

Population ageing in the Small Island Developing States of Africa: trends and socioeconomic implications

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Abstract

Ageing of the population poses several profound impacts on every aspect of life. This phenomenon has been visible in the Small Island Developing States of Africa (SIDS) and is expected to continue in the next few decades as the SIDS are continuously experiencing one of the fastest ageing populations in Africa. In this context, SIDS in Africa including the Islands of Mauritius, Seychelles, Cape Verde, Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe have a unique demographic structure which is characterized by a large proportion of older persons. The aging profile of these countries presents a golden opportunity for research on aging and older persons in Africa as a blueprint for the rest of the continent. We posit that older persons in the SIDS in Africa are an important resource in the development process post-2015 and harnessing their potential for social economic development will lead to a second demographic dividend.

Introduction

Population aging has been observed to be increasing since the middle of the twentieth century¹. Several factors including declining infant mortality rates and increasing life expectancy account for the rise in the number of older persons². The process, depth and intensity of aging varies globally. Advanced countries have a higher proportion of older persons compared to developing countries. This notwithstanding, population aging is gradually being observed in developing countries including those in Africa. In 2000, older persons aged 60 years and above constituted 5.1% of Africa's population and this is expected to increase to 10.4% by 2050². More recently, in 2014, there were 62 million older persons (60 years and above) in Africa³. This number accounts for 7 percent of the global population of older persons. It is projected that by 2050 the population of older persons in Africa will increase to 212 million².

Within the African region there are wide variations in population aging among the various countries. Within the period 1990-2010, some countries e.g. Tunisia recorded an increase in the proportion of the population aged 60 years and above while others e.g. Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Sao Tome and Principe recorded a decline⁴. Small Island states in Africa including the Islands of Mauritius, Seychelles, Cape Verde, Comoros, Guinea Bissau, Sao Tome and Principe have a unique demographic structure which is characterized by a large proportion of older persons. The aging profile of these countries presents a golden opportunity for research on aging and older persons in Africa as a blueprint for the rest of the continent.

Table 1: Summary statistics on demographic, health and socio-economic indicators of the study countries

	Mauritius	Comoros	Seychelles	Sao Tome and Principe	Cape Verde	Guinea-Bissau
Total Population (in 1000s)	1,273	788	96	190	521	1844
Population growth rate (2010-2015)	0.4	2.4	0.7	2.2	1.2	2.4
Old age dependency ratio 65+ years in 2015	17.3	7.5	12.5	8.8	10.3	8.7
Percentage population aged 65+ in 2015	7.6	2.6	6.9	3.1	4.6	3.2
Total Fertility Rate (2010- 2015)	1.5	4.6	0.7	4.8	2.4	4.9
Life expectancy at birth(2010-2015)	74.2	62.8	72.9	66.2	73.0	54.7
Life expectancy at age 60	20.2	16.2	19.4	18.2	18.6	15.0

¹ UN DESA, 2015 World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision

Data and methodology

Ageing trends since 1950 will be analyzed for the six SIDS of Africa and the link with development will be explored in this paper. Every two years the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs updates population estimates and projections for all member states. The World population prospects 2015 revision will be used for all data in this article. As part of this effort UNDESA collects data on population dynamics including ageing, life expectancy dependency ratios among others which are relevant for this manuscript

Older persons and development

The socio-economic conditions of older persons is key to ensuring their health and well-being. Additionally, older persons have the potential to contribute to socio-economic development if they are given the opportunity and the enabling environment to function properly. The growing population of older persons in Africa has been described as the “second demographic dividend” because of the potential of older person’s contribution to socio-economic development. The extent to which Africa realizes the second demographic dividend depends on the support given to older persons in terms of opportunities to participate in the labour force and access to adequate health care and pensions.

References

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