

## CONFERENCE REPORT



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# THE SECOND CHINA-AFRICA CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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South-South Cooperation for Population and Development and  
Achievement of Demographic Dividend in Africa

8-10 July 2018

Guangzhou, China

## Table of Content

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	2
2. INTRODUCTION.....	5
2.1 BACKGROUND.....	5
2.2 ABOUT THE REPORT.....	6
3. PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.....	10
3.1 DAY ONE-SUNDAY, 8 JULY 2018 - CONFERENCE PREPARATORY MEETING.....	10
3.2 DAY TWO – MONDAY, 9 JULY 2018.....	11
SESSION 1: OPENING CEREMONY.....	11
SESSION 2: EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES IN REALISING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND.....	14
SESSION 3: POLICIES FOR HARNESSING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND.....	17
SESSION 4: DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN A MIGRATION AND AGEING CONTEXT.....	19
SESSION 5: YOUTH AND ADOLESCENT SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY.....	22
SESSION 6: REALIZING AND MAXIMISING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND.....	24
3.3 DAY THREE – TUESDAY, 10 JULY 2018.....	27
SESSION 7: POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR ACHIEVING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND.....	27
SESSION 8: MIGRATION AND GENDER WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND.....	30
SESSION 9: CLOSING CEREMONY.....	32
4. OUTCOME DOCUMENT OF THE CONFERENCE.....	33
PREAMBLE.....	33
CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS FOR AFRICA.....	36
EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FROM CHINA.....	38
PROPOSED RESOLUTIONS AND ACTIONS.....	40
Annex 1: Conference Programme.....	43
Annex 2: List of participants.....	49

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The second high-level China-Africa Conference on Population and Development was held in Guangzhou city of China from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018. The National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China, China Population and Development Research Center, China Population Association and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) hosted the conference jointly, with local coordination supported by Guangdong Provincial Health and Family Planning Commission, and China South Medical University. It aimed to reinforce consensus and strengthen South-South Collaboration (SSC) between China and Africa on population and development issues.

The second China-Africa conference reiterated the resolutions adopted at the first China-Africa Conference on Population and Development held in Nairobi during 18-19 April 2017. It reflected on policy priorities, shared goals and capacity strengthening to harness sustained demographic dividend in Africa, and embracing the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the roadmap outlined in African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 with a reflection on the broader vision of the 'Africa We Want'.

The conference adopted the theme "South-South cooperation for population and development and achievement of demographic dividend in Africa", reflecting on experiences and lessons from China. The deliberations of the conference were summarised as an outcome document, and ratified by participants representing various government, think-tank and academic institutions from China and Africa.

The outcome document adopted in the conference acknowledged that there is no "one size fits all" solution for national efforts to achieve demographic dividend. While the Chinese framework focused on education, employment, empowerment and equity, the experiences of African countries tended to focus on four pillars of population and development: health and wellbeing; employment and entrepreneurship; education and skill development; and rights, governance and youth empowerment.

The presentations focused on sharing China's experiences, policies, best practices and challenges related to accelerating the demographic window of opportunity for economic growth. Current and future challenges in sustaining the demographic dividend including issues related to population ageing, low fertility, migration and urbanisation were examined using historical

and current data in a changing family planning policy context. High population mobility in China contributed to effective allocation of labour resources and improved labour productivity. Labour mobility across different geographical regions and urbanisation acted as catalysts for job creation, high labour force participation rates and economic development. The meeting discussed the development of new policies such as the “Healthy China 2030” with strategies focused on improving health and wellbeing of older people and retaining a cadre of experienced elderly human resources for boosting economic productivity and social development. China has been proactive in introducing more policies focused on older population to meet the healthcare needs and demands, promote long-term care insurance systems and services, create an elderly friendly environment and establish a policy system for human resource development.

Africa, on the other hand, is confronted with significant demographic challenges. The pace of demographic transition in Africa is rather slow in most countries, and uncertain and complex in a few conflict and post-conflict countries. Despite improvements in child mortality rates and population life expectancy, fertility rates continue to remain very high across the continent. Realizing a demographic dividend requires multi-sectoral interventions and economic investment. Young people need opportunities to gain appropriate quality education, skills and experience to succeed in a competitive global job market – which demands more knowledge, skills, competency and technical expertise. Dividends will be constrained without simultaneous investments in decent job creation, good governance, infrastructure and enabling business environment.

If societies are able to productively engage young people entering working age, this can boost economic growth, and because there are relatively few dependents, countries can increase their investments in economic and human capital, generating a virtuous cycle of social and economic development. Effective family planning, sexual and reproductive health programmes focused on adolescents and youth can decelerate fertility rates, which in turn can create a demographic window of opportunity favourable for social and economic development.

Among other challenges, Africa needs significant investment and policy interventions to reduce illiteracy rates, such as compulsory education systems ensuring gender equality at different levels in schools and universities; strengthening technical and vocational training for developing youth life skills; education reform and leadership training to create communication channels across the whole education system and offering adequate training to teachers. All of the above goals aim to cultivate globally competitive, qualified and skilled labour force who can

meet market demands.

The suggestions to boost employment include multiple interventions. For example, investment in economic development sectors to equip future employees with basic skills and sustainable employment opportunities; strategies to reduce unemployment and underemployment through robust economic policies; gender equality in employment and related policymaking; and social insurance and pension system with the labour force in informal economic sectors.

It is also equally important to maintain gender equality in education by changing traditional social norms and behaviours, and empower the youth and women in policy making to realize an inclusive, participatory, accountable and transparent political participation. The youth and women should be prepared to lead and seize opportunities to make meaningful economic and social contributions, and participate in the policy making towards fulfilling the 2063 Agenda.

The participants committed to further strengthen South-South collaboration, and maximize the opportunities under the newly established China South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund and other international cooperation platforms. The participants called for greater cooperation, knowledge exchange platforms, technical support, research and investment to collect, process and analyse quality population data for national and sub-national level planning. UNFPA representatives confirmed their commitment to promote and strengthen partnerships in population and development and offer technical support in experience sharing and capacity building.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 BACKGROUND

The United Nations projects Africa's population to grow almost exponentially throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century from 1.2 billion in 2017 to 2.5 billion by 2050 and to about 4.5 by the end of the century. There is evidence of demographic transition in Africa, rather slow-paced in most countries, and uncertain and complex in a few conflict and post-conflict countries. The higher representation of children and youth in the population poses significant challenges for socioeconomic development, and the benefits of current economic growth have been uneven in Africa with little or no significant improvement in living conditions.

A rapid decline in fertility can potentially shift the age structure of the population and can increase the share of working age population. The resulting demographic dividend is not an automatic process of demographic change; it rather results from the empowerment, education and employment of young people who move into working age. With appropriate investment in human and social capital, African countries have the potential to harness the demographic dividend and attain a sustainable economic growth in the future.

Realizing a demographic dividend requires multi-sectoral interventions and economic investment. Young people need opportunities to gain appropriate quality education, skills and experience to succeed in a competitive global job market - which demands more knowledge, skills, competency and technical expertise. Dividends will be constrained without simultaneous investments in decent job creation, good governance, infrastructure and enabling business environment. If societies are able to productively engage young people entering working age, then it can boost economic growth, and because there are relatively few dependents, countries can increase their investments in economic and human capital, generating a virtuous cycle of social and economic development.

At the sixth Joint Annual Conference of the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Economic

Commission for Africa (UNECA) held in 2013, experts and policy makers from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Economic Development of African countries affirmed the huge potential of demographic dividend in African countries.

In 2015, the AU adopted “Agenda 2063”, a long-term strategic framework for socioeconomic transformation and sustainable development for the continent and enable creation of a regionally integrated, peaceful and prosperous Africa in the next 50 years. Later, the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> AU Summits held in 2017, highlighted demographic dividend and the need for investment in the youth to drive African development. The vision “Africa We Want” embraced under Agenda 2063 aspires for an “integrated, people-centered, and prosperous Africa, at peace with itself” - leaving no one behind, reflecting particularly on inclusive growth and sustainable development. It called for a people-driven development addressing the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children; and an Africa as a strong, united, resilient, and influential global player and partner.

China has already completed a demographic transition and experienced sustained economic growth for over the last four decades. The Chinese experience clearly demonstrates that the window of opportunity created by demographic transition can be turned into a demographic dividend, only if combined with appropriate economic reforms, investment, social development policies, governance and stability. While the Chinese model of population and development may not be transferable in other settings, it does offer lessons and opportunities for Africa to develop coherent policies and investment strategies for harnessing sustainable demographic dividend.

## 2.2 ABOUT THE REPORT

The second China-Africa Conference on Population and Development was held in Guangzhou city of China from 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> July 2018. The National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China, China Population and Development Research Center (CPDRC), China Population Association and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) hosted the conference jointly with local coordination supported by Guangdong Provincial Health and Family Planning Commission, and China South Medical University.

The second China-Africa conference adopted the theme “South-South Cooperation and Achievement of Demographic Dividend in Africa” with the following aims:

- to review and discuss the challenges and prospects related to demographic dividend in Africa, reflecting on China’s experiences and lessons in harnessing and managing the demographic dividend;
- to address the specific population and development issues within the context of demographic dividend vis-a-vis adolescents and youth, reproductive health and reproductive rights, education, skills and employment, gender and the impact of population ageing;
- to discuss the multi-sectoral strategies and policy solutions to harnessing demographic dividend in Africa, reflecting on experiences and best practices from China and elsewhere;
- to share experiences and technical knowledge on population data management and research methods, and in particular strategies of producing high quality evidence for policy impact and programme interventions;
- to reinforce consensus and strengthen South-South Collaboration between China and Africa on population and development.

The second conference was a follow-up to the first China-Africa Conference on Population and Development held in Nairobi during 18-19 April 2017 and hosted by the National Council for Population and Development of the Government of Kenya. The Nairobi conference highlighted

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