

Policy Brief: Zambia

November 2015

Education Global Practice

Health, Nutrition, and
Population Global Practice

Adolescent Girls in Zambia: Introduction and Overview

Sophie Naudeau, Rifat Hasan, and Anne Bakilana

Adolescence is a Transformative Time **Adolescence (defined here as the second decade of life, from 10 to 19 years of age) is a time of transition that fosters both challenges and opportunities.** Coined by American psychologist G. Stanley Hall at the turn of the twentieth century, adolescence was considered a time of great storm and stress. Since then, a more balanced view of adolescence has emerged that acknowledges the risky behaviors that adolescents are likely to experiment with but also highlights the many opportunities that adolescence offers for promoting positive experiences and for setting young people on a favorable trajectory for adult life.¹ While the concept of adolescence typically refers to the transitional period between childhood and adulthood, this transition may be shorter or longer depending on the socio-economic context and the prevailing societal norms (World Bank 2006).² In many societies, boys and girls experience a sudden shift from childhood to adulthood during a very short period of time around puberty and are henceforth expected to behave as adults even though they are not biologically, cognitively, or emotionally ready to assume adult responsibilities.

¹ For a review of relevant literature on the topics discussed in this paragraph, see Naudeau et al. (2008).

² The five youth transitions identified in 2006 by the World Bank—learning, employment, staying healthy, starting a family, and exercising citizenship—work together in building human capital and fostering long-term growth.

Choices made during adolescence not only have immediate consequences but also greatly influence the economic opportunities, health outcomes, and skill sets attained later in life. Yet adolescence is also a period when social norms create pathways defined largely by gender. During adolescence, gendered roles and responsibilities often create opportunities for males, but curtail them for girls, as adolescent girls tend to participate more in household chores, to face higher rates of child marriage, to be more burdened with early pregnancy and child rearing, to face higher risks of domestic violence, and to confront greater societal barriers to paid employment and asset ownership than adolescent boys (World Bank 2011).

Poverty and ethnic minority status can further magnify gender disparities for youth, as reductions in household spending on education, health care, and nutrition are more likely to affect adolescent girls than boys. Across 27 countries, boys from the poorest households are 9 percentage points more likely than girls to complete their primary education, while no difference is evident between boys and girls from the richest households (World Bank 2011). Moreover, girls in low-income households are almost twice as likely to marry before the age of 18 as girls in higher-income households (World Bank 2014). These striking gender differences in the poorest socioeconomic quintiles are exacerbated in times of shock. For example, a study of 59 developing

countries found that health outcomes are far worse for girls than for boys during economic shocks, with girls having five times the average increase in infant death as boys (World Bank 2011).

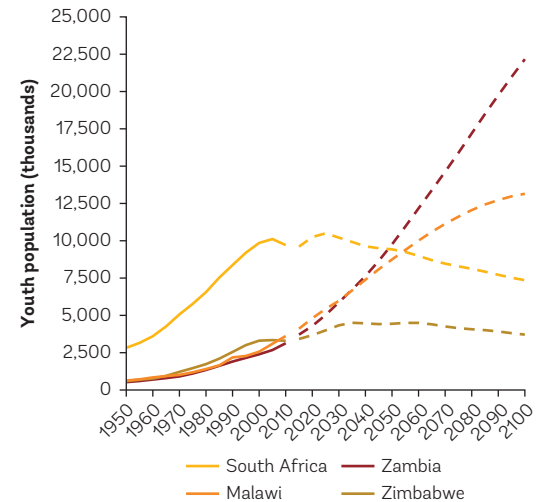
Adolescents—and Their Decisions—Have Important Implications for Harnessing the Demographic Dividend³

In Zambia, adolescents make up 24 percent of the population, a substantial proportion. Approximately 13 percent of Zambia’s population is made up of boys and girls 10–14 years old and 11 percent is made up of boys and girls 15–19 years old. The median age of the Zambian population—16.8 years—declined between 1950 and 2010 and has just started to increase since then. The already large number of adolescents is expected to increase sharply in the upcoming decades—the current population of 3.7 million adolescents is expected to increase to 9.8 million by 2050—adding challenges for society to provide health, education and job training services to prepare them for a productive future. Because of the size of the population, the trend in Zambia is striking even when compared to its neighbors (figure 1). Furthermore, the total population is expected to triple in the next 35 years, from 14.5 million in 2015 to approximately 44 million in 2050, driven by persistent high fertility and population momentum (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2011). Fertility is higher in Zambia than in Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe, with women having more than five children on average over their lifetime.

Zambia’s persistently high fertility combined with decreasing mortality is not only causing high population growth but also creating a large share of youth dependents, giving way to higher dependency ratios. The number of dependents (persons younger than 15 and older than 65) per working-age adult is currently 96 (figure 2). Zambia’s dependency ratio is extremely high compared to neighboring countries, but it is declining. Regionally, only West Africa’s is higher. Unless the determinants of such high fertility are addressed, Zambia will continue to have high population growth rates exerting pressure on the economy for decades to come (figure 3).

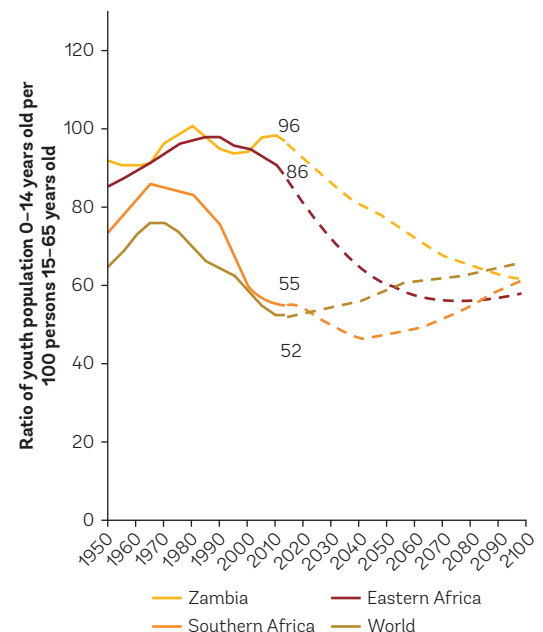
In Zambia, as in many other countries, the high prevalences of child marriage and teenage pregnancy contribute to high fertility and population growth and are closely interrelated with a range of economic and sociocultural determinants that perpetuate a vicious cycle for the poorest and most vulnerable girls. On the other hand, child marriage and teen pregnancy also

Figure 1. Actual and Projected Youth Population (Ages 10–19) in Zambia and Select Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1950–2100



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2011.

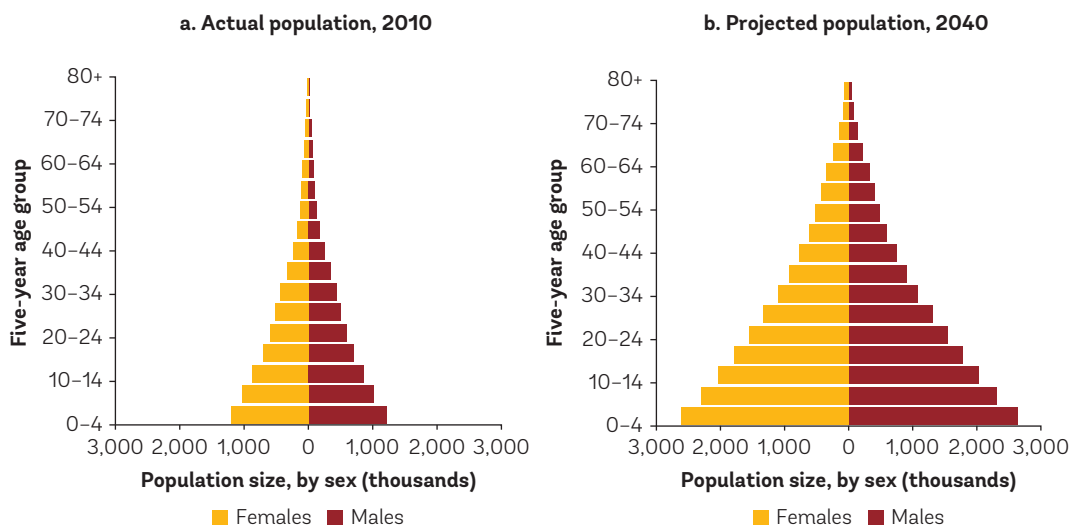
Figure 2. Actual and Projected Total Dependency Ratio in Zambia, African Regions, and the World, 1950–2100



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2011.

³ Demographic dividend is defined in box 1.

Figure 3. Population Age Structure in Zambia, by Gender and Five-Year Age Groups, 2010 and 2040



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2011.

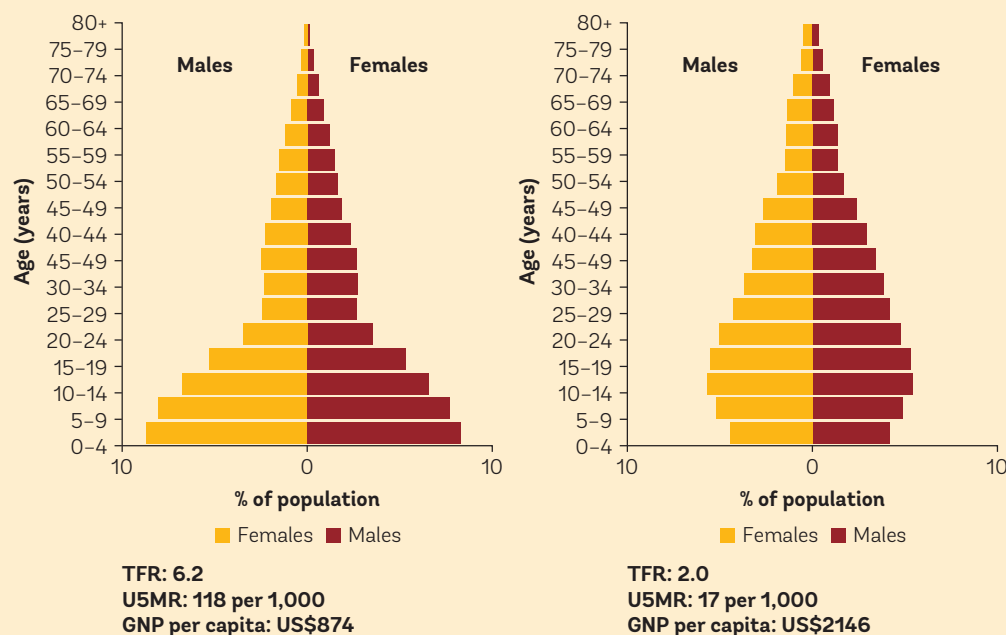
Box 1. What Is a Demographic Dividend?

A demographic dividend is the accelerated economic growth that may result from a rapid decline in a country's mortality and fertility rates and the subsequent shift in the age structure of the population (Gribble and Bremner 2012). As a country's working-age population grows in relation to the number of young dependents, a small window of opportunity exists to achieve strong economic growth.

At the same time, a growing population, coupled with a slowly changing population age structure, will create challenges related to the need for a high and growing resource envelope for public services, delayed accumulation of human capital, a high dependency ratio with a low level of savings, and delayed opening of the demographic window of opportunity.

Over a 30-year period, Tunisia underwent a transition in which fertility declined rapidly, the age structure started to change, and the young dependent population became smaller than the population of working-age adults (figure B1.1). This transition created a window of opportunity to accelerate economic growth, and Tunisia harnessed this opportunity and translated this into growth in GNI per capita.

Figure B1.1. Population Age Structure in Tunisia, 1970 and 2000



Source: Gribble and Bremner 2012.

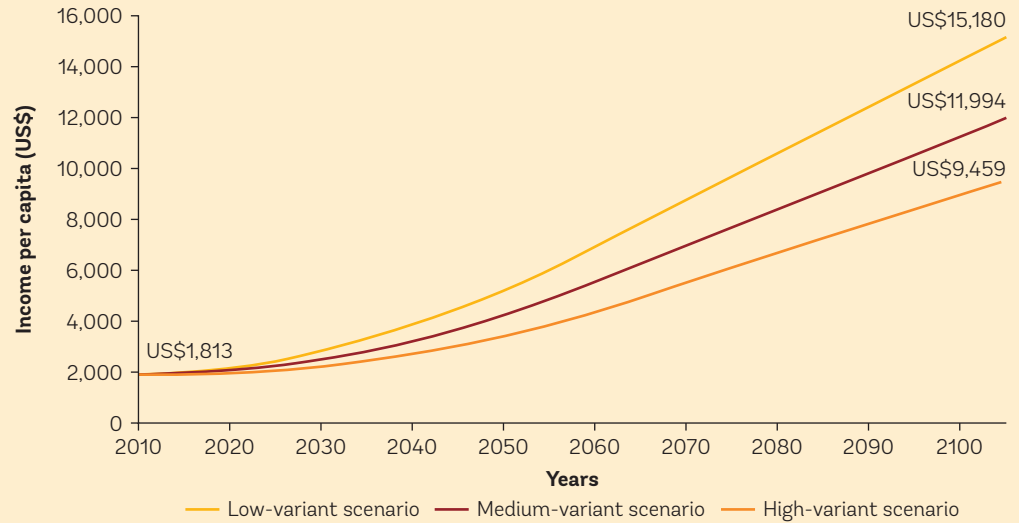
Note: TFR = total fertility rate; U5MR = under-5 mortality rate.

box continues next page

Box 1. (continued)

In another example, the effect of fertility on income per capita was modeled for Nigeria for the upcoming decades. In 2060, per capita income is projected to be US\$9,459 in 2060 in a high-fertility scenario compared to US\$11,994 and US\$15,180 in medium- and low-fertility scenarios, respectively (figure B1.2). This indicates the economic effect that is possible with a full demographic transition.

Figure B1.2. Income per Capita under Three Fertility Scenarios in Nigeria, 2010–2100



Source: Canning, Raja, and Yazbeck 2015.

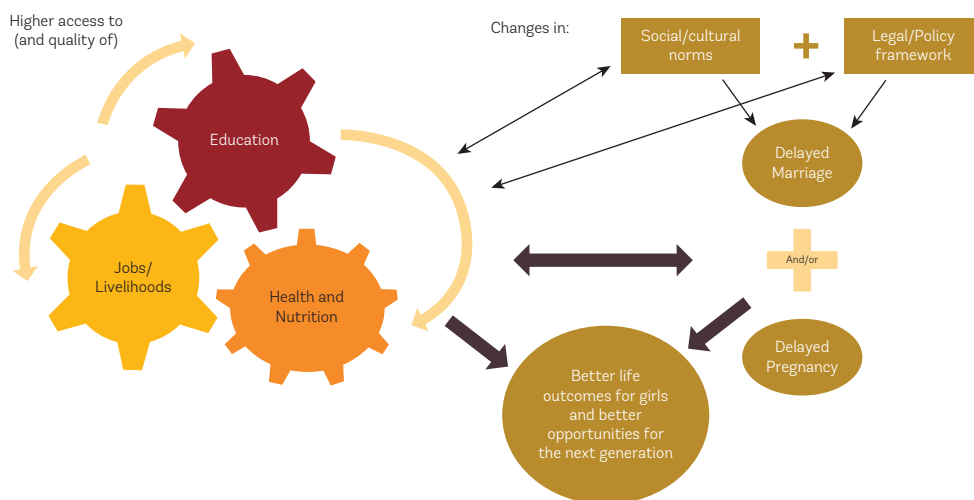
contribute to high child mortality and poor maternal health. Some of the key economic determinants of child marriage and teenage pregnancy include the inability of the poorest families to bear the costs (or opportunity costs) of girls' education and the lack of options available to girls for developing the skills they need to generate sufficient income to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. Closely interrelated to these economic constraints are a host of sociocultural practices and expectations about the place of girls and women in society and women's empowerment to decide the appropriate time for sexual activity, marriage, desired family size, and use of family planning. While these sociocultural determinants can vary significantly by subculture, by wealth quintile, and between urban and rural areas in Zambia, they tend to perpetuate a vicious cycle where girls drop out of school earlier than boys, marry too soon, become sexually active, do not use protection and become pregnant early on, are unable to participate in productive activities, and eventually are unable to provide adequate care for their children or to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

The Cost of Inaction Is High

The cost of inaction is high for adolescent girls themselves, for the next generation, and for the nation as a whole. Child marriage and teenage pregnancies have costly negative consequences for the life trajectories of adolescent girls and their children. As further documented in this series of policy briefs, Zambian girls who marry or have children early have lower education levels, higher fertility, lower household wealth, and less power to make decisions. Adolescent girls in Zambia suffer from undernutrition, which places them at higher risk for complications during pregnancy and childbirth. Their children are more likely than children born to older women to have high mortality and morbidity, poor nutritional outcomes, and lower overall development and school readiness by the age of 6. As a result, failure to reduce the prevalence of early marriage and early pregnancies will significantly hinder Zambia's prospects for human capital accumulation, productivity, and economic growth.

Demographic change matters for human development and poverty reduction, and to create the potential for a demographic

Figure 4. Conceptual Framework



dividend, Zambia will need to first accelerate its demographic transition (box 1). Zambia is a pre-demographic dividend country with only a very few countries lagging behind it (World Bank 2016). Making progress on the demographic transition is a necessary step for poverty reduction. This will require investments in health, education, and other determinants of fertility and mortality which in turn will improve the human development outcomes and open up opportunities to make larger investments in human capital and open economic opportunities. A changing age structure with a smaller share of young dependents compared to working-age adults combined with policies to improve education, employment, and governance can bring transformative changes to Zambia and its economy.

Conceptual Framework

Together with other policies that address high fertility, reducing child marriage and teenage pregnancy can contribute significantly to the fertility declines needed to accelerate this demographic transition and ultimately create better life outcomes for adolescent girls, better opportunities for the next generation, and the potential to harness a demographic dividend. As illustrated in figure 4, the conceptual framework for this series of policy briefs acknowledges the complex, bidirectional nature of the relationships that exist among child marriage and teenage pregnancies; the opportunities for adolescent girls to access adequate-quality education, jobs or livelihoods, and health and nutrition; and the social and cultural norms that prevail and the legal and policy framework in place. It also posits that positive changes in

opportunities and norms can lead to delayed marriage and pregnancy among adolescent girls and foster better opportunities for the next generation.

This series of policy briefs focuses on four key areas for action (or pillars):

- *Pillar 1.* Keeping girls in school
- *Pillar 2.* Equipping out-of-school girls with skills
- *Pillar 3.* Beginning a family and adopting a healthy lifestyle
- *Pillar 4.* Addressing the early childhood development needs of children born to teenage mothers.

The first three pillars focus on delaying marriage and pregnancy and ensuring that adolescent girls have a healthy pregnancy if they do become pregnant. The fourth pillar focuses on the specific needs of children born to teenage mothers as a way to promote better opportunities for the next generation, while allowing teenage mothers to engage in further education or skill-building opportunities. Under each of the four pillars, the series includes two policy briefs: one that documents the current situation and trends in Zambia and one that summarizes the global evidence on what has worked to promote positive impacts in this particular area.

References

- Bhalotra, Sonia. 2010. "Fatal Fluctuations? Cyclicalities in Infant Mortality in India." *Journal of Development Economics* 93 (1): 7–19.
- Canning, David, Sangeeta Raja, and Abdo S. Yazbeck. 2015. *Africa's Demographic Transition: Dividend or Disaster?* Washington, DC: World Bank.
- Gribble, James N., and Jason Bremner. 2012. "Achieving a Demographic Dividend." *Population Bulletin* 67 (2). Population Reference Bureau, Washington, DC.

- Naudeau, Sophie, Wendy Cunningham, Mattias Lundberg, and Linda McGinnis. 2008. "Programs and Policies That Promote Positive Youth Development and Prevent Risky Behaviors: An International Perspective." *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development; Special issue: Core Competencies to Prevent Problem Behaviors and Promote Positive Youth Development* 122 (Winter): 75–87.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2011. *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*. New York: Population Division.
- World Bank. 2006. *World Development Report 2007: Development and the Next Generation*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2011. *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 2014. *Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*. Washington, DC: World Bank.
- . 2016. *Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016: Development Goals in an Era of Demographic Change*. Overview booklet. World Bank, Washington, DC.



© 2015 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank. Some rights reserved. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this work do not necessarily reflect the views of The World Bank, its Board of Executive Directors, or the governments they represent. The World Bank does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work. This work is subject to a CC BY 3.0 IGO license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo>). The World Bank does not necessarily own each component of the content. It is your responsibility to determine whether permission is needed for reuse and to obtain permission from the copyright owner. If you have questions, email pubrights@worldbank.org.

SKU K8494