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Economic Commission for Africa

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VIRTUAL THINK TANKS AND EXPERTS GROUP MEETING

Theme:

**Generational Economy and Structural
Transformation in COVID-19 Era in West Africa**

24-25 November 2020

CONCEPT NOTE



1. Background

The Economic Commission for Africa Sub-regional Office for West Africa (ECA/SRO-WA) was mandated to host the Specialized Centre on Demographic Dynamics for Development (DDD) to contribute to the generation of data, knowledge and policies to address the severe population challenges faced by many African countries. The Covid-19 pandemic brought further disruption to African countries which were already facing structural vulnerabilities. The 2020 Virtual Think Tanks and Experts Group Meeting will thus be an important opportunity for ECA/SRO-WA to affirm its role and capacity to conduct in-depth analysis on the population dynamics and development linkages, investigate the implications of the Covid-19 crisis for demographic dynamics, and propose analytical tools to mainstream demographic dividend in development policies and plans at national and regional levels in the West Africa region.

The theme of the 2020 Think Tanks and Experts Group Meeting, to be held on **24-25 November 2020** is “**Generational economy and structural transformation in COVID 19 era in West Africa**”.

The choice of this theme is a way for ECA/SRO-WA to underline the particularly acute demographic challenges in West Africa and to highlight the close connection between population dynamics and the sustainable development objectives that countries are pursuing; with the risk that the covid-19 pandemic could divert efforts away from population policies. It is important to stress that human well-being equitably shared by all people today and in the future, and compatible with the environment and the protection of nature, is at the heart of the sustainable development goals expressed in agenda 2030. Given the many challenges associated with population dynamics in West Africa compounded by the adverse effects of the Covid-19 crisis, achieving the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development and the 2063 agenda for Africa’s aspirations for the future will require a better understanding of the demographic transformations of the region and policies that are essential to the attainment of demographic dividend such as access to quality and affordable health and social protection, quality education and job opportunities for the youth.

With an estimated population of about 391.4 million at mid-2019, West Africa is one of the fastest growing sub-regions of the world.¹ Unlike many regions of the world experiencing decreased population growth, West Africa is still witnessing rapid increase in its population accounting for 5.1 per cent of world population and 30 per cent of Africa’s population. Between 2019 and 2050,

¹ The background document ***Population Dynamics, Demographic Dividends and Sustainable Development in West Africa*** is the main source of the statements and statistics in this concept note.



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eight West African countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Senegal, Togo and The Gambia – will need to prepare for a doubling of their population. Niger’s population is projected to nearly triple by 2050.

While there has been a consistent decline in the population growth in West Africa partly explained by reduced fertility rates, progress is still slow compared to other regions and sub-regions of the world. As for the 2015-2020 period, the total fertility rate of the region has fallen to 5.18 compared to 6.9 between 1975 and 1980 suggesting a low fertility decline. Total fertility rates in most West African countries are estimated to remain among the highest in the world with a prevalence of stalling of fertility in 2020. As a result, West Africa presents the slowest demographic transition in Africa.

Population dynamics varying across countries and regions may represent opportunities and risks. On the one hand, a rapid growth of population leading to a significant youth bulge and limited job opportunities could prevent a large proportion of the population from contributing to and benefiting from economic growth. Besides, every aspect of the sustainable development goals including consumption, production, employment, access to infrastructures, social services, health, education, housing, water, food and energy is influenced by population trends. Climate change and environmental challenges stemming from pressures on the planet’s resources are also exacerbated by population growth.

On the other hand, population dynamics if well managed could help countries to reap demographic dividend resulting from the large concentration of the population in the working age range as countries go through demographic transition and make critical investments in education, health and job-generating sectors. This implies that the prospects of the age structure of the population need to be well-harnessed to enjoy the economic benefits of population changes. In addition to having one of the youngest populations in the world, the proportion of the population in the working ages in West Africa is growing faster than in other age groups, creating a window of opportunity for rapid economic growth, if appropriate investments are made. Equally important and related to population dynamics are migration and urbanisation which can be a powerful engine of sustainable development.

As the challenges pertaining to population dynamics in West Africa cannot be dissociated from the challenges of sustainable development embedded in Agenda 2030 and the tremendous disruption to this policy agenda owing to the Covid-19 crisis, it will be fundamental that countries embark on population policies or reinforce their existing strategies with innovative evidence-based research and analysis. The challenge is to align the needs resulting from the rapid population change with the production and consumption changes that the sustainable development involves.



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This will include, but not limited to, the formulation and implementation of policies that will accelerate and help realise a demographic bonus; investment in digital skills and technology to promote virtual learning; improvement of productivity and job creation; encouragement of family planning; investment in reproductive health services and in women's empowerment; adoption of environment-friendly consumption behaviour.

2. Objectives

The objective of the 2020 virtual Think Tanks and Experts Group Meeting is to explore the link between population dynamics and sustainable development and to identify ways to align population changes in West Africa along with the sustainable development goals. Emphasis will be put on the covid-19 pandemic and its likely adverse impact on demographic dynamics and drivers of a demographic dividend.

Specifically, the meeting intends to:

- Analyse the population dynamics and demographic dividend paths in West Africa and set priorities to address population challenges in the region amid the covid-19 pandemic;
- Present evidence-based analysis of the socio-economic impacts of covid-19 in West Africa from a generational economy perspective;
- Facilitate exchange of experiences, lessons learned and good practices between countries on effective population policies which would contribute to sustainable development;
- Identify effective solutions and support countries to address the interconnected challenges of population dynamics and sustainable development.

3. Expected value-addition and outcomes of the meeting

The following outcomes are expected to be achieved

- Key demographic dynamics and demographic dividend challenges and prospects in West Africa analysed
- The socio-economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on population dynamics and SDGs performance assessed;
- Key messages and recommendations spelled out to inform the formulation of evidence-based population policies, strategies and programmes.

The meeting's recommendations will be submitted to the participants for validation. Those conclusions and recommendations will be submitted to the 23rd Session of the Intergovernmental Committee of Experts (ICE23) of West Africa for endorsement and implementation by the Member



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States. Ultimately, comments, amendments and contributions from the meeting will inform the final version of the report on the knowledge products.

4. Structure of the meeting

The virtual meeting will be held as a two-day event prior to the Intergovernmental Committee of Senior Officers and Experts (ICE). Presentations and communications are planned to be delivered by ECA staff, researchers from Think Tanks working on Demographic Dynamics for Development issues, experts from ECOWAS Member States, representatives of the Regional Economic Communities and Intergovernmental Organizations of West Africa.

The proposed structure of the meeting is as follows:

- Opening session;
- Key address on Generational economy and structural transformation in COVID-19 era;
- Communications on the Socio-Economic Impact of Covid-19 on West Africa: regional analysis and country cases;
- Communications on Demographic Dividend, Structural Change and Sustainable Development in West Africa;
- Summary of key messages and recommendations of the meeting to be transmitted to the Member States.
- Closing session

5. Target audience

The Think Tanks and Experts Group meeting will gather a broad range of stakeholders comprising researchers, experts from Member States, representatives of the Regional Economic Communities and Intergovernmental Organizations of West Africa, policymakers, practitioners, academics, NGOs, and relevant UN agencies. Representatives of the private sector and civil society active in the field of population policies in the sub-region will also be present.

6. Date and logistics

The Think Tanks and Experts Group Meeting will be a virtual event that will take place from November 24 to 25, 2020. The ECA Office for West Africa, will facilitate the logistics. Further details on other administrative arrangements will be provided in the information note to the participants.



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All participants are invited to confirm their participation by **22 October 2020** and to provide the ECA West Africa Bureau with all the required information to facilitate the organization of the logistics.

7. Contacts

Confirmation of participations by e-mail, as well as the transmission of all necessary information, must be sent to Ms. Zara SANI Email: saniz@un.org; Tel.: +227 20 72 73 00 Fax: +227 20 72 28 94 and copied Mr. Ismael ISSIFOU Email: ismael.issifou@un.org and Ms. Sidzanbnoma Nadia Denise Ouedraogo Email: ouedraogo49@un.org