



The Federal Government of Somalia  
Ministry of Planning, Investment and Economic Development



# THE SOMALI ADOLESCENTS & YOUTH BOOM OR GLOOM?

“Dhalinyaradu waa qorax so baxeyso”  
-Youth are the rising sun

**“Somalia’s future development depends on the youth. The ministry serves to ensure investment and economic development for the betterment of the youth, who can benefit from fair opportunities.”**

**H.E. Jamal Mohamed Hassan,**

The Minister of Planning, Investment and  
Economic Development of the  
Federal Government of Somalia



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

For years now Somalia has experienced a data vacuum. Given how demographically young the country is the lack of information about the youth has been felt particularly strongly. By providing the most basic information, as well as more detailed information from the Adolescent and Youth Report, we believe we can now make decisions that will have a positive impact on the lives of the Somali youth. The data and perspectives being presented in this report tells us more about how many young people there are, where and how they live, and what the Government and its partners can do to invest in the large youthful population and protect their rights to drive economic and social development.

I wish to acknowledge, with much gratitude, the Ministry of Planning and the staff from the Directorate of National Statistics (DNS) for the Federal Government of Somalia, in particular Abdirahman Omar Dahir, DNS Director General, Mohamed Moalim, the former DNS Director General and the Senior Advisors to the DNS, Nur Weheliye and Ahmed Elmi for their continuous support and collaboration in putting this booklet together.

This project would not have been possible without the unwavering support of the donors and international community, in particular Department for International Development (DfID) - UKaid and the Embassy of Sweden, who have helped to turn Somalis' dreams into reality by funding such an extensive, objective and informative survey – that collects information on individuals and households. I would also like to acknowledge the dedication and high professionalism of the UNFPA Somalia staff, led by Mariam Alwi, who worked tirelessly to provide technical guidance and support to the Ministry of Planning in compiling the information for this booklet.

My greatest appreciation goes to all the households; men and women who were interviewed at different phases of the collection of data. Their cooperation is truly appreciated.

**Nikolai Botev,**  
*UNFPA Somalia Representative*

# Introduction

**D**ifferent societies use different parameters for their definition of youth. Some societies use biological markers (the period between puberty and parenthood) while others use cultural markers to define youth as a distinct social status with accompanying roles, rituals and relationships. The proposed National Youth Policy by the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) refers to persons aged 15 to 34 years.

WHO identifies adolescence as the period in human growth and development that occurs after childhood and before adulthood, from ages 10 to 19 years. Biological processes drive many aspects of this growth and development, with the onset of puberty marking the passage from childhood to adolescence. Adolescents are usually categorized as early adolescents (10-14 years) and late adolescents (15-19 years).

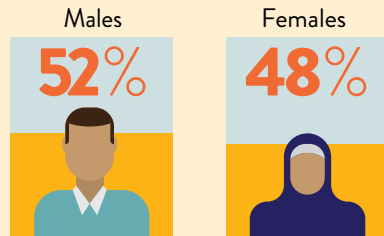
**12.3 M** Total Somali population  
(PESS 2014)

**51% (6.49M)**  
Of the Somali population is between 10-35 yrs

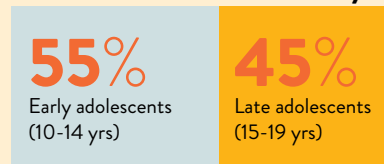
### Distribution by Age

EARLY ADOLESCENTS (10-14 yrs)	LATE ADOLESCENTS (15-19 yrs)	ADOLESCENTS (10-19 yrs)	YOUTH (15-35 yrs)
<b>28%</b> (1.84M)	<b>23%</b> (1.48M)	<b>51%</b> (3.33M)	<b>72%</b> (4.65M)

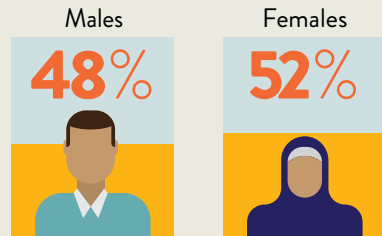
### Adolescent (10-19 yrs)



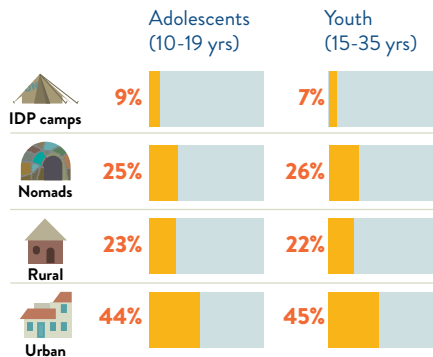
### Of the Adolescents (10-19 yrs)



### Youth (15-35 yrs)

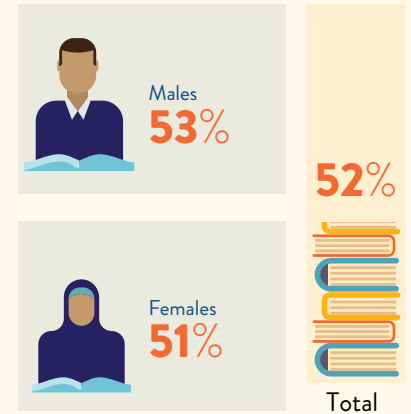


### Distribution by Type of Residence

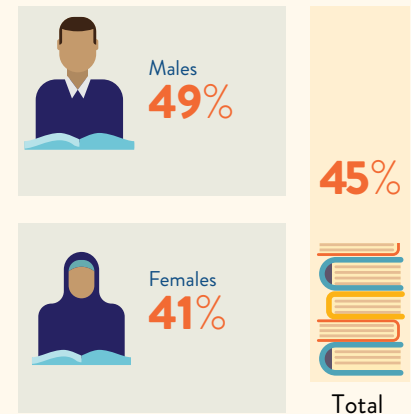


## EDUCATION

### Adolescents (15-19 yrs) Literacy



### Youth (15-35 yrs) Literacy



**13.9 M**  
Total Somali population  
(2017 Projected)

### Enrolment among the Adolescents

**63% (1.1M)**  
of early adolescents (10-14 yrs) are currently enrolled



**50% (0.7M)**  
of late adolescents (15-19 yrs) are currently enrolled



### Education Attainment (15-35 yrs)

**66%**  
of the youth have not completed any level of education



**18%**  
Have completed primary

**3%**  
Have completed University

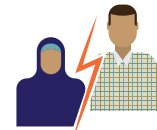
### MARRIAGE\*

#### Adolescents (15-19 yrs)



**13%** Ever married  
of these:

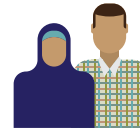
**31%** males **69%** females



**1%** Divorced  
of these:

**27%** males **73%** females

#### Youth (15-35 yrs)



**53%** Ever married  
of these:

**34%** males **66%** females

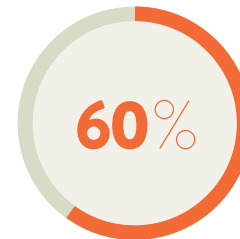


**3%** Divorced  
of these:

**25%** males **75%** females

\*The Survey only covered persons aged 15 years and above

### EMPLOYMENT\*



of the total labour force is within the ages of 15-35 yrs

**4 out of 10**  
adolescents (15-19 yrs) are unemployed

**3 out of 10**  
Youth (15-35 yrs) are unemployment

\*The unemployed according to PESS are persons who stated that they were not working but were actively seeking employment during the 12 months preceding the survey

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SOMALI ADOLESCENTS

**A**dolescence is the period between childhood and adulthood, marked by rapid physical growth. It is important for the adolescents to be equipped with the necessary life skills needed to navigate through life. Information on the adolescent population and where they reside is critical in social (e.g. education and health) and economic planning.

The findings of the 2014 Population Estimation Survey for Somalia (PESS) show that a majority of the population is below 35 years.

Urban areas have better access to social and economic amenities

The adolescent boy and girl have different roles in the community. These different roles promote or inhibit their access to social amenities such as education and health. In many instances the boy child enjoys more advantages over the girl child. Infrastructural development is not uniform in the entire country. In many developing countries, urban areas are more developed and have better access to social and economic facilities.



**27%**

of the population are adolescents (10-19 yrs)

**55%**

Early adolescents (10-14 yrs)

**45%**

Late adolescents (15-19 yrs)

**52%**

of adolescents are female

**48%**

of adolescents are male



**9%**

reside in IDP camps



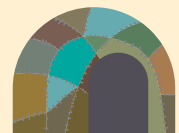
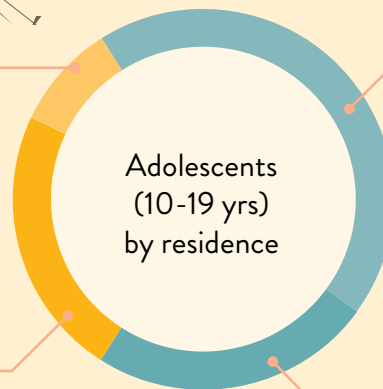
**44%**

reside in urban areas



**23%**

reside in rural areas



**25%**

are nomadic



52% of adolescents between 15-19 years are literate



63%

of adolescents between **10-14 yrs** are currently enrolled



50%

of adolescents between **15-19 yrs** are currently enrolled

## Education status of the adolescents

**E**ducation is an essential tool for empowering adolescents and youth. Education provides the foundation for further skill development that is necessary for economic growth. Both the United Nations 'World Program of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and beyond' and the 'African Youth Charter' recognize the importance of youth education and emphasize that governments need to focus on access to education among the young people for youth development.

Although there is a larger proportion of literate adolescents compared to the population aged 15 years and above, the rates are still low. Among the adolescents (15-19 yrs), 52 percent are literate compared to 40 percent in the total population aged 15 years and above. Majority of the literate population reside in the urban at 80 percent whereas the least are among the nomads at 16 percent.

The population segment aged 10-14 years are expected to be enrolled in primary school. Among this population, 63 percent are currently enrolled of which, 54 percent are boys and 46 percent are girls. Enrolment is highest in the urban where 84 percent are currently enrolled and lowest among the nomadic boys and girls at 27 percent. In the rural current enrolment stands at 66 percent.

Among the adolescents (15-19 yrs) 50 percent are currently enrolled, 53 percent boys and 47 percent girls. Like the early adolescents, 76 percent among the urban are currently enrolled. Among the nomadic adolescents (15-19 yrs) only 17 percent are currently enrolled.



# Marriage and Family

Information on marital status by age and sex reflects the process of family formation and dissolution and is important because of its possible implications for fertility. Married females are more at risk of pregnancy and are the main target of maternal and child health programs. Early entry into marriage for the girls exposes them to a longer period of child bearing. Besides the possibility of bearing many children, the young girls and their offspring are exposed to high risks of mortality, low birth weight and complications such as fistula. Economically because they don't get a chance to pursue higher education levels, they and their children are at a danger of getting into the intergenerational poverty cycle.

Among the adolescent girls, an estimated 18 percent have ever married. Given the low contraceptive prevalence rate, low uptake of antenatal care, inadequate demand and supply of health facilities these married adolescent girls are exposed to the adverse effects of pregnancy and birth related complications. There is need to educate the girls from an early age on issues pertaining to pregnancies such as the importance of antenatal care (ANC), hospital delivery, immunization and birth spacing in order for them to understand the advantages and dangers to both the mother and the unborn child. The Somali community is highly patriarchal. Decision making at the household level is mostly done by the men, thus the boy child also needs to be educated on sexual and reproductive health

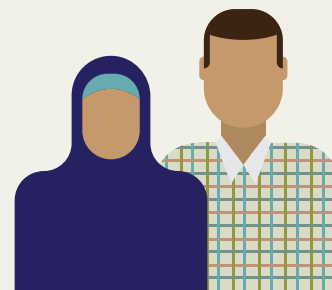


Percentage of boys and girls between 15-19 yrs that have ever married



of girls between 15-19 yrs are vulnerable to pregnancy and birth related complications

11% of boys and girls between 15-19 yrs are currently married



123 per 1000

Age specific fertility rate (15-19 yrs)

source: MICS 2006

21

Unmet need for contraception among all married women

source: MICS 2006

## Contribution of adolescents to the labour force

**T**he active population (or labour force) consists of all adolescents who either were employed or were unemployed but actively seeking employment during the last 12 months. There are 17 percent of 10-14 year olds and 30 percent of 15-19 year olds who are economically active.

The unemployed according to PESS are persons who stated that they were not working but were actively seeking employment during the 12 months preceding the survey. Unemployment stands at 35 percent for the 15-19 year olds, 35 percent among the males and 34 percent among the females. The early adolescents form 6 percent of the employed population and the late adolescents form 16 percent of the employed population. For this age cohort, they lack the education and skills to join the skilled labour force, they are most likely to remain in the unskilled sector for their entire work life, thus increasing their probability of life long poverty.



**17%**  
of adolescents  
between  
**10-14 yrs** are  
economically  
active



**30%**  
of adolescents  
between  
**15-19 yrs** are  
economically  
active



“Every number, every piece of statistical data tells a story. The findings of the 2014 PESS show that 81.5 percent of the Somali population is young, below 35 years. These young people hold the keys to the future; unlocking their potential will lead to a better world for everyone,”

**Nikolai Botev,**  
UNFPA Somalia Representative.



## DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE SOMALI YOUTH

**Y**outh is a period of transition characterised by emotional, psychological and physical changes. Decisions made during this state not only determine the success or failure of the youth in life but also has impact on society. Historically the youth in Somalia had an active role in the struggle and liberation of Somalia through the Somali Youth League formed in 1943 under the name Somali Youth Club. Youth participation in politics and nation building remained active in the post independent governments. This gains were lost during the years of the civil war, the youth became voiceless, were driven into desperation and recruited to join the militia. The youth are a significant part of the total population that should not be ignored if a society is to realize social, political and economic development. In

Somalia, 38 percent of the population are between 15-34 years of which 48 percent are males and 52 percent are females.

A bulging youth population presents an economic window of opportunity

A bulging youth population presents an economic window of opportunity. Somalia can reap the demographic dividend if and when its demographic transition will advance from high mortality and fertility to low mortality and fertility. In addition the youth have to be empowered with the necessary health information especially sexual and reproductive health (SRH), social and economic skills.





©AMISOM/Photo

## Marriage and family

**F**amilies and households form the primary social units. They play a critical role in society, as they shape individuals, influence their interactions and provide safety nets against shocks and stress factors. In a country where child bearing happens within marriage, age at which girls enter into marriage is critical in determining the country's fertility. In a country with high fertility -total fertility rate (TFR) for Somalia is 6.7 and low contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) of 15 percent delayed entry into marriage is highly favourable. Of the youth population, 53 percent have ever married while 46 percent are currently married. In the female population 52 percent are currently married while 83 percent of them had ever married by the age of 29 years.

Child marriage is an appalling violation of human rights and robs girls of their education, health and long-term prospects. A girl who is married as a child is one whose potential will not be fulfilled. Since many parents and communities also want the very best for their daughters, we must work together and end child marriage.

**-Babatunde Osotimehin,**  
M.D, Executive Director, UNFPA

## Youth and Education

The youth form a critical part of the current and future labour force. It is thus necessary that they are equipped with proper education and skills necessary to position the country in the global economy. Education is the basis upon which skills are built. Among the youth, 45 percent are literate compared to 30 percent for the population above 35 years. Majority of the literate youth reside in the urban at 71 percent.

Among the youth of ages 20-35, 68 percent have not completed any level of education. Only 14 percent have completed primary level and 12 percent have attained secondary level. Those with university qualifications make up three percent of the youth population. These statistics are appalling, given the perceived role of education by the key informants and participants of the focus group discussion (FGD). Education was identified as one of the key drivers of social, economic and political inclusion. It was observed that currently young people, especially those who



Education was identified as one of the key drivers of social, economic and political inclusion



© UNFPA/Somalia

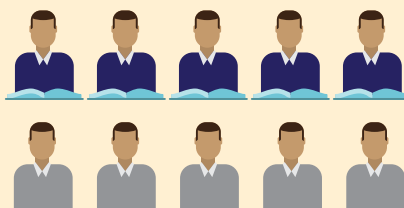
**45%** of the youth (15-35 yrs) are literate

have not left the country, cannot get employment and good jobs due to the lack or low levels of education.

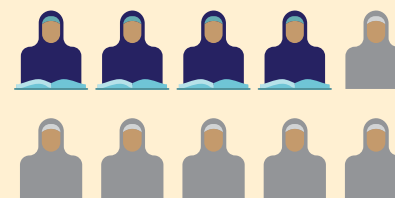
The findings of the qualitative study indicate that traditional cultural roles and responsibilities are barriers to female's access to social and economic opportunities, including education. Women's roles and responsibilities are strongly tied to the household and to raising children.

Traditional cultural roles and responsibilities were identified as some of the barriers to female's access to social and economic opportunities, including education.

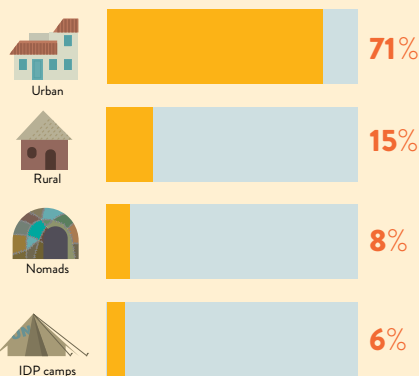
**49%** of males are literate



**41%** of females are literate



### Literacy levels by type of residence



**68%** of the youth (20-35yrs) have not completed any level

**14%** of the youth (20-35yrs) have only completed primary level

**12%** of the youth (20-35yrs) have completed up to secondary level

## Youth employment

**S**omali adolescent and youth make up 60 percent of the labour force, 46 percent of the youth are economically active. Among the male youths, 58 percent are in the labour force compared to 35 percent of the female youths.

*Female youth face even greater challenges, including stereotypes, the preference for men in the society and that they are look-down on. More women come out of the house seeking economic support for their families, because the husband may neglect duties and responsibilities and she becomes more exposed to gender based violence. On the other hand, when the mother is educated and she starts working in a higher position, the core of the community quickly demands the women to stay in her home; don't they see that men have irresponsibly neglected house duties?*

-Young Somali

The youth unemployment rate is 28 for every 100 youth in the labour force, 27 and 28 among the male and female youths respectively. Nomadic youth are the least likely to be unemployed followed by the rural youth. This is greatly contributed by the nature of Somali economy which depends greatly on livestock.

Youth with no level of education completed are the least likely to be unemployed whereas those who have only completed primary level education



© AMISOM Photo / Tabin Jones



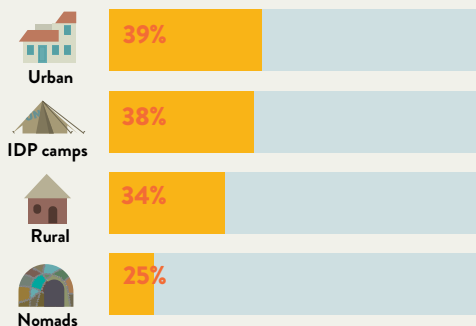


**60%**  
of male youth  
are economically  
active

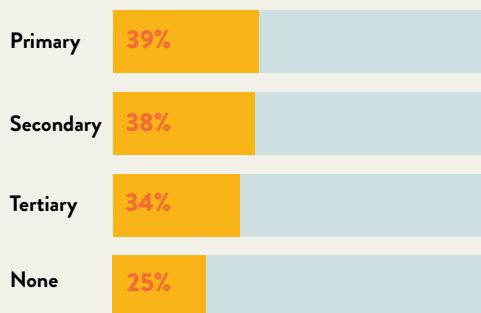


**40%**  
of female youth  
are economically  
active

### Youth unemployment rate by type of residence



### Youth unemployment rate by level of education attained



are the most likely to be unemployed.

To reverse the unemployment situation, suggestions given during the qualitative study include: provision of technical and vocational training, creation of youth forums, engaging youth in politics and decision making, interactive programs such as sports, recreation centres, rewarding innovative ideas among youth, promoting youth entrepreneurship through business trainings and micro finance and encouraging youth, and especially women, to pursue higher levels of education.



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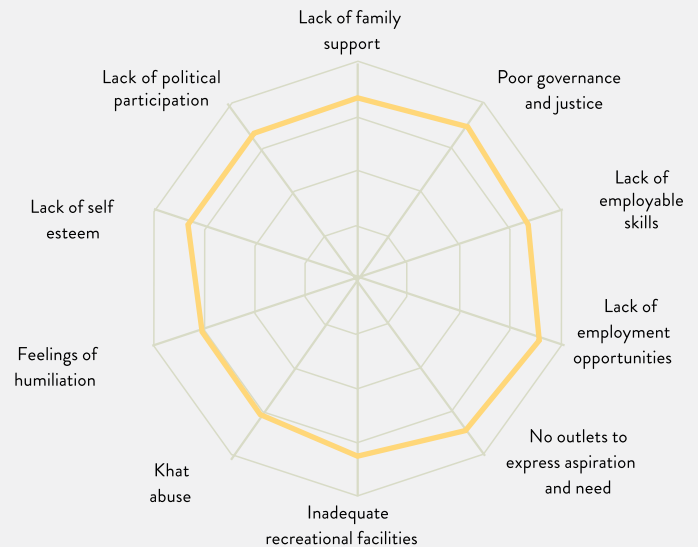
Somali from the diaspora are held in high esteem. Their mastery of the English language and foreign passport makes them the preferred candidates for high level government and international jobs

-FGD Participant

## What challenges do the Somali adolescents and youth face?

**The Somali adolescents** and youth are a social group that faces problems and uncertainties regarding its future. The findings of the qualitative study indicate that the youth face the following major challenges: high illiteracy levels, limited education and training opportunities, unemployment and under-employment, lack of political participation, lack of health services, radicalization, insecurity, consumption of drugs, especially khat, early marriage and the lack of a national youth policy that is expected to put in place structures that will promote social, economic and political participation of youth.

### Factors that impede youth development



© UN Photo / Albrkanim Mohamed

Our politics have no room for the youth, they only consider older people to participate; because we had a culture where only the old man can take decisions and can talk about the future of his community we transferred this culture to our modern politics.

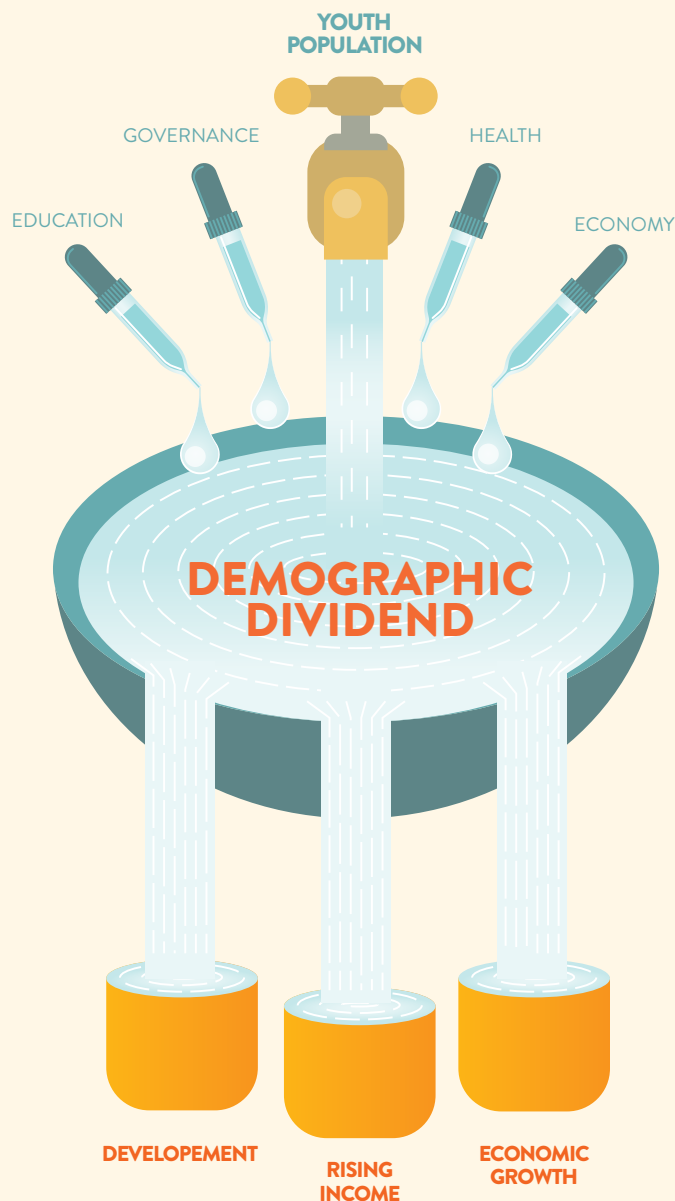
-FGD Participant

## How can the country capitalize on the youth bulge?

**The qualitative findings** allude to opportunities for the country in the youth bulge. The country can realize national economic growth and stability by investing in macroeconomic, social and labour market policies and institutions to support youth in learning, going to work, avoiding health risks, and exercising good citizenship.

Investments in youth sexual and reproductive health (SRH), including birth spacing, is key to achieving the demographic transition. Aggressive birth spacing programs targeting both men and women and increasing awareness among youth are part of the strategies that can lead the country to realize a demographic dividend. In addition to birth spacing, delaying the age at first marriage and first birth could also slow the population growth rate substantially.

In 1965, the General Assembly endorsed the Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples. From 1965 to 1975, both the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council emphasized three basic themes in the field of youth: participation, development and peace. The youth have a critical role in the peace-building processes and decision-making on peace and conflict. Through their inclusion and participation their role/perceived role as victims or agents of violence will be changed to active agents of peace-building and positive social change. Their inclusion and participation not only enhances their capabilities, but also provides them the opportunity to develop their lives as well as their societies. Their inclusion in decision making allows them to gain ownership of the policies that affect them and the entire country.





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