

# Transitions to adulthood in a high fertility context: The case of Sub-Saharan Africa

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Caroline W. Kabiru

African Population and Health Research Center, Nairobi, Kenya

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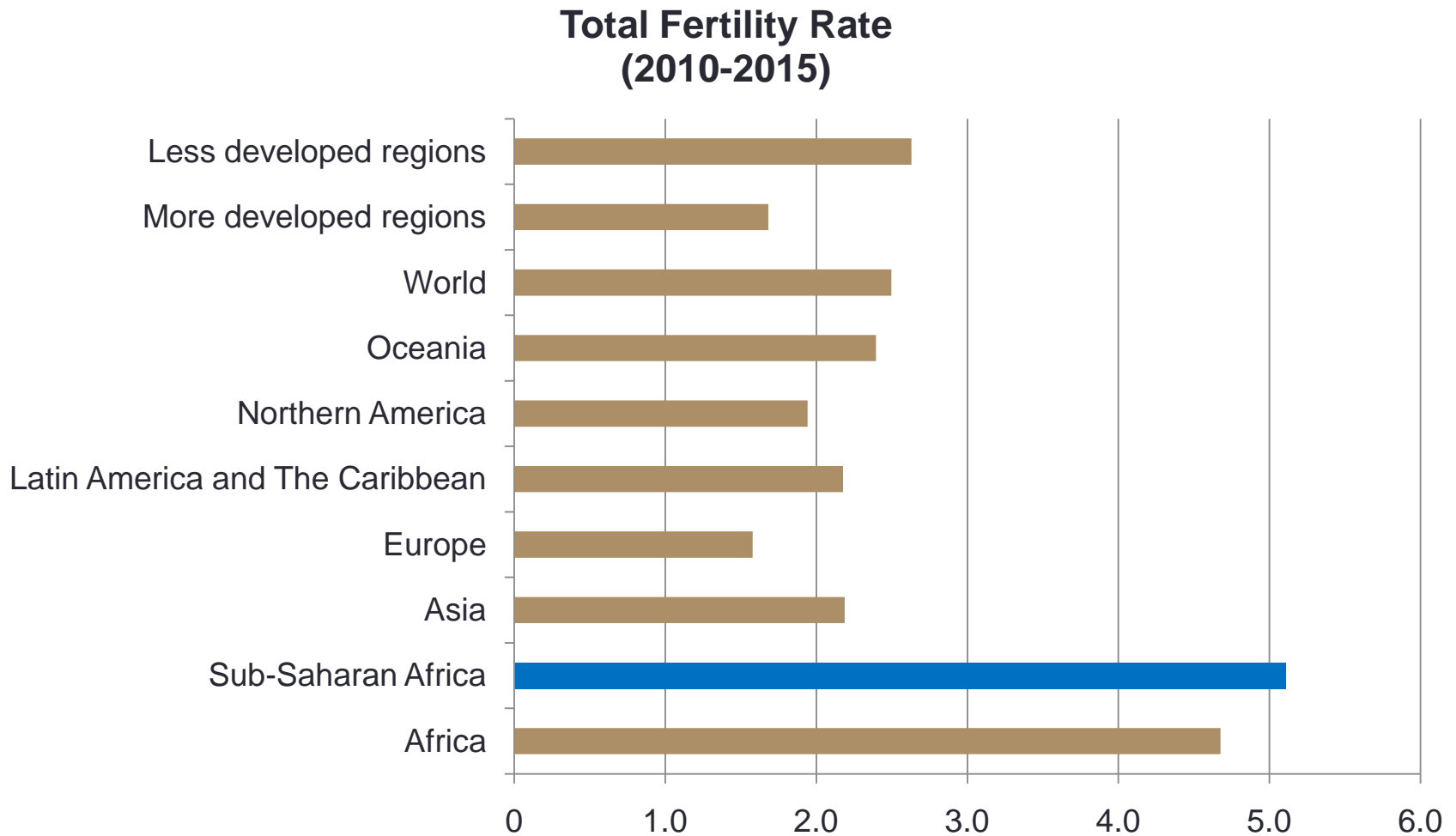
Population Division, United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs

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# Presentation roadmap

- The current situation of young people in sub-Saharan Africa
  - Employment
  - Education
  - Marriage
  - Sexual and reproductive health
- Policy prospects to address the challenges facing young people in sub-Saharan Africa

# Why sub-Saharan Africa?



# Why sub-Saharan Africa?

- Most youthful population in the world
- The proportion of young people will remain high
- A large population of young people presents immense opportunities for development
- **However it also presents** a significant challenge given the precarious economic and social realities in the region

# THE CURRENT SITUATION OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN SUB- SAHARAN AFRICA

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# Youth employment

- Declining job opportunities even for educated young people (Al-Samarrai and Bennell, 2007)

## Implications

- Brain drain
  - International/Rural-urban migration
- Involvement in “survivalist” income generating activities requiring minimal skills and with low incomes

# Education

- Many SSA countries have initiated policies and programmes to improve access to education
- Literacy rates remain lower than other regions
- Rapid population growth means sustained pressure on educational facilities and resources
- Pockets of exclusion







# Marriage

# Consequences of early marriage

Early age at marriage has broader social and economic implications (UNFPA, 2012).

- Limits young women's access to education and employment with subsequent implications for poverty status (UNFPA, 2012; Gyimah 2009)
- Increased risk for early pregnancies—often unintended and associated with poor maternal and child health outcomes (Eruklar, 2013, Mensch, 2005)
- Increased risk of intimate partner violence (Hindin et al, 2008; Eruklar 2013)
- Poorer mental health outcomes (Gage, 2013)
- Greater risk for HIV infection (Clark, 2004)

# Informal unions

- Informal unions or “cohabitation” increasingly common
  - Perpetuated by economic hardships that limit capacity to cover wedding-related expenses (Antoine 2006; 2007; Calves 2007; Bocquier & Khasakhala 2009)
- Informal unions associated with
  - Higher likelihood for intimate partner violence (Hindin et al 2008)
  - Risky sexual behavior

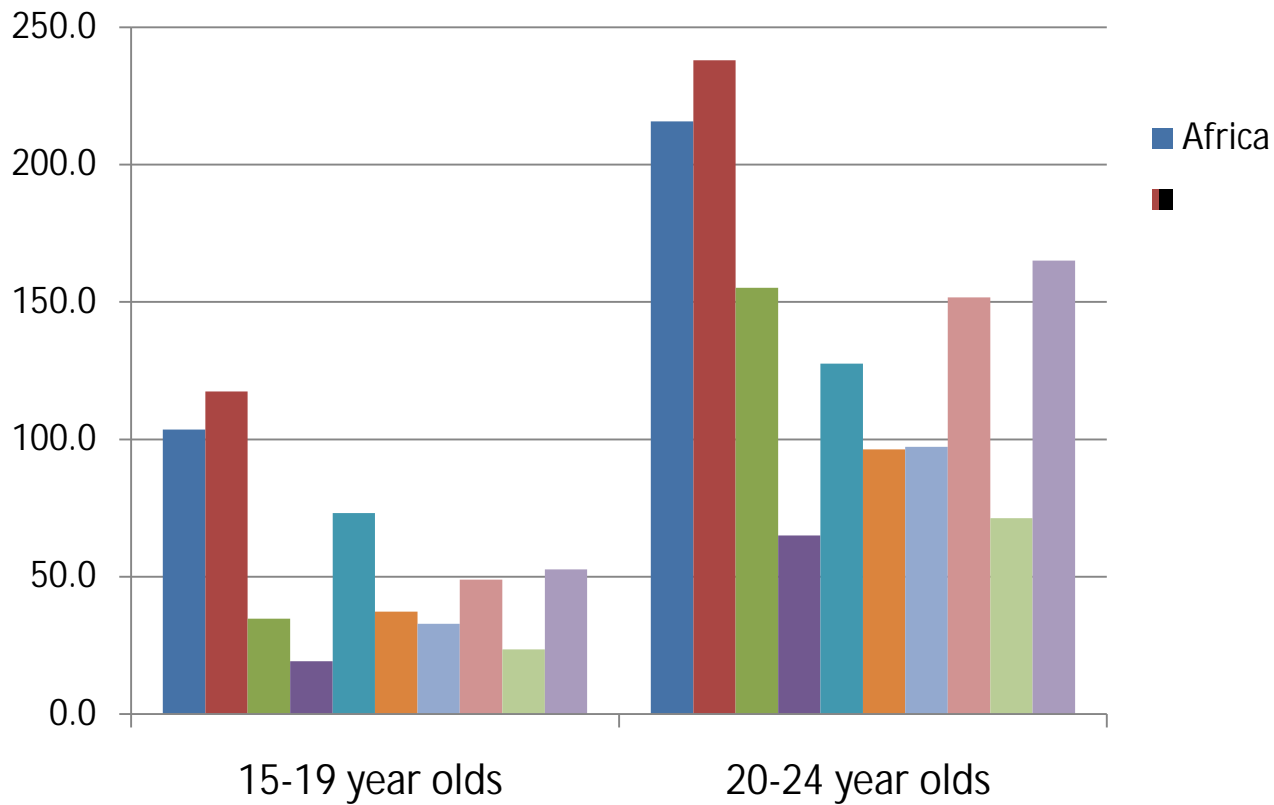
# Sexual and reproductive health

- The transition to adulthood is characterized by developmental changes, including increased sexual risk taking
- Higher proportions of females than males report early sexual debut
- Early sexual debut is more/MCID mon among
  - Females in rural areas
  - Females with lower educational attainment

# Sexual and reproductive health

- Low levels of comprehensive sexual knowledge
  - Exclusion of essential information in sexuality education programs
  - Large numbers of out-of-school youth
- Limited access to SRH services
  - Only 40% of births to women aged less than 20 years are attended by a skilled health worker (PRB, 2006)
- Early—often unprotected—

# Sexual and reproductive health





# Sexual and reproductive health

- High levels of unmet need for contraception
  - 21–46 per cent of married females aged 15–24 years in six SSA countries had an unmet need for contraception (Prata et al 2013)

## **Consequences**

- High incidence of unsafe abortion
  - Half of all abortions (3.2 million) among 15-19 year olds occur in Africa

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POLICY PROSPECTS TO ADDRESS  
THE CHALLENGES THAT YOUTH IN  
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA FACE

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# Possible avenues for change - employment

- Invest in 'the basics for growth' (Oppenheimer and Spicer, 2011, pp. 18);
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# Possible avenues for change - education

- Educational opportunities must match the demands of a growing population if young people's ability to engage meaningfully in the formal economy is to be harnessed.
  - Alignment of the content of school curricula to current and future needs of the economy (Altman et al 2013).
  - Adequate resources should be invested in vocational training, including ensuring that vocational training programmes are formalized and accredited (Altman et al 2013).





# Concluding remarks

....what is needed? – accelerated implementation of existing policies and declarations

- Increased allocation of resources to support primary and secondary education, youth entrepreneurship, and access to health services
- Creation of knowledge sharing platforms to identify and prioritize programming for youth
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# Thank you

Kabiru, CW, Izugbara, CO, Beguy, D, and Sidze EM

African Population and Health Research Center