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**UNITED NATIONS**

**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL**

Distr.: LIMITED

POP/APC.3/92/Inf.1

1 October 1992

Original : ENGLISH

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**ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA**

**Third African Population Conference**

**Meeting of Experts**

**Dakar, Senegal**

**7-10 December 1992**

**DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION AND FUTURE  
TRENDS IN AFRICA**

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This paper is intended to provide participants with background information for the discussion of item 4 of the provisional agenda.

The paper has been issued without formal editing.

## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The most noticeable feature of Africa's demographic trends since the 1950s has been the rapid growth of its population. The average annual rate of growth of population was 2.21 percent in 1950-55, and has remained between 2.53 and 3 percent per annum during the period 1955 to 1990. During the second quarter of the next century, deceleration is expected to occur, for by then a sizeable population. Rapid population growth will still be expected for sometime because of the inbuilt momentum for population growth in the age structure. Thus, according to low variant projections of the United Nations, the 1990 population of 640 million will increase to 1074 million in 2010, marginally lower than the population of 1,148 projected by the medium variant.
2. This demographic feature of Africa's population is reflected in other demographic components of change, in particular, high fertility and high urban population growth rates.
3. This present paper which describes major characteristics on past and future trends of Africa's demographic features is divided into two sections: demographic trends and future trends.

## II. DEMOGRAPHIC SITUATION

### A. Population Size and Rate of Growth

4. The total population of Africa as estimated by the medium variant of the United Nations 1992 assessment is 643 million (605 million for ECA member States) in 1990.<sup>1/</sup> As can be seen from Table 1, the following is the share of this population among the ECA sub-regions - West Africa (32 percent), East/Southern (33 percent), North Africa with only six countries (23 percent) and Central Africa (12 percent).
5. In recent years the population of a majority of African countries has continued to grow at the relatively fast rate of 3 percent per annum. At the sub-regional level, population growth rates are higher in West Africa and East/Southern Africa compared with Central and North Africa.
6. During the period 1985-1990, high average annual population growth rates (that is, 3 percent and above) were recorded in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria and Togo in West Africa; in Botswana, Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Somalia, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe in East/Southern Africa; in Cameroon, Congo, Gabon, Rwanda and Zaire in Central Africa; and in Libya in North Africa. It should be noted that average annual population growth rates for the other countries, barring Guinea Bissau, Mauritius and Seychelles, were also high, varying between 2.0 and 2.9 percent during the same period.

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<sup>1/</sup> United Nations, World Population Prospects: The 1992 Revision (New York:1992), for this and other figures in the document.

7. These high rates of population growth distinguish the ECA region from the other world regions. For instance between 1985 and 1990 the average annual growth rates for the world as a whole, and Central Asia (the other region experiencing high population growth) were: 1.74 and 2.78 respectively, compared with 2.95 for the ECA region.

Table 1: Major Demographic Indicators by Sub-region, 1985-89 (medium variant)

Sub-Region	Population 1990 (000)	Crude birth Rate a/	Crude death Rate a/	Infant mortality Rate a/	Life Expectancy b/	Percent annual rate of growth
North Africa	140	36.9	10.8	79	59	2.60
West Africa c/	194	48.2	16.5	11	49	3.19
Central Africa	71	46.6	16.2	98	50	3.04
East & Southern Africa	200	48.1	16.9	114	49	3.04
Total	605	44.7	14.7	103	52	2.95

a/ Per 1000

b/ at birth

c/ does not take into account new census figure for Nigeria.

Source: See footnote 1

## **B. Fertility**

8. Sub-regional crude birth rates (CBRs) for 1985-90 are shown in Table 1. These indicate that barring the North African sub-region, the CBRs for the other sub-regions are relatively high, that is, 45 per thousand and above. This pattern of high fertility is confirmed by examining the total fertility rates (TFRs). The evidence shows that the TFRs in 1985-90 were around 6 and above for all the three sub-Saharan sub-regions: West (6.9), East/Southern (6.9) and Central (6.2). The TFR in North Africa, 5.1 was much lower.

9. These regional figures mask marked country level variations. In North Africa, for example, the relatively low fertility is ascribed to three countries: Egypt, Morocco and especially Tunisia, which all recorded TFRs under 5 in 1985-90. The TFRs in the other countries were high: Algeria (5.43), Libya (6.87) and Sudan (6.44), typical of other African countries.

10. Fertility levels in West Africa, on the other hand, are uniformly high with the TFRs, ranging from 5.58 in Cape Verde to 7.41 in Cote d'Ivoire during 1985-90. Only one other country - Guinea-Bissau - recorded a TFR under 6. In the remaining countries the TFRs during

the same period were between 6.5 to 7.1: e.g., Burkina Faso (6.5), Liberia (6.5), Mali (7.1), Mauritania (6.5), Niger (7.1), Nigeria (6.9) and Sierra Leone (6.5).

11. In Central Africa there are wide country variations in fertility rates, with the TFRs ranging from 5.0 in Gabon to 8.3 in Rwanda in 1985-90. Zaire the most populous country in this sub-region had a TFR of 6.1 during the same period.

12. East/Southern Africa also has a diversified fertility pattern, although generally levels are high. At the one end of the spectrum are the two small island countries-Mauritius, 2.0 and Seychelles, 2.42 - with extremely low TFRs, the lowest in the whole of Africa. At the other end of the spectrum are the majority of countries, with high fertility, including Kenya with a TFR of 6.8 in 1985-90, Malawi (7.6), Tanzania (6.8) and Zambia (6.8). Barring Lesotho and Zimbabwe both with TFRs under 6, the range in the remaining countries was 6.2 to 6.9.

### **C. Mortality**

13. The most distinguishing pattern of sub-regional mortality is the relatively low levels for the North African sub-region compared with the three sub-Saharan Africa sub-regions (See table 1). The crude death rates (CDRs) and infant mortality rates (IMRs) for the period 1985-90 were: North Africa, 10.8 and 76; West Africa, 16.5 and 111; Central Africa, 15.9 and 98; and East/Southern Africa, 16.4 and 114.

14. At the country level, in North Africa, barring Sudan's relatively high level-15.8 - the CDRs were all relatively low in 1985-90, ranging from 7.3 in Tunisia to 10.8 for Egypt.

15. That West Africa is generally a high mortality sub-region is shown by the range of country level CDRs in 1985-90; from 8.3 in Cape Verde to 23.4 in Sierra Leone. Apart from Cote d'Ivoire's (14.5), Ghana's (13.1), and Togo's (14.1), the CDRs in the remaining countries were high, that is, 15 and above.

16. The CDRs in Central Africa were generally high, that is, over 16 in 1985-90. The exceptional countries with lower CDRs during the same period were Sao Tome (7.9), Zaire (14.2), Cameroon (14.9) and Congo (14.6).

17. East/Southern Africa has at the country level, a diversified mortality pattern, although levels are generally high. At the one extreme are a small number of countries with very low mortality. Topping this list are Mauritius and Seychelles, that recorded the lowest mortality levels in the whole of Africa between 1985 and 1990: CDRs of 6.4 and 5.6 respectively. Other countries with relatively low mortality include Botswana, Kenya, Swaziland and Zimbabwe, with the following CDRs in 1985-90, 11.6, 11.3, 12.5 and 10.3 respectively. At the other extreme are countries with fairly high mortality, such as Angola, Ethiopia, Malawi and Somalia, all with CDRs in 1985-90 equal to or more than 20.

#### D. Age Composition

18. Because of their recent history of high fertility, the populations of ECA Member States are youthful. For instance, the percentages of the population aged under 15 years range in 1989 from 41.2 in the North Africa sub-region to 47.4 in the East/Southern Sub-region.

19. At the country level, in North Africa, the three countries- Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia - that have relatively low fertility levels are the only ones with lower percentages under 15 years: 39.4, 40.5 and 38.0 respectively.

20. The percentages of the population under fifteen years are generally high, that is, above 40 percent in 1990, in the countries of West Africa. The countries with relatively high percentages include Cote d'Ivoire (48.1), Ghana (45.4), Liberia (45.2), Mauritania (44.6) and Nigeria (47.4), and those with moderate percentages were Cape Verde (39.6) and Guinea Bissau (41.3).

21. Similarly, among the countries in East/Southern Africa, the percentages of the population under fifteen years are on the whole high. Mauritius and Seychelles - countries with exceptional low fertility by African standards - had in 1990 also very low percentages. On the other hand, Kenya had in 1990 50 percent, Botswana (49.4), Rwanda (49.0) Tanzania (49.2), Zambia (49.7) and Zimbabwe (44.9.0). In Central Africa, the percentages of the population under 15 years vary from 32.4 (for Gabon) to 45.3 (for Zaire).

22. As a basis for comparison, it should be pointed that the percentages of the population under 15 years in 1990, for the world the more developed and less developed regions are: 32.3, 21.4 and 35.6 percent respectively. The weighted percentage for ECA member State, it should be noted during the same period is 45.

23. Attention is now focused on the percentages in the age group 15-64, conventionally defined as the working age group (WAG) and the total dependency ratio (TDR). The percentages of the population in the WAGs are also high in Africa, varying from 51 in the West African sub-region to 55 in the North Africa sub-region. At the same time, at the sub-regional level, the evidence shows that the TDRs are also generally high in 1990: North (82), West (98), Central (94) and East/South (99).

24. At the country level, in the North African sub-region, where the percentages in the WAGs are high, the range are 58 in Tunisia and 51.7 in Libya. This sub-region has the lowest TDRs, varying from 73 in Tunisia and 93 in Libya. In the West Africa sub-region, the percentages of the population in the WAGs are relatively high in 1990 in Cape Verde (51) Gambia (53) Guinea (51) Guinea Bissau (54), Senegal (53) and Sierra Leone (55), and relatively low in Benin (51), Ghana (51), Liberia (51), Nigeria (49). The TDRs are also generally high in countries in this sub- region, especially, Benin (101), Cote d'Ivoire (96), Ghana (93), Liberia (93), Mali (98), Mauritania (99), Niger (101) and Nigeria (100).

25. At the country level, in the East/Southern sub-region, the percentages of the population in the WAGs were relatively high in 1990 in Ethiopia (52), Mauritius (66) and Mozambique (53),

and relatively low in Kenya (47) and Tanzania (49). At the same time the TDRs are high in Kenya (119), Rwanda (103) Uganda (104), Tanzania (106) Zambia (101) and Zimbabwe (103).

26. In the Central African sub-region, all countries generally recorded high percentages of their population in the WAGs, with the percentages for Chad (54), Equatorial Guinea (54) and Gabon (57), the highest. Compared with other countries in the sub-Saharan African sub-regions, TDRs are relatively low varying from 75 in Gabon to 93 in Zaire.

27. As a basis for comparison, the percentage of the population in the WAG and the TDR are in 1989 for all ECA member States 52 and 99 respectively; those for the world 62 and 61, the more developed regions, 67 and 50, and the less developed regions 61 and 65.

### **G. Population Distribution and International Migration**

28. The two common population distribution patterns in Africa include the uneven spatial distribution of the rural population and the disproportionate concentration of the urban population and development in a single metropolitan centre.

29. Internal population movements in African countries take various forms: rural-to-rural, urban-to-urban, rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban movements. Among these four categories of movements inter rural and rural-to-urban migrations have been found to be the most popular in most of the countries. <sup>2/</sup> Inter rural movements occur from less endowed to prosperous rural, agricultural, mining and industrial localities.

30. Relative to international migration, the following trends could be discerned in recent years.<sup>3/</sup> The first type involves inter-country movements. In West Africa, for example, a well-documented inter-country movement is the flow from, inland Sahelian countries (e.g., Burkina Faso and Mali) to more developed coastal countries like Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana. Agricultural estates, mines, industrial sites and urban areas are the main destination nodes of the immigrants.

31. A distinguishing aspect of inter country migration in Southern and Central Africa, for many years now, has been the regulated flows to the South African coal and gold mines from especially Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

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<sup>2/</sup> Aderanti Adepoju, 'State of the art review of migration in Africa', In Commissioned Papers: Conference on the Role of Migration in African Development: Issues and Policies for the 1990s (Dakar: Union for African Population Studies, 1990)

<sup>3/</sup> UNECA, 'International migration: population trends and their implications for Africa', African Population Series, no.4, E/ECA/SER.A/2, Addis Ababa, 1983; and Sergio Ricca, International Migration in Africa: Legal and Administrative Aspects (Geneva: ILO, 1989)

32. One other important class of inter-country movements in Africa is the large scale migration of refugees.<sup>4/</sup> By 1989, for instance, it has been estimated that nearly 5 million of the world's 15 million refugees were in Africa. In this connection, it should be pointed out that the African refugee problem started becoming significant in the 1960s. In 1964, for instance, the total number of refugees in Africa was estimated as 400 thousand. By 1970, this number had increased to three-quarter million; and about 3 million by 1979. During the 1980s the number of refugees peaked at 5 million.

33. The major refugee generating and receiving countries have changed over the years. However, the evidence establishes that in recent years, the countries of East and Central Africa, especially Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Malawi, Tanzania and Zaire as the major hosting locations of refugees, with the first three also among the major source countries (Table 2)

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<sup>4/</sup> See, e.g. UNECA, Guidelines on the Methods of Evaluating the Socio-Economic and Demographic Consequences of Refugees in African Countries, E/ECA/POP/TP/91/6[2.3(ii)], Addis Ababa: Nov. 1991

TABLE 2: Estimated Number of Refugees for Main Countries of Origin <sup>a/</sup> Sub-Saharan Africa, 1985-1989

Country of Origin <sup>a</sup>	Early 1985	Early 1988	Early 1989
Ethiopia	1202556	1482500	1264400
Mozambique	46157	632600	920200
Angola	337700	395800	407100
Rwanda <sup>b</sup>	349422	377906	391509
Somalia	-	60000	350000
Sudan	59100	251000	348000
Burundi	172100	173900	176900
Chad	61300	136881	126524
Namibia	77300	75900	76300
Zaire	94550	43536	43716
South Africa	31259	24200	24700
Uganda	273575	106700	21300

Source: United Nations, World Population Monitoring 1991, Dept. of International Economic and Social Affairs, ST/ESA/SER.A/126, Population Studies, No.126, (New York, 1992)

- a/ Countries presented in descending order for 1989 figures.
- b/ In estimating the total number of refugees originating in Rwanda, it was assumed that all those reported for Burundi for early 1988 and 1989 were of Rwandes origin

34. In North Africa, a contemporary international migration pattern is the emigration to Western Europe, and more recently, to the oil-endowed countries of the Arabian Peninsula, the Persian Gulf and Libya.

35. Despite the fairly significant numbers of intra-continental flows mentioned above, factors such as the porous nature of international boundaries and the irregular character of most of the movements have made it difficult to adequately quantify them.

36. Urban patterns and trends are next assessed. Two aspects of the development of urbanization in Africa that mark out the continent from other world regions are the low levels of urbanization and the high rates of urban (as well as total) population growth. For example, during the period



1950 to 1990, the level of urbanization in Africa increased from 15 to 35 percent. By 1990 the percent urban was about half the level in Latin America, 72.3 percent, and slightly lower than the overall world average, 43 percent. Among world's major regions, Africa's level of urbanization is only comparable to those of East and South Asia, 29.4 and 29.0 percent respectively in 1990.

37. However, it is with respect to urban population growth, that Africa's recent urbanization experience is distinctly different from those of other world regions (Table 3)

Table 3: Percent urban, 1950, 1970 and 1990 and annual rate of growth of urban population, 1950-2000

Sub-Region/World Regions	Percent Urban			Annual Rate of Growth		
	1950	1970	1990	1950-70	1970-90	1990-2000
Period						
Northern Africa	24.5	36.0	44.3	4.30	3.74	3.61
Wester Africa	10.2	19.6	33.1	5.74	5.78	5.34
Eastern Africa	5.3	10.3	22.4	5.92	6.83	6.18
Central Africa	14.3	24.8	39.6	4.67	5.18	4.79
Southern Africa	38.2	44.1	55.6	3.15	3.51	3.27
Africa	14.5	22.9	34.5	4.68	4.95	4.79
Latin America	16.4	23.9	29.9	4.33	3.43	2.52
East Asia	16.8	26.9	29.4	4.30	1.95	2.22
South Asia	14.8	20.2	29.0	3.83	3.97	3.75
More Developed Regions	53.8	66.6	72.7	2.23	1.13	0.76
Less Developed Regions	16.9	25.5	33.9	4.31	3.59	3.54
World	29.1	37.2	42.7	3.15	2.49	2.55

Source: United Nations, 1989

38. During the period 1950-70, for instance, Africa's annual rate of urban growth, 4.68 percent, though higher was not very different from those of other less developed regions (LDRs) such as Latin America, 4.33 percent, and East Asia, 4.30 percent. But since this period while urban (as well as total population) growth rates of LDRs have decelerated, Africa's had accelerated to around 5 percent per annum during 1970-90, compared with rates of 3.43 for Latin America

and 3.97 percent for South Asia, the other two high urban growth regions. By the end of the century Africa's rate of population growth would have only marginally decelerated to 4.79 percent per annum i.e. with doubling time of around 15 years.

39. With urbanization viewed from the perspective of the growth of localities, the evidence indicates that Africa has a smaller percentage share of its population in cities of 20,000 and above, as well as, the larger cities, e.g. those with populations of 1 or 2 million or more. For instance, it has been estimated that by 1980 there were approximately 38 localities with population sizes of 500,000 and above in Africa, compared with 78 in South Asia and 42 in Latin America.

### III. FUTURE TRENDS

40. High population growth in Africa is the result of the combination of two main factors: high, almost constant fertility levels and high but falling mortality levels. Given this pattern of high rate of population growth, an important question is when will deceleration begin in the region. The evidence from the 1990 assessment indicates that population growth rate will stabilize around 3 percent per annum up to the end of the century before it begins to decelerate, although gradually at the beginning, and at high level. At these rates of growth the population of Africa is expected to cross the one billion mark between 2005 and 2010.

41. More specifically, according to the medium variant projections of the United Nations, the population growth rate of the region, among the highest in the world, would marginally decrease between 1985-1990 and 2000-2005, from 3.00 to 2.89 percent per annum. This rate is projected to fall under 2 percent i.e., 1.9 percent during the period 2020-2025.

42. The roles of fertility and mortality in the growth of the population of the Africa is next explored. In this connection, it is pertinent to point out that the region's population growth is fertility rather than mortality-driven. The following factors, among others, have been suggested in explaining the phenomenon: the early and almost universal marriage patterns, the influence of culture, the large cohorts in the child-bearing ages in view of the young populations and slow spread of family planning programmes.

43. Trends in fertility for the period 1950-55 to 1985-90 presented in Table 4 indicate that during the period 1950-55 to 1985-90 the TFRs for the world as a whole and other world regions excepting Africa's experienced a secular trend. Specifically, between 1950-55 and 1985-90, the TFR for the world as whole declined from 5.0 to 3.44; in the more developed regions, from 2.84 to 1.90; and in the less developed regions 6.18 to 3.94. Compared with these appreciable declines, the TFR of the ECA region experienced only an insignificant decline, from 6.65 in 1950-55 to 6.20 in 1985-90 (Table 4).

Table 4: Trends in Total Fertility Rates by Major World Regions and ECA Sub-regions, 1950-1955 to 1985-1990 (Medium Variant)

	1950-55	1960-65	1970-75	1980-85	1985-90
World Total	5.00	4.98	4.46	3.60	3.45
More Developed Regions	2.84	2.69	2.20	1.93	1.89
Less Developed Regions	6.19	6.09	5.41	4.19	3.94
Africa	6.65	6.79	6.62	6.40	6.24
North Africa	6.83	7.08	6.36	5.66	5.11
West Africa	6.78	6.88	6.89	6.87	6.85
Central Africa	5.90	5.97	6.13	6.19	6.24
East/Southern Africa	6.76	6.90	6.99	6.91	6.85

Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects: 1990 (New York: 1991)

44. This decline is largely attributable to the North African sub-region, the only one among the four where a secular decline occurred during the period from 6.83 in 1950-55 to 5.11 in 1985-90. In the other three sub-regions a slight secular increase took place: in West Africa, from 6.78 to 6.85; in East/Southern Africa, from 6.76 to 6.85 and in Central Africa from 5.90 to 6.24.

45. Future trends in the total fertility rates (TFRs) for Africa and other major world regions are shown in Figure 2. The indicate that TFR for Africa, the highest among world regions would decrease from around 45 per thousand in 1990 to about 25 per thousand by 2020.

46. Relative to mortality, the other component of population growth, it should be noted that current levels are still high, by world standards. Projections of the United Nations indicate that life expectancy at birth, which stood at 50 years in 1985-90 will increase by 12 years by 2015-2020. The infant mortality rate, another indicator of mortality, will decline from 103 per thousand in 1985-90 to 54 per thousand in 2015-2020. At this time, i.e. 2015-2020, single digit rates would have been attained by North America and Europe.

## CONCLUSION

47. From a size of around 221 million in 1950 Africa's population grew by 40 percent, from 1950 to 1970, that is, from 221 to 361 million. During the next twenty years, 1970 to 1990, the population grew by 78 percent, that is from 361 to 642 million. This translates into almost a four-fold increase in forty years.

48. This rapid growth of the population within a relatively short span, unprecedented for a major world region, is the result of a regime of high average population growth maintained at the level of between 2.5 and 3 percent per annum during 1955 to 1990.
49. As explained earlier, Africa's high population growth is fertility rather than mortality-driven. Factors such as the early and almost universal marriage patterns, the influence of culture, the large cohorts in the child-bearing ages in view of the young populations and the slow spread of family planning programmes are among the major determinants of this change.
50. African culture puts a premium on having many children, for both financial and economic reasons. From the financial viewpoint, parents expect to receive, on the balance, more benefits from children compared with the costs of childraising. Childraising costs to parents are usually minimised because of assistance from the extended family, the practice of child fostering especially in West Africa, and strong social obligations to relatives.<sup>5/</sup>
51. Two other factors, namely the large population in the childbearing ages along with the practice of early and almost universal marriage patterns have contributed to high fertility in Africa.
52. Demographic surveys conducted in a number of African countries point to the slow spread of family planning programmes, with headway made in only a handful of countries like Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco in North Africa, and Botswana, Kenya and Zimbabwe, in recent years. However, it would appear that the potential demand for family planning is appreciable because of factors such as unmet needs for contraceptives, rising rates of abortion, differences in desired family sizes as well as the high use of contraceptives by certain population groups and/or areas. This potential should be tapped by African governments.
53. Against this background, policies pertaining to strengthening demand for smaller families, improving the status of women and expanding the uses of family planning programmes, among others, have a major role to play to bring down levels of population growth.

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<sup>5/</sup> World Bank, Population Growth and Policies in Sub-Saharan Africa (Washington, DC.:1986), chapt.3