

Report

Expert Group Meeting in preparation for the 30th anniversary of the International Year of Family, 2024 Pretoria, South Africa, 23-25 January 2023

Demographic Changes and Family Wellbeing in Africa

The Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria in cooperation with the Focal Point on the Family, Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Doha International Family Institute (DIFI) and the International Federation for Family Development (IFFD) organised an Expert Group Meeting on “Demographic Changes and Family Wellbeing in Africa” held 23-25 January 2023 at the University of Pretoria in Pretoria, South Africa

The meeting was organized as part of the preparations for the thirtieth anniversary of the International Year of the Family, 2024 (IYF+30). The Expert Group Meeting addressed demographic trends and their impact on families in Africa. Interlinkages between demographic trends, urbanization and migration were also explored.

Summary of proceedings

Family in Africa

African Union’s Plan of Action on the Family, 2004

Although sociologically defined as a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption and characterized by a common residence constituting a household interacting and communicating with one another in their respective social roles and maintaining a common culture, family in Africa is mostly extended and kinships are very common. More recently there has been an increase in single-parent, child-headed and grandparent-headed families due to several factors including wars and conflict and the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Owing to its multiple roles and functions, the centrality, uniqueness, and indispensability of the family in society is unquestionable. Most people rely on their families in times of crisis, unemployment, sickness, poverty, and old age. The African family networks are then the primary mechanisms for coping in the face of social, economic, and political adversity on the continent. However, the family in Africa has been undergoing changes and faces formidable challenges linked to growing poverty, civil strife, and conflict as well as growing vulnerability.

It is then imperative to develop and implement social policies to address concerns faced by families. An integrated approach is needed placing the family at the centre of a comprehensive development agenda to sustain its integrity. To that effect a **Plan of Action on the Family in Africa** has been developed in 2004 as a contribution to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family. The main objective of the Plan was to advocate for the promotion, formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes to ensure the protection and support of the African family to enable it to play its vital role more effectively in the development of Africa.

The Plan of Action is to assist Member States to formulate, implement and monitor family policies; to create structures and mechanisms to respond to challenges facing families and to develop a Management Information System for data collection, analysis, utilization, dissemination, storage, and retrieval at all levels. Moreover, the Plan advocated for the upholding of the rights of women and girls and ensuring the well-being of vulnerable groups such as children, youth, older persons, displaced persons, and refugees. The Plan focused on poverty alleviation, rights to social services, water and sanitation, adequate shelter, and land ownership. Family is very visible in the **2063 Social Policy** document which highlights the role of the family vis a vis ageing and disability. Still, peace and security on the continent have captured the attention of the leaders and political will is needed to focus on the family.

Overall, the goal of the Plan of Action on the Family in Africa is to improve the quality of life of all families in Africa, however, the Plan needs to be reviewed and updated and its implementation status verified.

Family policies in Sub-Saharan Africa

Only 4 out of over 50 countries in Africa have **national family policy frameworks**, South Africa, Ghana, Rwanda, and Kenya. There are also several **Family Codes** in francophone countries including Mali, Benin, and Burkina Faso. There are also a lot of **implicit family policies** in Southern Africa, namely in Botswana, Mozambique, Zambia, and Lesotho. In West Africa there are plural legal systems concerning families, e.g., statutory, customary, and Islamic marriage in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In East Africa, there are five types of marriages in Uganda (church, customary, civil, Mohammedans and Hindu). In Tanzania the Law of the Child Act was introduced in 2009. In Central Africa a Code of Persons and the Family was introduced in 1993, while in Gabon the Civil Code considers husbands as heads of

households. Plural legal systems in existence are often contradictory, while mostly implicit family policies are group specific.

Demographic trends in North Africa

Political upheavals and economic instability impact demographic trends in the region. For instance, after political upheaval and the floating of the Egyptian pound, marriage rates in the country declined. The average age of women at marriage is rising but has been declining since 2005. Share of women married or in a union is also declining. Divorce is going up even though marriage rates are declining. In contrast to Sub-Saharan Africa, cohabitation in the Maghreb is very rare. Extended families prevail and help in times of crises. Overall, educated people are more likely to get married.

Divorce has been associated with many negative impacts, including higher rates of chronic diseases, lower longevity, worse mental health. Divorce also impacts housing demand and construction as it creates more demand for housing and impacts land allocation use, especially in urban areas., moreover it bears high litigation costs.

Divorce seems to be celebrated in popular culture, e.g., in songs. There is a perception of a culture of political and legal change encouraging people to divorce and discouraging marriage. Recently, the President of Egypt established a fund under his own supervision for people to contribute a substantive amount of money for future security. This illustrates the dilemma of democratic rule vis a vis authoritarian rule.

North Africa faces many other demographic challenges such as the decreased marriage rates due to economic hardship, personal preferences, and other structural factors. These challenges are accompanied by many missed opportunities to leverage on youth bulge and demographic dividend, where economic growth would be enhanced resulting from the larger share of the working-age population from the total population. However, the lack of proper governance and comprehensive development agendas turned these dynamics into missed opportunities.

Family formation

Measurement and analysis of family formation processes, parenthood, marriage, cohabitation, re-partnering, etc. is important as it helps us to understand family transitions, instability, structure, etc. it is vital for child and adult well-being, policy interventions targeted at providing resources to support those in need, implications for housing demand, equity in access to work and income, labour force participation access to work and income and access to social protection, etc.

Fertility rates in Sub-Saharan Africa have declined from 6.3 in 1990 to 4.6 in 2021 and are projected to go down to 3.0 by 2050 They are still the highest in the world. Although overall fertility rates are declining in Africa, adolescent fertility rate is the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa with serious health consequences for young mothers

and children. Although marriage provides protection from poverty, marrying too young is problematic.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the proportion of never married women aged 45-49 is high compared to other regions. Although marriage remains the norm, the proportion of married people is going down. This is due to higher education levels of women and high costs of marriage, including dowry payments. There has been an increase in cohabitation which is becoming a more acceptable form of partnership. It's very high in Southern Africa as compared to other subregions of Africa. Divorce is also on the rise, especially in Southern Africa.

As for household structure, the proportion of lone parent households is growing as well. Currently, 40.1 per cent of women live with children below one year of age.

Good practice

Many couples do not get married due to various challenges, among them a high cost of a wedding. Encouraging marriages is key in establishing an institution that will safeguard a conducive environment for upbringing children. **Re A Nyalana Association** (meaning 'we are getting married') promotes the institution of marriage and families and assists cohabiting couples to formalize their informal cohabitation relationships and enter marriage. Public and education awareness, community mobilization, registering of couples, counselling services, conducting training are provided. Since the organisations' inception in 2011, 5,026 marriages were solemnized, mostly in communal ceremonies to save on costs.

Mortality and morbidity trends

The impact of endemic communicable diseases on African families has been very negative. Malaria causes absenteeism from work, inability to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare as well as financial burden due to the costs of treatment. Tuberculosis brings about stigma and discrimination, often accompanied by a breakdown of family relationships and caregiver-child separation. Viral hepatitis causes increased financial needs related to testing and treating the illness, loss of employment and minimized social participation. On top of these major diseases there are many neglected tropical diseases causing reduced wage earnings, poor school attendance and performance, social stigma, and maternal morbidity.

Good practice

Lifeline Pretoria is a service counselling adult with expertise in numerous categories including trauma, crime, violence, addiction, physical health, relationship and general. The need for services surged during COVID when there was a 500 per cent increase in gender-based violence.

Urbanization in Africa

Macro level picture of population growth is important to understand rapid urbanization. By 2030 Africa will have 17 cities with more than 5 million inhabitants and 90 cities with at least one million inhabitants.

Urbanization affects families with extended families shrinking in size and at the same time the provision of care within extended families is shrinking. The number of elderly homes and shelters in North Africa has doubled during the last decade.

As family is the basic environment to invest in new generation and at the same time to invest in old generations, solidarity between generations enriches the functionality of the family and contributes to the community development at large. Thus, enhancing intergenerational solidarity helps to protect cultural heritage with grandparents serving as depositories and transmitters of culture, identity, and values to the next generations. Moreover, the involvement of grandparents in childcare reduces the financial burden at the state level. According to the South Africa Institute of Race Relations, approximately 80 per cent of foster carers in Africa collectively are extended family members.

The recent evidence from empirical research on assessing the marital relationships in the first five years of marriage across 19 Arab countries revealed prominent harmonious interactions between extended and nuclear families. Thirty per cent of couples reported that parents-in-law positively contribute to solving of marital disputes. Moreover, 18 per cent confirmed that they still receive financial support from their families, while 32 per cent and 23 percent of participants respectively confirmed that extended families help to raise the children and take care of them during illness of mothers. No interference was indicated by 37 per cent of survey participants.

With its young population we can observe the demographic dividend in Africa. The demographic dividend is defined by UNFPA as ‘the economic growth potential that can result from shifts in a population’s age structure, mainly when the share of the working age population is larger than the non-working age share of the population’.

The resulting pressures on the North African economies, governance, and social stability due to the population growth that was not accompanied by proper development plans, have been a key factor affecting their stability.

Urbanization

Africa is a large continent of great diversity. Cities provide security, protection, host governments, sites of production and consumption, driving change and innovation and shaping relationships between people. Women gain independence in cities. Cities are part of modernity, rise of capitalism and industrialization. Cities are engines of development but also of efficient infrastructure. Africa is the least urbanized continent but currently has the most rapid rate of urbanization with increasing drivers for migration and natural increase in population size.

Relating to the colonial legacy of Africa, new cities were built around the extraction of natural resources. Their modernist planning was for the elites, so the cities in Africa have experienced investments in infrastructure and underinvestment in services and this legacy continues.

Economic stagnation faced currently by Africa is accompanied by unplanned urbanization on a large scale. Level of informality is extremely high. In 2019 45.1 per cent lived in extreme poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, in Northern Africa it is below 3 per cent.

African Urban Agenda and **Social Agenda 2063** are important instruments to move sustainable urbanization forward. Importantly, the demographic dividend, should be recognized and taken advantage of but it is only possible if we invest in education and skill sets and gainful employment. Risks remain, including financial constraints and administrative authoritarianism.

Good practice

Pathways out of homelessness is a network of NGOs focusing on research, policy, and practical solutions to homelessness. During COVID temporary shelters were organized very rapidly. Some of its activities include creating and maintaining of shelters in every region of the city, ending homelessness among older persons, implement housing first approach and ongoing awareness raising.

Migration trends in Africa

Most of the African internal migrants move towards coastal areas (e.g., from Burkina Faso toward Cote d'Ivoire). Within countries of western Africa, we can observe north-south migration. The poorer and more inland country is the less it is likely to leave the continent and coastal, richer countries tend to be more urbanized. In the Maghreb rural to urban migration is often followed by international migration.

Conflict also prompts migration out of Africa. Colonial ties and proximity to Europe influences that migration. Although perceived as large, African international migration is relatively small accounting for 10 per cent of global migration.

Southern Africa has the largest percentage of international migrants. In 2019, 6.7 per cent of all international migrants residing in South Africa were born in Africa. South Africa absorbs most semi-skilled workers in the agricultural sector

The median age of international migrants is 30.9 years of age. Labour migration predominates from western and central Africa to Europe and the Gulf countries. Refugee flows predominate from eastern and western Africa. There is also clandestine, seasonal and nomad migration.

As of 2022 the population of Africa stands at 1.4 billion and it is the youngest with 60 per cent of the population under the age of 25. The projected population is to reach

2.3 billion by 2050. It will be the greatest reservoir of human capital in the upcoming decades and by 2040 Africa will surpass China and India in labour force.

In sub-Saharan Africa the 11.9 million of its migrant workers do not represent more than 1.6 per cent to fit the workforce. Most African countries need skilled migrants. Migrant women are 30 per cent of all migrant workers, but it is doubtful as many women are engaged in informal sector, unpaid or underpaid work including domestic labour.

Women left behind bear double responsibility for care and face higher probability of divorce. They often suffer from strain and stress. They may be more independent to make decisions within a household, but their financial autonomy depends on remittances from male relatives, mostly husbands and partners. which may exacerbate gender inequality.

Africa is complex multifaceted continent infused with a varied and fluid social cultural and economic political and environmental milieu. Males, 15-34 are more likely to migrate. They are usually more resourceful. Family and education are the most important drivers of migration as primary bread winners tend to migrate and those left behind face the consequences, including mental health issues.

There are interlinkages between demographic trends and rural to urban migration shaped by fertility rates, child mortality rates, increased access to education and family planning services. There is an especially strong link between demographic trends and rural to urban migration, creation of more urban areas, mega cities, and intermediate and small cities.

Push factors include political unrest and natural disasters while better education opportunities and job prospects are the major pull factors.

With 281 million people living and working outside their country of birth in 2020 and one in seven people being a migrant globally, there are many **challenges for families left behind**. In children-headed households, children grow up without adults. There is a higher possibility of dropping out of school. With the lack of parental supervision and care, the girl child is suffering the most. The disruption of family life results in poor diet, increase in psychological problems, reduction in labour force participation, reduced incentives for education.

Good practice

Centre for Faith and Community, University of Pretoria & Tshwane Homelessness Forum helps immigrants in South Africa in ten deprived communities where females suffer the highest depression, with main drivers being material deprivation and discrimination. The charity puts emphasis on societal integration, increasing the level of contact with domestic inhabitants, learning local languages, helping people to take part in existing associational life, cultural activities, legal interventions, encouraging people to participate in social life.

Parenting in the digital world

There are many traditional challenges to development in Africa, including poverty, malnutrition, educational systems relating to economic issues. New challenges relate to new digital technologies harming children and young people, such as social isolation, cognitive, emotional moral and social development are threatened. Technology use affects health, education, and family relations. Young people are impacted by influencers rather than parents, and influences are not good models for new generations.

Although technology made it easier to educate and communicate, challenges remain, and parenting has become complicated. Another challenge is to the social, cognitive, and physical development of children – absence of supervision, reduction in physical interactions, excessive use of apps and loss of connection with parents. To bridge the digital gap, strengthening the family institution and role and adopting culturally adapted programmes is key.

There are many different methodologies in researching parenting. In the digital age, the research has shifted from descriptive to the implementation of programmes. Parents needed to adapt in the digital era. In the south, digital parenting research is only emerging. Parenting styles are described from western perspective. In Africa parenting is complex, it cannot be studied as a reciprocal relationship. There are challenges, such as vulnerability that can be found in societal systems especially those in economic and politics identified in ethnicity, poverty, socioeconomic status disability and gender. Social inequalities create risks, shocks and stressors that challenge people coping abilities. Deprivation is common.

Apartheid legacy remains pervasive impacting on access to and availability of resources. White South African families are mostly likely to own digital devices in contrast to black families. Black families depend on government grants. Parental substance abuse and exposure to violence and unemployment is common. Parenting happens in extended families.

As for digitalization/technology and the parent-child relationship, parents try to catch up to new exigencies of technology at work and monitoring of their children's digital devices use.

Good practice

International Federation for Family Development present in 68 countries, offers parenting classes to couples using the case method. Classes depend on the age of children. Couples discuss specific cases, share their experience and concerns and come to conclusions based on the discussions. Due to the pandemic, the technology enabled IFFD to offer courses in a more extensive and comprehensive way.

National policy development

Kenya - lessons learnt

In the development of family policy, there is a need for broad, strategic engagement of all relevant partners. Technical ability within a team is important as is the commitment, leadership, and vibrant involvement of stakeholders. It is also vital to show social impact and legal implications of proposed policies. Mainstream entities, such as religious organisations are vital as are linkages to Sustainable Development Goals and African social frameworks. Sponsorship is also key.

The African Plan of Action on the Family proved to be useful in the design family policy at the national level. Through its priority areas, the Plan sought to build the capacity of States and the region to respond to the dynamic challenges that are facing the African family in a harmonized manner. As family policies are fundamental, greater priority to national family policy development is needed. It's important to be strategic and persistent.

Family-friendly policies in the workplace – UNICEF's perspective

Family-friendly policies are those that help to balance and benefit both work and family life – policies that provide three types of resources needed by parents of young children: time, resources, and services. The four sets of policies are: paid parental leave; support for breastfeeding; affordable, accessible, and quality childcare and child benefits.

Investing in family-friendly policies is good for children, good for women, good for businesses and good for the economy.

They are good for children as they improve health and nutrition of young children. Investing in early childhood development is one of the most effective ways to improve children's skills, abilities and ultimately productivity. Child benefits are a proved tool to address multiple deprivations with just one intervention.

Family-friendly policies are good for women as they enable their economic participation, reduce gender pay gap and improve gender parity. By redistributing domestic care work, women are less likely to drop out of the workforce. Affordable child and family care services facilitate women's labour force participation, enhance children's capabilities, and create decent jobs in the paid care sector. Social protection evidence is increasingly demonstrating gender-transformative impacts including improved autonomy, reduced stress and reduced IPV.

Family-friendly policies are good for the economy with evidence from Nordic countries showing that they have boosted growth in GDP per capita by 10 to 20 per cent. Women's equal participation in the workforce would add \$12 trillion to the global economy by 2025 and social protection benefits local economies as well as direct recipients while boosting household productivity. They are good for business by increasing employee retention, allowing career positioning and advancement, boost

employee engagement and morale, make companies more competitive, and attract talent, while improving brand image and taking companies closer to global sustainability standards. They are also cost effective by reducing staff turnover, absenteeism, as well as recruitment and training costs. They also increase the likelihood of women returning to work after maternity leave.

Africa is still at a very early stage in family policy development in the workplace. Available policies on paid family leave are few and far below international standards. Access to breaks for breastfeeding is not institutionalized in law and few countries have adequate policy. Few children have access to affordable childcare and only 16 per cent of households in Africa receive child or family cash benefits.

Conclusions

It is important keep in mind the economic impact of any given policy on families. Thus, policymakers and professional should turn to family scientists for family data and research upon which the assessment of the effects of a proposed action on family roles, structure and functioning should be made.

It is vital to rethink the national development agendas to preserve and utilize the value system in the rural areas, which encourages families to stay at their inherited houses and lands and retain their traditional occupations and crafts.

In terms of ageing and care, the care of older persons cannot be seen in isolation from other forms of care and long-term care infrastructure is needed on the continent. There are many implications for female family caregivers, including financial hardship, health implications, emotional strain, limited labour force participation.

To address the gaps in care, the African Governments must support the comprehensive development of long-term care systems. While the tradition of relying on extended family to care for older adults should be respected, Governments and community organisations need to consider ways to ease the burden of care with new policies and programmes.

Investments in human capital is a must to take advantage of the population dividend and mobilize the youth bulge. Poverty and unemployment rates will decrease accordingly as a by-product of human development processes. Countries' strategies that focus on the development of urban areas and leaving the rural areas behind intensify the aspiration to migrate. Thus, improving the quality-of-life standards in rural areas including the enhancement of infrastructure, educational and health systems, transportation, and career opportunities will generate equitable development plans and sustain balanced population dynamics.

Family planning policies should not restrict people's reproductive rights. Such polices should be addressed from a comprehensive perspective without neglecting the necessity of socio-economic development policies. More collective institutional

research is needed to address population dynamics challenges and put in the policy agenda proper evidence-based solutions.

As African population is projected to experience significant demographic changes, with an increase in the ageing population, targeted policies and programmes are needed to consider the unique cultural, economic, and social context of each country. Improving access to information communication technology for older persons is important, as it can help to improve their social connectivity, access to healthcare, and overall quality of life.

To design responsive family policies first, we need to recognize the context that frames family life and seeks to address structural challenges, such as poverty and unemployment. Secondly, we need to combine a range of interventions to address poverty and inequality. Thirdly, we need to integrate services between the state and civil society and use a family and community-centred approach to service delivery. Lastly, we need to monitor the outcomes.

Policies beyond cash transfers are needed to ensure transformative processes. Cultural sensitivity is also needed as there are 3000 ethnic groups in Africa, with ethnocultural minorities seniors the fastest growing segment of population while most age tech solutions treat them as a homogenous group.

Recommendations

Health

- **Shift focus to social determinants of health to address underlying vulnerabilities of the region**
- **Improve the infrastructure and access to basic services (hospitals, schools, access to clean water, etc.)**
- **Provide adequate funding and provision of holistic, collaborative services, including for comprehensive primary care**
- **Assist families adapt to new forms of socialization and communication**
- **Use cheaper platforms to educate the public and school children about health issues, such as the radio**
- **Encourage physical outdoor activities to prevent weight gain, depression, and schooling distress**
- **Provide affordable counselling services to communities for families, especially during pandemic crises**
- **Train community health workers to educate communities about the diseases and distribution of drugs**
- **Encourage deliveries of home medication or open points for collection**
- **Assist families with essential equipment for home schooling (also in case of health emergencies and pandemics)**

- **Invest in upgrading teachers' skills including the use of new technologies**

Urbanization

- **Extend urban design, currently aimed at urban minorities in well-to-do suburbs to informal urban settlements**
- **Strengthen community-based interventions with precarious situations and people in mind with a focus on access to primary healthcare, education, trauma support, housing security and access to vocational training**
- **Support local implementation of policy and strategy, regardless of government engagement**

Migration

- **Make a better use of existing migration platforms to coordinate information and data sharing to inform policy makers**
- **Carry out concrete, empirical and evidence-based studies are required to counterpose the negative narrative of migration from Africa**
- **Improve rights to residence and skill exchange for migrants**
- **Adhere to the African continental free trade area agreement adopted in 2018 by AU heads of state (free circulation of goods, services and capital would represent a strong push to labour migration)**
- **Adopt gender-sensitive migration policies**
- **Invest in women's and girls' health empowerment**
- **Invest in education and family planning**
- **Invest in social integration, prevention of racism and discrimination**
- **Study migration forms and identify factors lagging, analyse migration in the broader context, define social and demographic consequences, study mechanisms of integration in host societies**
- **Use Africa-centric lens to understand cultures, norms, and values**
- **Increase cooperation and information sharing on migration**
- **Improve the use of existing migration platforms to coordinate information and data sharing to inform policy makers**

Workplace policies

- **Redesign the workplaces, including the following policies: minimum six months of paid parental leave; breastfeeding facilities and compensated breastfeeding breaks for the first six months; affordable, accessible, and quality childcare services; child grants that support all families with**

children; labour regulations to improve the working conditions of families with children in the formal and informal sectors

- **Academia: map, analyse the situation in Africa; design investment cases for family-friendly policies; align such policies with international standards and academic organisations; engage business sectors in policy change; offer alternatives to the policies and encourage evidence-informed decision making**

Parenting

- **Develop culturally adapted parenting education programmes**
- **Enhance traditional family system of parenting by integrating new means of supporting family and upbringing through institutions and the establishment of permanent or transitional policies**

New technologies

- **Collaborate with government agencies and civil society on new technologies use**
- **Ensure access to the internet for all**
- **Make sure schools are sites and spaces of learning and engagement advancing technology and digitalization**
- **Support communities with new technologies access and training**

Research, Collaboration and communication

- **Invest in research agenda and data collection including developing of indicators of family well-being**
- **Conduct multidisciplinary research to assess inclusion of health in all policies**
- **Use family lens in policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation**
- **Institute family impact reports**
- **Invest in research on migration, divorce and other relevant issues and their impacts on families**
- **Invest in research on health impact on diverse family structures to assist in developing policies and family interventions**
- **Establish collaborations and partnerships with academia, legislatives, civil society, and other relevant stakeholders**
- **Institutionalize policies through effective communication**
- **Carry out a continental mapping of family organisations**
- **Bridge the gap between academics and policy makers**
