Title: African Children and Adolescents: Dividend or Debt?

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Abstract: Sub-Saharan Africa has been persistently characterized by very high concentration of children and adolescents. In 2009, Sub-Saharan Africa had 43% of its population between age zero and 14 years while the average for low income countries was 39% and the world average 27%. The question is what are the implications of these large proportions of children and adolescents in the region? Can they be considered as dividend or debt? A search for the answer to the questions is attempted in this chapter within the age structure-economic framework. One country each was selected to represent the Eastern, Western and Southern parts of Sub-Saharan Africa. The selection process was guided by the availability of at least two sets of census data. In this regard, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa were purposively selected. Three variables critically analyzed in the study include age, educational attainment and employment status. Two main analytical strategies were carried out. First, population pyramids were constructed for the selected countries to highlight the prevailing age-sex structure of various populations. The second level of analysis involved computing the dependency ratio vis-à-vis general dependency ratio, percentage distribution of children and adolescents by educational attainment and employment status. The series of census data analyzed show clearly that the region is still largely characterized by a soaring proportion of young people who are largely dependants. The youthful population structure in Sub-Saharan Africa is the major contributor to the prevailing high dependency ratio in the region. Consistent with various age structures and economic relationship frameworks adopted for the study, the present proportion of children and adolescents are more of economic burden at both micro (individual families) and macro (governments) levels. Nevertheless, if reductionate population policies are vigorously implemented now and birth rates begin to decline in a sustainable way, the current large proportion of children and adolescents would graduate into the working age population in about a decade or so while dependency ratio would begin to fall. If appropriate economic, social and legal frameworks are put in place, this situation is most likely to propel rapid economic growth and social welfare. Thus, children and adolescents in Sub-Saharan Africa are more of debts presently but all things being equal, potential great source of economic miracles.