BACKGROUND
Nigeria is Africa’s most populous nation with an estimated population of more than 170 million. Today Nigeria’s fertility rate is higher than that of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole and more than twice the world average.

While providing for such a large population poses a significant economic challenge, its age structure can also be a potential boon to growth if it positions itself properly to achieve a demographic dividend – possible when its working age population is larger relative to its non-working age population. In Nigeria, trends show a significant rise in the share of working age people, with a potential ratio of working-age to non-working age people rising to approximately 2 by 2050. If employed productively, the working-age group can cause Nigeria to reap significant economic gains.

In a “business-as-usual” scenario Nigeria would grow by 4.02 percent from 2010-2030, roughly its growth from 2000-2008. As a result of demographic change and expected life expectancy increases, however, the GDP per capita increases to almost 12 percent higher by 2020 and nearly 29 percent higher by 2030.

But the dividend will not come automatically. To seize the opportunity Nigeria’s policies must develop its workforce and ensure that it is productive. Equally important, the policies must be shaped to be consistent with the varying realities of Nigeria’s regions.

KEY RESULTS FOR THE FUTURE

**THERE IS A DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN NIGERIA’S FUTURE.** Clearly, prospects are good for Nigeria’s demographic dividend, starting from mid 2020’s until 2050.

**BUT THE DIVIDEND IS NOT AUTOMATIC.** Nigeria will need to accelerate progress in both fertility and mortality reduction through quality reproductive health services and commodities, enhance access and quality of education for its boys and girls, and encourage women participation in the labour market while enacting policies to enable meaningful job creation for its youth. Both public sector and private sector need to anticipate this and work together to create employment opportunities.
TIMING OF NIGERIA’S DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND VARIES BY GEOPOLITICAL ZONES. The Southern geopolitical zones (SS, SW and SE) are already undergoing a demographic transition, with slower population growth and favourable age structures, and thus less dependency and consequent higher per capita incomes. The Northern geopolitical zones (NW, NE, and NC) have more rapid growth and youthful age structures, with higher dependency and lower per capita income. This de-coupling of the timing of Nigeria’s demographic dividend is worth noting for its policy implications to ensure more equitable national development into the future.

MAGNITUDE OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND ALSO VARIES BY GEOPOLITICAL ZONES. Though all regions of the country stand to gain from the demographic dividend, it appears that the Northern geopolitical zones – which have seen the highest dependency ratios and low per capita income growth – have the most to gain.

POPULATION POLICY TO SEIZE THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND
As the short window of opportunity for achieving the demographic dividend approaches, policymakers, the private sector and civil society leaders have a responsibility to prepare Nigeria both to reap the prospective economic rewards and to avert any potential harms a large, unemployed population of working-age people might cause.

National policy recognizes Nigeria’s demographic profile – high growth, a young population (nearly half the population less than 15 years old), rapid urbanization, high adolescent maternal mortality and high risk pregnancies – and the country’s National Population Policy was built on key principles to respond to it. Though the policy was adopted and an implementation policy put in place by 2008, the implementation has been poor.

To date, Nigeria’s women and children still have a high burden of preventable morbidity and mortality, maternal mortality, early marriage and adolescent pregnancy with the attendant complications, and persistent high unmet need for contraception among women in all states, across all geopolitical zones, ethnic and religious groupings. Additionally, Nigeria’s commitments announced at the London 2012 Summit are yet to be fully implemented despite initial optimism.

To remedy this and prepare the country for impending age structure shifts, the government should implement the below recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS
FEDERAL LEVEL
• Conduct an immediate review and revival of the National Population Policy and its implementation mechanisms, with strong leadership by the President and National Assembly.
• Accelerate ongoing efforts to improve maternal and child health, and ensure all unmet needs for family planning are met with Federal Government resources, including a focus on teenage-friendly reproductive health services.
• Accelerate access to quality basic, secondary and post-secondary education for girls and boys.
• Enact culturally-appropriate affirmative action policies and laws to encourage women’s participation in the work force and business opportunities particularly in the northern parts of the country.
• Use various media and the local film industry to promote culturally appropriate role models for girls and young women.
• Constructively engage religious and traditional leaders with positive assurances of government’s intention.

STATE LEVEL
• Review population policy and implementation approaches, deriving guidance from the reviewed national policy, by each state.
• Commit resources to complement federal government efforts in the areas mentioned above, by each state.

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