

# Zambia and Western Province Are on the Cusp of a Promising Future

Zambia has the potential to achieve a prosperous and competitive economy in the coming decades, but rapid population growth hinders its goal of becoming an upper middle-income country by 2030.<sup>1</sup>

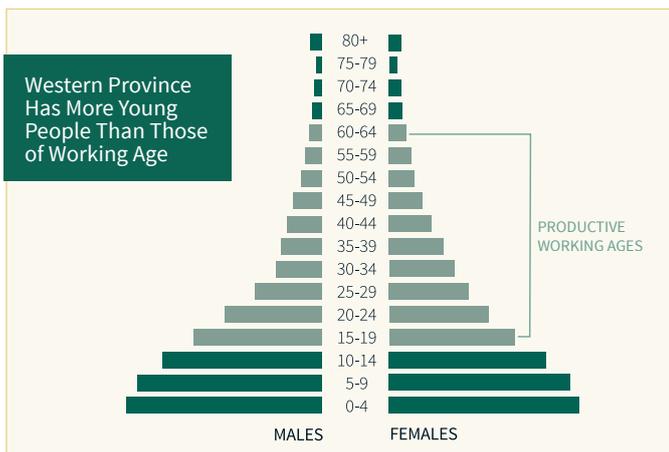
## Rapid Population Growth Challenges Zambia's Ability to Provide for Its People

- Half of Zambia's 17 million people live in **poverty**.<sup>2</sup>
- The **unemployment** rate is 12.6%; the youth unemployment rate is 17.4%.<sup>3</sup>
- One in five married women (ages 15 to 49) have an **unmet need** for family planning—they want to space or limit childbearing but are not using a family planning method.<sup>4</sup>
- On average, Zambian women have five children.<sup>5</sup> At this rate, the population will increase to 24 million by 2030 and **more than double** to 41 million by 2050.<sup>6</sup>
- For every 100,000 live births, there are 252 **maternal deaths**.<sup>7</sup>
- To meet the basic needs of the population in 2030, the government will need to:<sup>8</sup>
  - Train and absorb 25,000 **doctors** and **nurses** and 115,000 **teachers**.
  - Educate more than 4.5 million primary and secondary school **students**.
  - Invest 37 billion Kwacha in **health** and **education**.



### Western Province...

- Eighth most-populated province—1 million people.<sup>9</sup>
- Highest rate of poverty—82 out of every 100 people live in poverty.<sup>10</sup>
- Contributes 3% to Zambia's total GDP.<sup>11</sup>
- Second highest unemployment rate—19.7%.<sup>12</sup>
- Lowest rate of family planning use—30% of married women use a modern method of contraception, and one in four have an unmet need for family planning.<sup>13</sup>
- Second highest adolescent pregnancy rate in Zambia—one in three female adolescents (ages 15 to 19) have had a live birth.<sup>14</sup>
- Highest median age at first marriage for women (ages 25 to 49) at 20.5 years.<sup>15</sup>
- Key challenges for the province as identified in Zambia's Seventh National Development Plan (2017-2021) include "poor infrastructure, ... inadequate basic social amenities such as schools and health facilities, as well as high poverty and unemployment levels."<sup>16</sup>



**With Investments in Family Planning and Reproductive Health, Western Province Can Help Zambia Achieve Upper Middle-Income Status**

### HEALTH

Women in Western Province have on average 5.6 children, while their mean ideal number of children is 4.9.<sup>17</sup> By expanding access to family planning and reproductive health services, women and couples will be better able to choose the timing and spacing of their pregnancies, meet desired family sizes, and improve child survival. These changes will help slow the country's rapid population growth and free up resources to address health issues like malnutrition, HIV, and malaria. Western Province is home to 6% of Zambia's malnourished children under age 5, and its mortality rate for children under age 5 is 73 per 1,000 live births.<sup>18</sup> At 15.4%, the province has the third highest HIV prevalence rate.<sup>19</sup> In 2015, the incidence of malaria in Western Province was 499.6 per 1,000 people—the fourth highest in the nation.<sup>20</sup>

## EDUCATION

In 2017, Western Province had more than 316,000 students enrolled in primary and secondary school, and 8,600 students received bursaries from the Ministry of General Education.<sup>21</sup> Twenty-seven percent of adolescent girls in Western Province completed secondary school, compared to the national average of 30%.<sup>22</sup> While Western Province has one of the highest rates of adolescent pregnancy, 85% of girls who experienced pregnancy in primary and secondary school returned to school after giving birth.<sup>23</sup> Eliminating barriers to family planning for youth will enable them to avoid pregnancy and adverse pregnancy outcomes.

## ECONOMY

When girls are able to stay in school longer, they can attain higher-skilled jobs that allow them to better contribute to the economy and help increase the working-age population (ages 15 to 65). The working-age population supports Zambia's dependent population—those under age 15 and above age 65. Fifty-two percent of Western Province's population is dependent.<sup>24</sup> Supportive policies like expanded access to family planning and reproductive health services can help increase Zambia's working-age population relative to its dependent population. Such changes can create a more competitive workforce, decrease youth unemployment and poverty, and address rapid population growth.

### Recommended Actions for Sustainable Population Growth and Economic Success

To achieve sustainable population growth and meet national development goals, Western Province must:

- Use demographic data to inform development policies and programs, and invest in multisectoral approaches that integrate population issues, including age-structure dynamics.
- Increase prioritization of and funding for voluntary family planning and reproductive health services, with a focus on reducing unmet need and expanding access to services for young people.
- Improve educational outcomes by identifying and reducing barriers to secondary school completion by adolescent girls.
- Invest in economic growth by creating youth employment and skills building opportunities.

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