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Demographic Dividend in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA): A Far-Fetched Dream?

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Abstract

This research was set out to assess whether 'demographic dividend' is a far-fetched dream for most countries in Sub Saharan Africa. To achieve this aim, the research draws from a wide range of secondary sources, including data from publications as well as past research and evidence gathered from this study shows that the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region is still at the early stage of demographic transition thereby lagging when compared to other regions. The research concluded by aligning with the position that achieving demographic dividend may be a far-fetch dream for most countries in the Sub Saharan African region. Some policy recommendations were made with key emphasis on education, dulling out of modern and safe contraception, bridging the gap of gender inequality and investing in social amenities.

Keywords: Demographic dividend, Demographic transition, Population Theory, East Asian Miracle, Sub-Saharan Africa

1. Introduction

Demographic dividend is the window of opportunity presented whenever the working-age population group is exceeding the dependent groups (which include children and old people), with both fertility and mortality falling (Elhadary, Abdelatti, & Nour, 2018). This process of moving from one age structure in a population to another is what is regarded as demographic transition. Demographic dividend ensures socio-economic gains are attained, as there would be more savings, which would lead to more investments and eventually economic progress. This is to say that a large population or a small population is not the problem, but the age structure of the population.

This shift in literature to the study of the age structure of a population and development was inspired by the economic success recorded in East Asian countries in the last five decades, despite their high population growth. It was recorded that this was possible because the population make-up was very high for those within working ages and very low for infants and older people (Elhadary, Abdelatti, & Nour, 2018). There was a slowdown in infertility as well as mortality in these countries. This is exactly what we referred to above, as demographic dividend. This research, therefore, sets out to analyse the situation of demographic dividend in Sub-Saharan Africa

1.1. Problem Statement

Population projections estimate that Africa will double its current population by 2050 (Cardona C., et al., 2020). However, the population below age 25 is projected to account for more than half of this total projected population (WPP, 2020). This population projection, especially which of its youth could be good bad news depending on how policymakers in the region approach the situation. There is no doubt that manpower is Africa's greatest resource which if well handled, would boost the region's economy and stimulate economic development, but what happens if this youth bulge is left unattended. Thus, this research sets out to contribute to the literature by investigating the extent to which Sub-Saharan Africa can benefit from demographic dividend.

1.2. Research Objectives

This research is set out to achieve two specific objectives:

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- To investigate the extent to which Sub-Saharan Africa is set to achieve demographic dividend
- To assess whether the region can benefit from the window of opportunity that demographic transition presents
- To assess whether there are effective policies geared towards attaining demographic dividend

2. Material and Methods

This research takes the approach of a critical review of past work. It reviewed all materials related to the topic which includes, investigation of previous research, as well as an evaluation of secondary data from World Bank publications, OECD, and UNDESA. The indicators of interest on this topic are Mortality rate, fertility rates, population and age structure, the population of working age, dependency ratio, education, and GDP per capita. The data and graphs were analysed by the author within the context of the research objectives. The papers used in the discussion were sourced from a wide range of databases including, Science Direct, Ebsco host, and google scholar.

3. Literature Analysis

Several decades ago, there was a fear that a growing population means a growing disaster for any economy. This was the idea of Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, where he postulated that while population grows in geometric progression, resources grow arithmetically thus, it would get to a point where resources available would become inadequate to cater for the growing population (Elhadary, Abdelatti, & Nour, 2018). Nonetheless, this theory has been invalidated by the stories of the East Asian Miracle which happened in the 1950s and 60s. This miracle was that even in the face of a growing population, the region was able to triumph and achieve economic progress, differing the theory of Malthus on population and growth. The discussions around these have been well explained in a previous unpublished policy report by Onyekwere (2020) submitted to the University of Portsmouth UK, which is adapted for the explanations provided below.

Since the miraculous economic growth of the East Asian giants like Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and China occurred despite high population growth, there has been a shift in the understanding of how population affects economic progress. Earlier theories state that a growing population would mean an increase in the consumption of finite resources, which would doom the world. This was the theory put forward by Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus in 1798 (Elhadary, Abdelatti, & Nour, 2018). But obviously, this was not the case for these East Asian countries. Many studies documented in Elhadary, Abdelatti, & Nour (2018) reveal that the secret to the East Asian Miracle was in the age structure of their population. Thus, they opine that the characteristics of people in a population are even more important to development than the size of a population. This is to say that a large population or a small population is not the problem, but the age structure of the population. Age structure deals with the classification of people in a population according to age group. This shift to the study of the age structure of population and development debate was inspired by the economic success recorded in East Asian countries in the last five decades, despite their high population growth. It was recorded that this was possible because the population make-up was very high for those within working ages and very low for infants and older people. There was a slowdown in infertility as well as mortality in the countries. This is exactly what is referred to as demographic dividend.

Demographic dividend thus ensures socio-economic gains are attained (as there would be more savings, which would lead to more investments and eventually economic progress) but this does not happen without deliberate policies geared towards taking advantage of the demographic transition (changing population age structure).

4. Discussions

Haven analysed the existing theory from the case of the East Asian countries, the question now is whether the Sub-Saharan African countries could repeat the story of the East Asians. That is, whether there are policies geared towards taking advantage of the demographic transition? These are issues that this research addresses.

4.1. Some Evidence to show that SSA can achieve Demographic Dividend

For clarity, countries that belong to the Sub-Saharan African region are placed in figure 1.

Figure 1. List of Sub-Saharan African Countries
Source: (The World Bank, 2021)

It has been projected by scholars and indeed many other development agencies such as the World Bank that by the year 2100 the world as a whole will have an increase in population to the tune of about 4 billion more persons, out of which 3.2 billion is estimated to come from Africa (see table 1.) It is also estimated that the population within the working-a group will increase by 2.1 billion over the same time frame, compared to a net global increase of 2 billion (Drummond, Thakoor, & Yu, 2014). Further evidence from the work of Drummond, Thakoor, & Yu (2014) indicates that there has been declining mortality and fertility in the SSA countries (although still very high compared to other regions of the world) thus, Africa's share of the working-age will increase from about 54 per cent to peak at about 64 per cent. Figures 2, 3 and 4 below show the declining mortality and fertility rates, as well as the massive increase in population within the working-age group

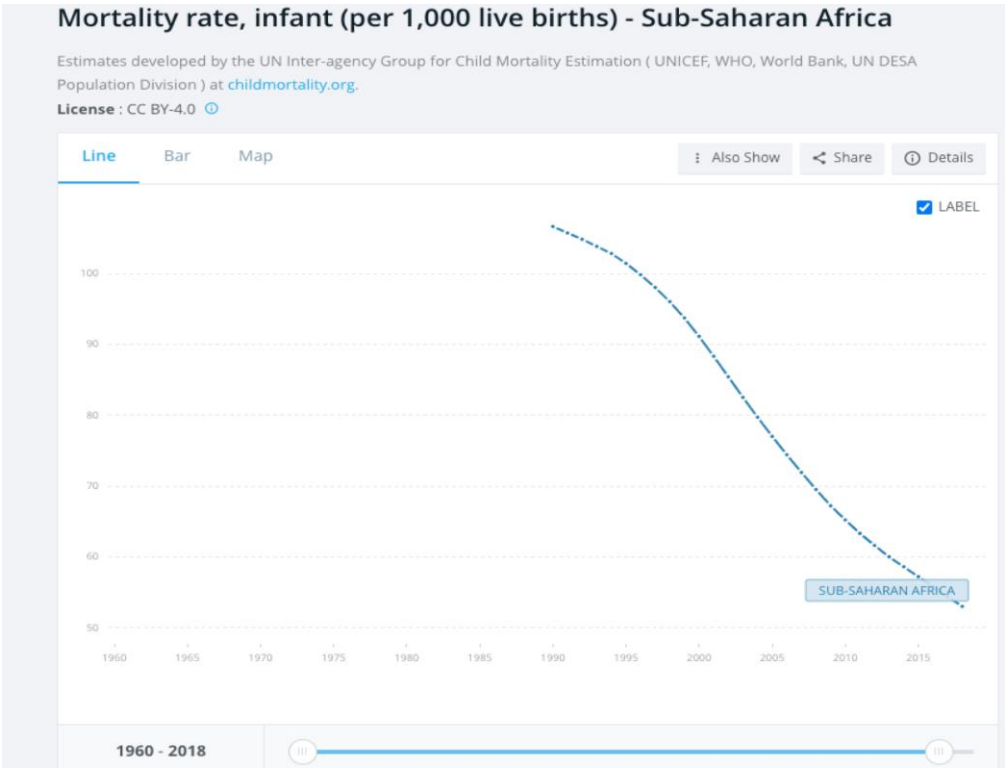

Figure 2. The Mortality in SSA region
Source: (The World Bank, 2021)

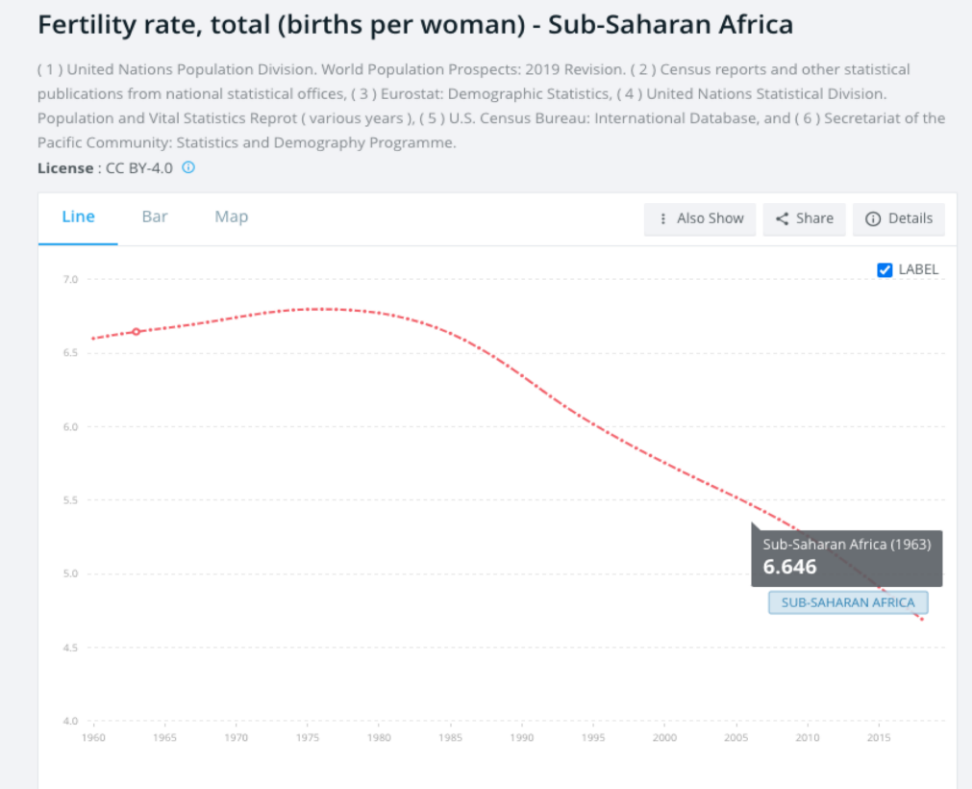

Figure 3. Fertility Rates for SSA
Source: (The World Bank, 2021)

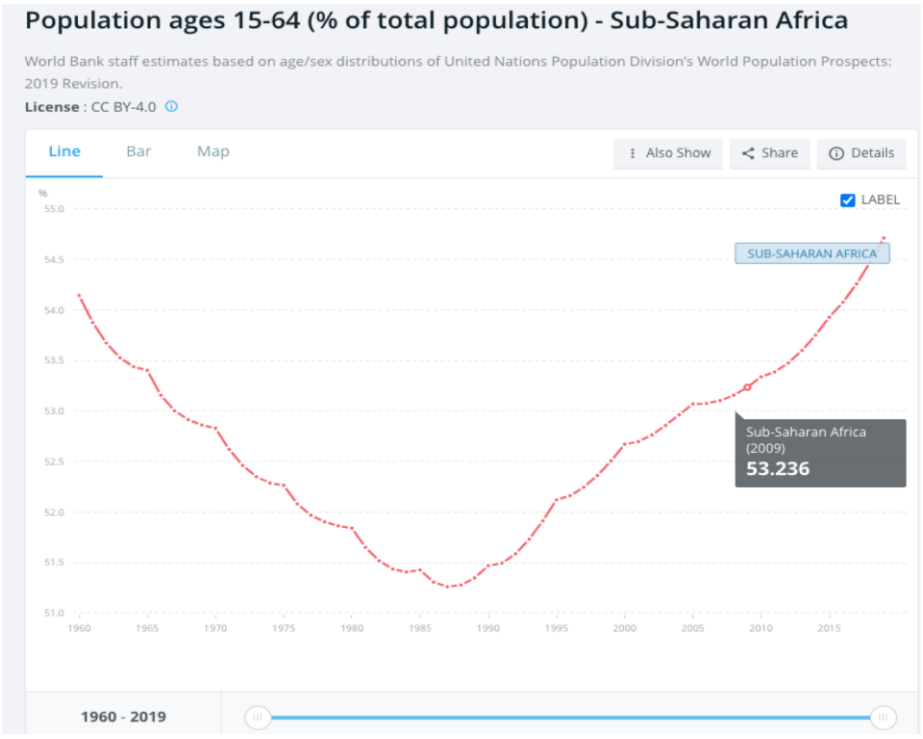

Figure 4. The population of Working Age
Source: (The World Bank, 2021)

Thus, these three pieces of evidence (declining mortality and fertility and increasing working age group population) satisfies the criteria for a country or region set for demographic dividend as specified in Elhadary, Abdelatti, & Nour, (2018). There is no doubt that the rising share of Africa's working-age population will increase its productive potential at this time when most of the advanced economies face an ageing population. Thus, there is evidence that the SSA region is set to reap the benefits of demographic dividend but the question remains whether there is the capacity to take advantage of this window.

Drummond, Thakoor, & Yu (2014) maintain that Africa's share of the global working-age population is thus further projected to increase from about 12.6 per cent in 2010 to over 41 per cent by 2100 (Drummond, Thakoor, & Yu, 2014). The magnitude of these demographic developments will be transformational for Africa and will also have major implications for the global economy (Drummond, Thakoor, & Yu, 2014). Central to all these figures and projections of Africa population growth in Sub-Saharan Africa. The SSA region accounts for a greater percentage of the continent's entire population. It is also lacking in the developmental index compared to other regions. This then means that with the projected population growth, the SSA is likely to contribute a greater percentage of it thereby exacerbating already overstretched health, education, and economic challenges if the potential of demographic dividend is not harnessed.

Table 1. Rising Africa Population

	Total population (bn)			*Working age population (bn)*		
	2010	2100	Change	2010	2100	Change
World	6.9	10.9	4.0	4.5	6.5	2.0
Africa	1.0	4.2	3.2	0.6	2.7	2.1
Africa/World (percent)	14.9	38.5		12.6	41.2	

Source: Adapted from Drummond, Thakoor, & Yu, (2014)

As noted earlier, there is an increasing recognition that beyond a population's overall size, its age structure is of great economic significance. In agreement with this, is Bloom, Canning, & Sevilla (2003), where it was noted that an increase in the share of the working-age population increases labourer supply and growth potential, thereby contributing to a demographic dividend (Drummond, Thakoor, & Yu, 2014). Galor (2005) explains that the increased working-age population and a resulting decline in dependency ratio causes an increase in output, savings, and investment. Such a demographic transition is often considered as the key driver of the Asian miracle (Bloom et al., 2000; Mason, 2001).

To put it into perspective, Cilliers (2018) opines that demographic dividend refers to a window of opportunity that opens when the working-age population (between 15 and 64 years of age) of a country is larger than the dependent population (below 15 and above 64 years of age) (Cincotta, n.d). From the pieces of evidence presented so far from the World Bank statistics on the figures and table, it can be said that the SSA region is to a great extent, meeting the demographic conditions necessary for demographic dividend. Nonetheless, the report in WPP (2020) indicates that only 34 out of 48 SSA countries have embarked on this population transition stage and that this window will remain open until 2050. Thus, there is an indication that not all count in SSA Africa will experience demographic dividend. But the majority are found to be meeting up with the criteria, as the 34/48 reported in WPP (2020) is more than 70% of the total number of countries.

4.2. Barriers to Sub-Saharan Africa's Path to Demographic Dividend

WPP (2020) maintains that Africa has shown a much slower demographic transition than other regions, which is a result of t poor policies addressing fertility and mortality. It is evident in the same report that countries or regions that have been unable to progress rapidly through the transition have struggled to address severe poverty and large disease burdens. The report explains that demographic features or characteristics of the early stages of the demographic transition structurally constrain the ability to reduce poverty and improve livelihoods. Figure 5 below shows the stages in demographic transition which every country undergoes.

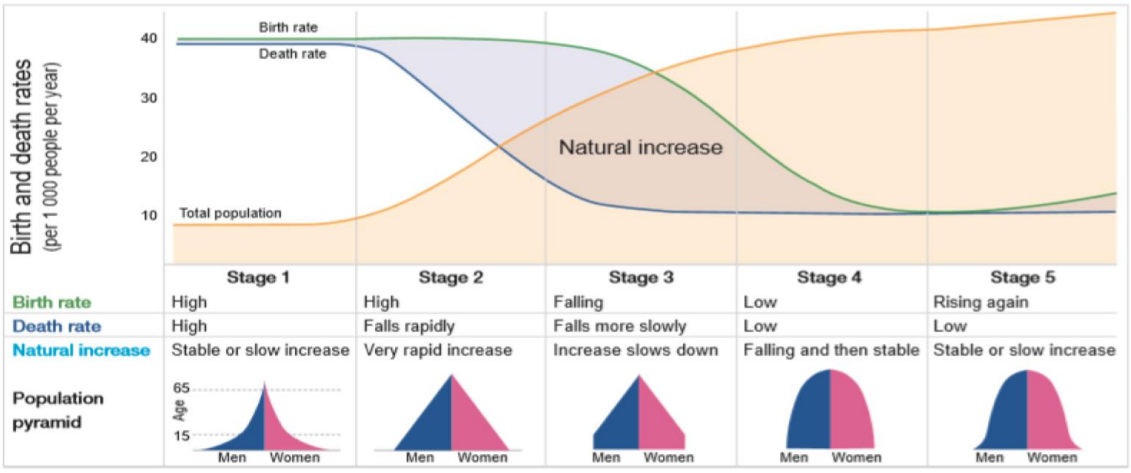

Figure 5. Stages of Demographic Transition
Source: (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2017)

Demographic dividend as explained earlier opens up a window that starts in stage 1 and progresses until stage 5. Elhadary, Abdelatti, & Nour (2018) Noted that the demographic dividend only la of 40 years after which, the window closes for the country or region. To harness the benefits produced by the demographic transition, countries require targeted investments in human, social, and physical capital (Bloom & Finlay, 2009; Bloom & Williamson, 1998; Bloom et al., 2007). The World Bank review categorized policies and programs required to achieve demographic dividen into three-time horizons which include, the short-term policies, the medium-term policies and the long-term policies. In the short- term, Cardona, et al. (2020) maintains that countries should catalyse the fertility transition. In the medium-term period, there should be a focus on ensuring that girls are educated, and that women are empowered; and the long-term period should be characterized by job creation and greater attention to pensions and savings (Cardona, et al., 2020).

Thus, it can be concluded from this reasoning that one of the major factors thmakekes SSA dream of harnessing demographic dividends a far-fetched dream is the high fertility rate still prevalent in some regions. This issue ranks at the very top on the challenges list to sustainable development and direct investment (Mueni, 2016). Presently, virtually all the countries in SSA either lack or have inadequate resources to substantially invest the right amount in their health and education sector, not to talk of increasing quality of existing services rendered which is poor (Mueni, 2016). It then becomes vital and strategic to free up scarce resources and plough back to the development of her young population. But central to this, is the need to reduce fertility. With the decrease in fertility, other problems equally fall (Mueni, 2016) and more resources freed up. Without a fertility decline, countries will face an ever-growing population base and ever-larger youth cohorts—and children will be further exposed to health risks, malnutrition, and lower public and private educational investments (Mueni, 2016).

There is a relationship between development and fertility rate. As stated by NBS (2006), households with smaller numbers of children are likely to be fairly better as compared with households with larger numbers of children (NBS, 2006). It is not surprising to see countries with the highest fertility rates like Chad, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria being amongst the poorest countries in the world (Omoju & Abraham, 2014). Conversely, regions or countries with relatively low fertility rate tend to be rich (Omoju & Abraham, 2014). Consistent with this line of argument is the empirical evidence from the work of Bloom et al (2009). The authors employed the demographic and health survey for 60 countries. Their finding shows that there is less dependency ratio in very rich countries, while the poor countries have a very high dependency ratio (Bloom D. E., Canning, Fink, & Finlay, 2009). Thus, to put it differently, it will remain a pipe dream for SSA to reap demographic dividends except fertility rates drop significantly.

Another factor that makes demography dividends a far-fetch dream for SSA is the poor and lack of formal education in the region. Some countries within the SSA show little or no commitment with regards the to education of the citizens. This is exemplified by sauch national government by not devoting adequate funding to the educational needs of her citizens to the minimum expected requirement especially by some of the United Nations Charters they signed to. In areas with relative funding for education, there exist yet some lapses. The implication of these is that the dream

of harnessing demographic dividends will become a mirage as the region will lose out on the optimal beneficial dividends associated with it that are capable of improving her economies. For example, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA),per centercent of the population aged 15 years and older completed primary school in 2010, while the SSA figure stands aper centpercent (Barro & Lee, 2013). Nevertheless, within the same period, for the number of people without formal education, the figure stands at 2 per cent and 32.2 percentages respectively for both regions (Barro & Lee, 2013).

It has been documented that about 95 million young people (men and women) do not have formal education, and are unemployed or in a low-paid job or even at some instance, withdrawn from the labor force in Africa (Garcia & Fares, 2008), out of which greater number of these people are domiciled in SSA. With labor being perhaps the most abundant resource the region has, it therefore becomes imperative to ensure that the youths get good educational development which can in turn help households move out of poverty. For example, in some countries such as Uganda, males earn about 30 percent higher for those with only primary education. For those with secondary education, the percentage is even much higher at 140 percent more than their counterparts without don't have primary education. These figures are much higher for the female, which is 49 and 150 percent respectively (Vilhuber, 2006).

As shown in figure 6 and 7 below, countries or regions as the case maybe with high illiteracy levels do also have low income per capita. Financial issues are indeed a key bottleneck for youths in Sub-Saharan African, thereby making them venture into the labor market most times unprepared. Studies have shown that their vulnerability to intergenerational poverty and economic predicaments increases as a result (Garcia & Fares, 2008; Oosterbeek & Patrinos, 2008). Youth who leave school early or never attend formal schooling systems rarely earn wages and often work in the informal sector – probably not maximizing their potential productivity had they completed school.

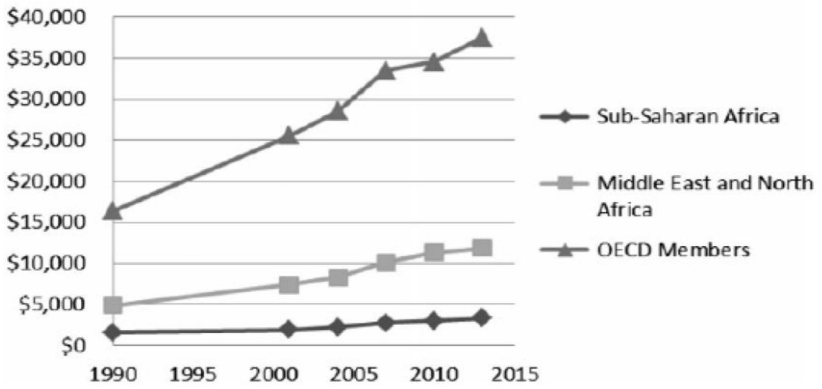

Figure 6. GDP Per Capita (US $)
Source: **(**OECD, 2008)

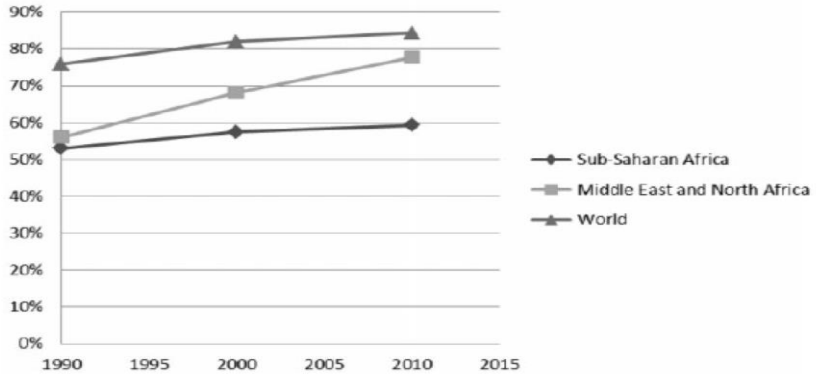

Figure 7. Adult (15+ years) Literacy Rate (%)
Source: (UNDESA, 2013)

According to a report by NASEM (2016) and the work of Sewamala (2015), financial institutions are tasked to promote a culture of savings and implement contractual savings to finance the education of children and youth. They state that the benefit of this comes in the form of savings which is transformed into domestic investments that will foster economic growth and development, or serve as a cushion to overcome the lack or limited availability of safety nets during periods of unemployment and old age (Canning et al., 2015).

There is a high rate of poverty in SSA over time. The increasing unemployment rate, corruption, poor economic policies, and abject lack of essential infrastructure have even further worsened the trend in the region. These problems have resulted in the young ones taking to social vices such as kidnapping, and prostitutes. Furthermore, there is a growing trend of religious extremism, especially along the Lake Chad Basin. This poses yet another challenge for the region to harness demographic dividends. Additionally, there is also high youth restiveness within the region especially in countries such as Sudan, Nigeria (as demonstrated by the recent End SARS campaign, this is even as the Niger Delta area of the country has remained restive for a long time now), Ugandan as shown by their just-concluded presidential election amongst others.

4.3. Favourable Policies and Factors Geared towards achieving Demographic Dividend in SSA

Although a plethora of available evidence has tended to suggest that it will remain a pipe dream for the SSA to harness demographic dividends, there still exist other key variables that go to show that indeed the region is on track to harness its demographic dividends.

Guengant & May (2013) state that, 'Political stability and the rule of law are part of good governance practices which help create a climate to attract foreign direct investments that will be catalysed to job creation and development'. They add that institutions have the capacity to support (or block) the development of policies to realize the growth potential created by the transition, and institutional quality is correlated with growth (Bloom et al., 1999). By these, one can say that Sub- Saharan Africa has made significant progress over the years with regards to political stability. It appears that the era of frequent military coups is over for the region. For example, Nigeria being the largest country in the region was notorious for its frequent military coups and regime from 1966 up to 1999. Since then, the country has remained under civilian rule. This is also the case for most other countries in the region. To this end, one can rightly say that the region is on the right track to harnessing its demography dividends.

Another area where SSA has shown that it is capable of harnessing its demography dividends is in the area of trade. The continent very recently had all the countries ratify the African Free Continental Trade Agreement (AFTA). According to Bloom & colleagues (2014), a carefully constructed trade policy is important. Evidence from East Asian countries shows that relatively open and competitive markets contributed to East Asia's financial success, while in Latin America, a closed economic policy limited poverty reduction efforts (Bloom et al., 2009; Canning et al., 2015). AFTA is yet another pointer to the fact the region can indeed harness the opportunity presented by its demography to reap its associated dividends.

Also, some countries such as Rwanda and Ghana, have managed to stabilize their economies, establish stronger institutions across sectors with remarkable effort to tackle corruption, and kept positive strides in political stability, family planning, maternal and child health, education, women empowerment and gender equality (AU, 2015; Canning, Raja, & Yazbeck, 2015; NASEM, 2016). This also goes to demonstrate that indeed other countries in the region can equally do likewise, thereby improving the overall potential of the region.

The term "economic dependent" is defined as children and elder people and in some countries women who are prohibited from working or taking part in any form of wage labour (Ssewamala, 2015). The Sub-Saharan African although currently accounting for the least developed region, region is endowed by the age structure of her demography with about 200 million people within the ages of 12 and 24, and thus accounting for about 28% of the region's population, thus making it the youngest region in the world (See Figure 8 above) (Garcia & Fares, 2008; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2013). This figure depicts that people in the dependency age bracket are minimal for the region although on aggregate level is worrisome as shown in Figure 9 above. Nevertheless, with this age structure, this research shares similar sentiment with that of Ssewamala (2015) that asserts that there are socially important and economic enticing opportunities for SSA to harness with increase in funding of education (Ssewamala, 2015). However, for Sub-Saharan African to reap the dividends which come from demography, the region will need to increase its savings culture, make a great sacrifice by reducing consumption per capita necessary for poverty reduction, attract significant foreign investment, as well as increase its human capital accumulation to leverage on the restructured economies. All these are achievable especially with the rising working-

age population share which offers a great opportunity for national savings to even go beyond consumption per capita increase (Ahmed, Cruz, Go, & Maliszewska, 2016).

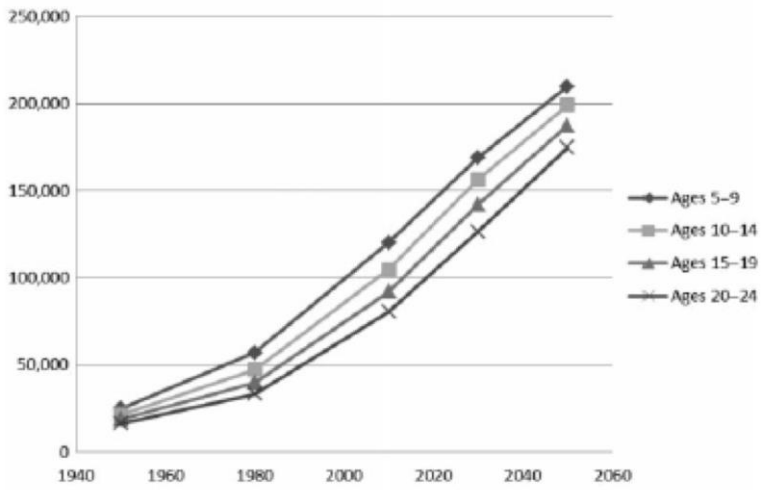

Figure 8. Age Structure of Sub-Saharan Africa
Source: (Ssewamala, 2015)

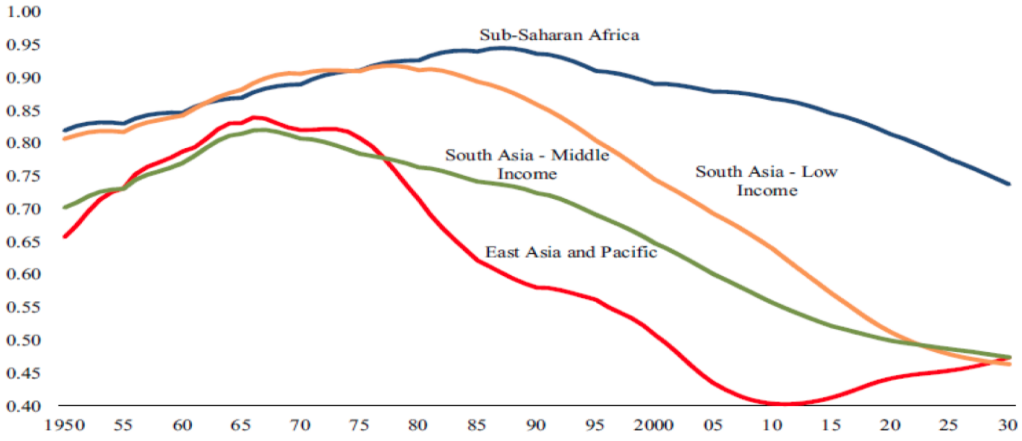

Figure 9. Dependency Ratio for Asia and SSA
Source: Adapted from Ahmed, Cruz, Go, & Maliszewska (2016)

5. Conclusion

This research has critically reviewed and discussed the issue of whether Sub-Saharan Africa can harness demography dividends. Findings show that the region is grasped with issues such as high unemployment rate, low literacy rate, poor funding, religious extremism, youth restiveness among others. Going forward, this research sums these challenges up as a bottleneck that is deterring the region from harnessing demographic dividends but noted that these problems are indeed surmountable. Nevertheless, this paper also examined some positivity gains the region has made, as well as other opportunities available at her disposal to harness her demographic dividends, and noted that there has been relative political stability in major parts of the region in recent years, and also, the nature of the age structure of the region which is favourable for active economic participation amongst other. Nonetheless, the challenges or the hindering factors to reap the benefits of demographic dividend in the region may outweigh the efforts the region is putting in to maximize these benefits. Thus, although available evidence adduces a mixed result, the hindering factors

appear to be more serious, as there are not enough intentional policies being put in place to take advantage of the demographic transition in the region. Consequently, this research has drawn inferences from all available evidence discussed so far, agreeing to the position that achieving opportunity demographic dividend may be a far-fetched dream for most countries in the SSA region.

6. Implication of Findings/Recommendations

This research has discussed the topic in detail, and from the conclusion reached goes further in proffering some policy recommendations which the Sub-Saharan African region need to implement. The key solution to most of these challenges enumerated above is education. With education, more people in Sub Saharan Africa can move into formal employment. With this, the Sub-Saharan Africa region will experience productivity increase and reduction of unemployment which will translate to growth. At a national level, education helps to improve competitiveness. Also, an educated labour force attracts better competitive production phases which have higher value-added. In a household, the issue of poverty as a result of unemployment can be reduced substantially. Furthermore, it can help reduce unwanted pregnancy in females with a better awareness of family planning. Additionally, with education workers can gain improved skills and knowledge to use more advanced technologies which will, in turn, result in improved efficiency levels in the market and thus, overall sustainable growth. The development of a more skilled labour force may also lower the unit cost for skilled workers and attract greater levels of foreign direct investment and higher wages for the employed (Ssewamala, 2015). This paper, therefore, makes the following policy recommendations;

- There is a need for countries in the region to rapidly dull out modern and safe contraception. The programme should be designed in a way that those already in need should get it while expanding the usage nationally.
- Greater attention should be paid to education on all levels with enormous resources devoted to the sector as well as good policies and regulations.
- There is a need to reduce or at least bridge the gap of gender inequality which is perverse in the region.
- Invest in social amenities such as clean water and a sanitized environment, as this helps to reduce the mortality rate for children and females, as well as enhances demographic dividend.

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