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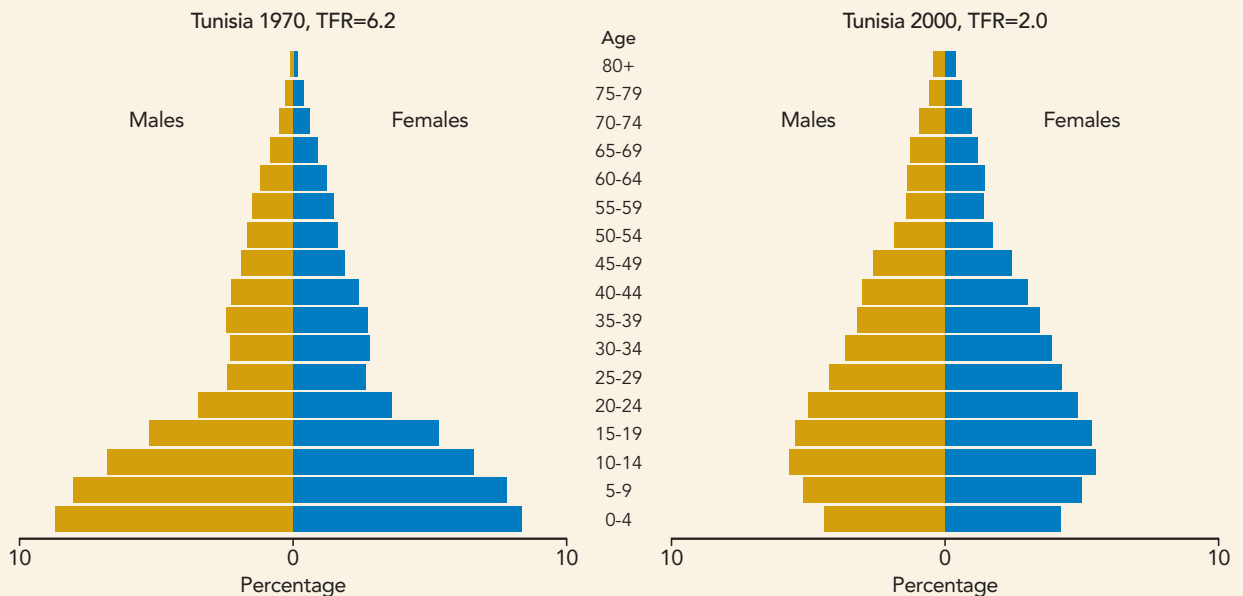
INITIATING THE DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND BY ACHIEVING A FERTILITY DECLINE

The accelerated economic growth of the demographic dividend remains a possibility for many African nations, but for the process to begin, countries must prioritize strategic investments to lower fertility (children per woman) and child mortality (deaths). Until countries address their extremely young age structure through family planning, education, and other investments that contribute to smaller and healthier families, they will not achieve their full potential for economic growth that comes through a demographic dividend.

For countries to realize a demographic dividend, they need to make investments that lead to having a smaller school-age population and a larger working-age population.

- **Birth Spacing and Family Planning.** Helping women to have healthy spacing and timing of pregnancies, and to have the number of children they want through family planning, is central to lowering fertility and achieving this needed change in population structure.
- **Child Survival.** When parents see their children thriving, they begin to see that having fewer children is beneficial. Investments in child survival are critical to establishing the desire for smaller families.
- **Girls’ Education.** Education—especially for girls—plays a critical role in lowering fertility. When girls stay in school longer, they are less likely to get married and bear children at a young age. Girls with a secondary education have fewer and healthier children.

Lower Fertility Facilitates Tunisia’s Demographic Dividend



Over a 30-year period, Tunisia underwent a transition that initiated a demographic dividend, with fertility decreasing from 6.2 births per woman to 2.0, and under-5 mortality dropping from 181 deaths per 1,000 live births to 17. At the same time, gross national income per person increased from \$874 to \$2,146 (in constant 2000 \$US), reflecting Tunisia’s harnessing its demographic dividend.

FAMILY PLANNING HELPS TRANSFORM POPULATION-AGE STRUCTURE

As a first step toward a demographic dividend, countries must go through a demographic transition—from high to low birth and death rates. Although most countries have made significant progress in reducing mortality, many countries continue to sustain high levels of fertility, and are therefore not poised for a demographic dividend. As long as fertility and resulting population growth rates remain high, the size of the school-age population will be larger than the working-age adult population. Families and governments will struggle just to adequately invest in the health and education of children and will have few additional resources to invest in the infrastructure needed to spur job creation and economic growth.

One key strategy to lowering fertility is to reach the public with messages about the health and economic benefits of smaller, healthier families and to provide women and men with voluntary family planning information and services. More than 50 percent of married women in Africa who don't want to become pregnant or want to delay a pregnancy are not using a modern contraceptive method. Greater political commitment and increased resources for family planning—as seen in several countries in Eastern and Southern Africa—are critical to putting African nations on a path toward making the demographic transition a reality. When women can choose when and how often to become pregnant, they are more likely to have fewer children and are better able to achieve their desired family size. Thus, through promoting use of modern contraception, fertility rates will decline and countries can begin to change population age structure, setting the stage for a demographic dividend.

CHILD SURVIVAL LEADS TO LOWER FERTILITY

A demographic dividend needs a healthy population. When parents see that their children are surviving and thriving, they recognize the need for smaller families and are willing to spend more of their resources on their children's health and education. Investments in child survival play a key role in initiating and sustaining lower levels of fertility; as infant and child deaths decrease, the desire for a smaller family and demand for family

planning will increase. In many countries of Africa, couples still desire large families, in part because of high inequality in improvements in child survival. While most African countries have made great improvements in child survival over the last decade, among households in the poorest quintile, child death rates are still nearly double the rate of wealthy households. Correspondingly, total fertility rates are also about twice as high among Africa's poor households than its wealthy ones. The persistent inequality reflects the need to ensure that the poor have access to child survival interventions as well as reproductive health programs, to further facilitate the demographic transition needed for accelerated economic growth.

EDUCATION HELPS INITIATE A DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

When both boys and girls have access to education, accelerated economic growth is possible. In the case of girls, education—especially at the secondary level—actually helps initiate the needed fertility decline. Secondary education helps girls delay marriage and first pregnancy and opens up new opportunities for women beyond their traditional roles in the home. Women who marry later tend to have fewer children than women who marry at a young age. Studies indicate that in African countries with high fertility and low average age at marriage, future population growth could be slowed by as much as 15 percent to 20 percent by delaying marriage and childbearing by five years. Data also indicate that education is closely tied to childbearing and desired family size. A recent study of 30 African countries found that women with secondary or higher education have on average lower fertility than women with no education (3.4 vs. 6.3 births per woman), and the same is true for desired family size (3.7 vs. 5.6 births per woman). Thus, education has an effect in both reducing fertility and modifying social norms related to childbearing.

Addressing rapid population growth and achieving lower levels of fertility are critical to realizing a demographic dividend. Together, efforts to promote voluntary family planning, improve child survival, and expand educational opportunities for girls contribute to lowering fertility and setting countries on the course for a demographic dividend.

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