

DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO PROPEL THE YOUTH FOR FOOD SECURITY IN KENYA

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Abstract

The demographic dividend is the accelerated economic growth that may result from a rapid decline in a country's fertility and the subsequent change in the population age structure. With fewer births each year, a country's working-age population grows larger in relation to the young dependent population. With more people in the labor force and fewer young people 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. Investments in today's youth population can position a country to achieve a demographic dividend, but the gains are neither automatic nor guaranteed. During the first dividend, the labor force temporarily grows more rapidly than the population dependent on it, freeing up resources for investment in economic development and family welfare. Other things being equal, per capita income grows more rapidly too. But a second dividend is also possible. A population concentrated at older working ages and facing an extended period of retirement has a powerful incentive to accumulate assets (unless it is confident that its needs will be provided for by families or governments). Nations earning a demographic dividend have invested in human capital (health and education), implemented sound economic and governance policies, and sustained the political commitment necessary to make the most of the opportunity. Carrying out those policies can be challenging for a country's social and governance structures, and not all countries may be able to take advantage of a dividend.

Developing countries are still working their way through the demographic transition. During the early stage, the number of children rises rapidly as mortality falls. Later, at an intermediate stage, fertility begins to decline, reducing the number of children, and the share of the working-age population increases. During the late stage, low mortality and fertility increase the share of the older population, a process known as population aging. Kenya is at the intermediate stage and has the opportunity to exploit the first demographic dividend. The second dividend begins toward the end of the intermediate phase and extends through the late phase, but the policies for realizing the second dividend are best established during the intermediate phase. This paper will examine the linkage between demographic dividend and increasing food security, with the youth actively involved in agriculture industry.

Population pyramids for Kenya in 2014 demonstrate the different population dynamics that are at work. The bulge is at the young dependent ages (high and low proportion of younger and older people, respectively) with all the burdens that they represent. The youth (15-34 years) comprise over two-thirds of the working-age population. Further, it is projected that between 2015 and 2050, working-age population will increase, on average, by more than 950,000 people per year. Kenya is starting to enter its window, under the assumption of declining fertility rates over the next several decades. The country has the opportunity to exploit the first demographic dividend by attracting and retaining youth in farming. However, studies show that Kenya is deriving very little demographic dividend in agriculture with an increasing proportion of the country's working age population being inactive. Thus, the key question is whether Kenya can experience increasing food security by actively involving the youth in farming activities during this window of opportunity ("dividends" of the changed age distribution). This paper shall concentrate on giving a glimpse

of the untapped opportunities awaiting youth to take to a career of remunerative self-employment in farming. The paper will further demonstrate how wise policies by government to seize upon the “dividends” of the changed age distribution; by involving the youth in more farming activities can lead to increase in food security. Thus, if the government takes action that follow, to some extent, those of the developed countries, the dividends may become real rather than potential.