 2016.

References

- Africa Union Commission. United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. 2013. "Creating and Capitalizing on the Demographic Dividend for Africa."
- African Institute for the Development Policy. United Nations Population Fund. 2015. "Synthesis Report on the Demographic Dividend in Africa." AFIDEP & UNFPA.
- Assembly of the Union Twenty- Sixth Ordinary Session 30-31 January 2016. 2017. "AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth." Ethiopia: Africa Union Commission.
- Girls not Brides. 2015. "Ending Child Marriage in Africa."
- Guengant, J.-P., & Kamara, Y. 2012. "How Can We Capitalize on the Demographic Dividend?" (A. Savoie, Trans.): Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and Institut de Recherche pour le Développement (IRD).
- Interdivisional Working Group on the Demographic Dividend. 2015. "UNFPA: A Value Proposition for the Demographic Dividend."
- Koski, A., Clark, S. and Nandi, A. (2017), Has Child Marriage Declined in sub-Saharan Africa? An Analysis of Trends in 31 Countries. *Population and Development Review*, 43: 7–29. doi:10.1111/padr.12035
- UNFPA. 2013. "Adolescent Pregnancy: A Review of the Evidence". New York: UNFPA.
- UNFPA. 2016. "Facing the Facts: Adolescents Girls and Contraception". New York: UNFPA.
- UNFPA. 2016. "Investing in Adolescents and Youth to Realize the Demographic Dividend in West and Central Africa. Senegal: United Nations Population Fund West and Central Africa Regional Office.
- UNFPA. 2012. "Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage". New York: UNFPA.
- UNFPA. 2013. "Motherhood in Childhood: Facing the Challenge of Adolescent Pregnancy." New York: UNFPA.
- UNFPA. 2016. "Realizing the Demographic Dividend: Empowering and Protecting Young People across West and Central Africa." Senegal: United Nations Population Fund West and Central Africa Regional Office.
- UNFPA. 2016. "Review of Adolescent and Youth Policies, Strategies and Laws in Selected Countries in West Africa. Senegal: United Nations Population Fund West and Central Africa Regional Office.
- UNFPA. 2014. "The Power of 1.8 Billion. Adolescents, Youth and the Transformation of the Future." New York: United Nations Population Fund.
- UNFPA Tchad. 2017. "Agenda 2063: Advocacy for the Demographic Dividend." UNFPA Tchad.
- UNFPA WCARO. 2016. Regional Demographic Profiles Compared: West and Central Africa's Position. Senegal: UNFPA WCARO.
- UNICEF. 2015. "A Profile of Child Marriage in Africa.", New York: UNICEF.
- UNICEF. 2014. "A Statistical Snapshot of Child Protection in West and Central Africa." New York: UNICEF
- UNICEF. 2015. Child Marriage, Adolescent Pregnancy and Family Formation in West and Central Africa. Senegal: UNICEF West and Central Africa Regional Office.
- UNICEF. 2014. "Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects." New York: UNICEF.
- United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision*
- Walker, Judith-Ann. 2014. "Mapping Early Marriage in West Africa: A Scan of Trends, Interventions, What Works, Best Practices and the Way Forward." Ford Foundation.
- Wodon, Quentin; Petroni, Suzanne; Thompson, Lyric; Male, Chata; Onagoruwa, Adenike; Savadogo, Aboudrahyme; Edmeades, Jeff; Kes, Aslihan and John, Neetu. 2015. "Child Marriage and the 2030 Agenda: Selected Findings from Early Research." Research Brief. September 2015.
- Wodon, Q., Onagoruwa, Adenike; Yedan, Ali; and Edmeades, Jeff. 2017. "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Fertility and Population Growth". Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.
- Wodon, Quentin; Petroni, Suzanne; Male, Chata; Onagoruwa, Adenike; Savadogo, Aboudrahyme; Edmeades, Jeff; Kes, Aslihan and John, Neetu. 2015. "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Preliminary findings from analyses of existing data." The Economic Impacts of Child Marriage. Research Brief. November 2015.
- Wodon, Quentin; Male, Chata; Nayihouba, Ada; Onagoruwa, Adenike; Savadogo, Aboudrahyme ; Yedan, Ali; Edmeades, Jeff; Kes, Aslihan ; John, Neetu; Murithi, Lydia; Steinhaus, Mara and Petroni, Suzanne. 2017. "Economic Impacts of Child Marriage: Global Synthesis Report", Washington, DC: The World Bank and International Center for Research on Women.

“The continent cannot meet its ambitious goals under Agenda 2063 while it limits a dynamic segment of its society, which women represent, from realizing its full potential. Investing in women and girls and their integration into the labor market, alongside delayed marriage and child bearing, and expanded access to education for girls, family planning, and sexual and reproductive health rights, have been attributed as the driving forces behind the economic successes of the Asian tigers.”

AU Agenda 2063 Framework Document:
The Africa We Want

