September Session

Executive Board of UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS

Statement by

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7 September 2016

New York
Mr. President,
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,
Distinguished Delegates,

I would like to present for your consideration the Country Programme Documents for four countries in West and Central Africa, namely Chad; Cote d’Ivoire; the Gambia; and Sao Tome and Principe, and to request one-year extension of the Country Programmes in Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Gabon, Mauritania, and two years for that of Senegal.

Given the efforts in recent years, the West and Central Africa Region has made significant progress in many key areas. For instance, the region has experienced strong economic growth, ranging between 5% and 6% the last three years. This economic dynamism is supported by changes in the governance of the countries which is also positively impacting the business environment.

We also note a decline in the maternal mortality rate (from 1,009 per 100,000 live births in 2009 to 679 per 100,000 in 2015 and a decrease in child mortality rate to 58 per 1,000 live births.

We are witnessing stronger political will and greater ownership by Governments in the region as they adopt policies and measures that address the myriad of developmental challenges holding back the region. This includes the embrace of the demographic dividend framework as well as action to rollback harmful practices and advance sexual and reproductive rights of especially women. From Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria through Ghana and Burkina Faso to The Gambia, leaders, legislators and stakeholders are demonstrating their resolve to abandon child marriage and
female genital mutilation. I must mention that the progress can be associated with the relentless advocacy and programmatic interventions by UNFPA colleagues and partners across the region.

Despite the encouraging progress, countries in the region are still grappling with issues including low contraceptive prevalence rate of 18 per cent for women aged 15-49 years, high fertility rates (5.5 children per woman), and persisting barriers to accessing sexual and reproductive health services and information, resulting in high maternal and child mortality levels 679 per 100,000 live births against the global target of 70 per 100,000.

Indeed, these basic statistics of the region show that, more than anywhere else, the need to improve maternal and reproductive health, promote family planning and empower young people to lead healthy and productive lives is of utmost importance.

The region has also seen increased insecurity in its Sahel part; the sequel of the recent Ebola epidemic and the few but increasing cases of Zika; high prevalence of gender-based violence and pervasive child marriage and other harmful practices; chronic institutional and political crisis and conflicts. HIV/AIDS remains a concern with prevalence rates increasing to over 3% in a number of countries, while access to care and support are the lowest compared to any other region of the world. Not to forget the large youth population with a lot of potential and in search of opportunities and dreams yet having limited access to education and exposed to radicalization and violent extremism.

Despite the bleak facts, there is one that gives the region high hopes - its youthful population with 43.8 per cent aged 0-14 and 31.8 per cent are aged 10-24 years. If
these young people are put first and enabled to become healthy, educated and employed, we can harness the Demographic Dividend. We are deeply convinced that by focusing on realizing the Demographic Dividend we can leverage strong partnerships and act in an integrated manner to address the above mentioned challenges and bring about peace, security, stability, sustainable growth and shared prosperity in West and central Africa.

Mr. President, distinguished Delegates

The West African Region lags behind regions on almost all sexual and reproductive health key indicators and, without intervention, is vulnerable to being left behind especially with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals 3, 4, and 5. Compared to other regions, West Africa has the lowest life expectancy, 54 years compared to 58 years in ESARO, which has the second lowest, and to 69 years, world life expectancy.

Maternal mortality is highest in West Africa. It is 66% higher than in the ESARO, which has the second highest rate, and 3 times (300%) higher that the global level. This high maternal rate is not surprising given that the regions has lowest access to sexual and reproductive health services. It has the lowest contraceptive use rate, the lowest rate of births attended by skilled providers, and the lowest rate of proportion of women whose demand for contraceptives has been served. The region is a clear candidate for prioritization, if we are to keep the visionary agenda of leaving no one behind.

In line with the commitment from the international community to leave no one behind and to work in global solidarity to realise the Sustainable Development
Goals, the regional office in West and Central Africa counts on your strengthened support as we scale up our work with partners to ensure access to sexual and reproductive health services, support to victims of gender-based violence, abandonment of harmful practices, and prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. The organization is effectively responding to the developmental needs and the effects of humanitarian emergencies. The work of UNFPA, particularly in the challenged areas of the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin and along the Mano River, is focused on building resilience and making a real difference to people’s lives. Here we can see encouraging progress in the provision of frontline reproductive health services to those who need it most.

UNFPA continues to forge strategic alliances across the region to expand support for the ICPD Agenda through the harnessing of the demographic dividend. Notable ones include: the partnership with the World Bank on the Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Initiative covering six countries; the collaboration with the Mano River Union supporting resilience and youth empowerment in the countries that were most affected by the Ebola Virus Disease emergency; on-going initiative with the French MUSKOKA to accelerate the fight against maternal and infant mortality, the mobilization of private sector in support of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) programmes; the engagement with eminent personalities, parliamentarians, Faith-based and traditional leaders around SRH, family planning and mobilization of eminent personalities such as the Africa Forum, youth networks to put young people first (AFRIYAN, ROJALNU), research institutions, the private sector, the media and other stakeholders. These are elements of a robust and deliberate move toward lifting all domestic resources in support to the implementation of efforts to harness the much needed demographic dividend.
Mr. President, distinguished Delegates,

Diverse in terms of geopolitical and socio-economical features, the four countries whose CPD are being presented today, face challenges that are common across the West and Central Africa region. While we note the significant achievements made with the MDGs, the gaps in access remain enormous, and a lot needs to be done to address the unmet need for sexual and reproductive health services in the region.

In this regard, UNFPA will continue its high-level advocacy and policy dialogue to promote access to sexual reproductive health information and services and will deepen engagement with parliamentarians, traditional and religious leaders to pass and enforce the relevant laws and policies as well as bring about behaviour change.

UNFPA in collaboration with the Government of Chad, and consistent with its Vision 2030 “Le Tchad Que Nous Voulons” and the UNDAF 2017-2021, has designed a country programme that intends to address the inadequate health coverage, including the insufficient number of trained health-care workers, improve the availability and quality of maternal care, increase the low supply and use of contraceptives, and address the persisting gender disparities that affect women and girls.

In Cote d’Ivoire, UNFPA commits to: raising access to quality family planning services through increasing the number of women reached from 153,000 to 880,000 over the four years; building capacity for service delivery and scale-up care services; supporting the development of innovative approaches for improving demand for maternal health services, including family planning; enhancing comprehensive sexuality education in and out of school; provision of integrated SRH services; and
increasing national capacity to address gender-based violence and empower women and girls.

Mr. President, distinguished Delegates,

The Islamic Republic of the Gambia recently hosted the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the African Youth Charter, tagged Banjul +10, and gathered hundreds of delegates to discuss challenges and identify effective policies to empower youth and harness the benefits of the demographic dividend.

The Government of the Gambia and UNFPA will join efforts across all programming areas with a focus on youth, adolescent issues, as well as sexual and reproductive health. Gender as an important theme will be cross cutting, and focus areas will be supported by improved data collection and analysis to boost the opportunities for reaping the demographic dividend. Earlier, I noted the efforts to end female genital mutilation and child marriage in The Gambia. The Country plans to put an end to obstetric fistula and UNFPA will work with the Government to make that the next breakthrough.

UNFPA in the region will continue to partner with governments to develop national demographic dividend profiles, which now form the base for sector-wide development for the benefits of young people, women and girls with the hope that they will become contributors to the development of their countries and for the achievement of Agenda 2030 and Agenda 2063 The Africa We Want.
UNFPA will continue its engagement with the governments of the West and Central Africa Region to operationalize the SDGs, building on the conviction of African countries that harnessing the demographic dividend will contribute to transforming the continent and the attainment of sustainable development. Leaders across Africa have recognized the benefit of demographic dividend as a lever of resilience and stability, addressing the root causes of inequalities, instability, vulnerability and insecurity, hopelessness, forced migration, radicalization, exploitation and violent extremism.

Mr President, distinguished Delegates,

Cote d’Ivoire is making a transition out of a period of political instability, to build a robust enabling environment for sustainable development. With the existing strong collaboration with the Government, UNFPA works to support progress on the implementation of the National Development Plan (2016–2020), and on achieving the targets of Agenda 2030 on Sustainable Development, particularly targets under Goals 3, 4 and 5 that relate to health, education and gender equality.

Sao Tome and Principe has successfully achieved MDG 2 on universal education, MDG 4 on reduction in infant mortality. UNFPA will support the country to build on this success to reach the targets of Goals 3 good health and Goal 5 on gender equality.

Mr. President,

Members of the Executive Board,
In addition to the four country programme documents, six countries of the West and Central Africa region are submitting requests for extension of their CPDs. By extending the duration of their country programmes, the six countries will strengthen the alignment with respective national planning cycles and UNDAF while enhancing the strategic focus to boost progress on targets and consolidate the foundations for the following programme cycle, consistent with the new framework of Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNFPA will assist the countries to aggressively mobilize resources from non-traditional donors to complement the core funds allocated by our organization, and we will also encourage them to build and reinforce strategic partnerships to achieve the identified results.

I cannot conclude without reiterating that supporting efforts to harness the Demographic Dividend is a priority in the region. The major interventions I have highlighted today are geared toward reaping a dividend through investments in women and youth.

We have introduced innovative approaches in the implementation of the vision of the UNFPA strategic plan with focus on the demographic dividend. We are working to put the young people of our region first in all our interventions. In doing this, we will apply a 4-pronged approach.

First, we are building strategic partnerships for high-level policy and programmatic advocacy. This is exemplified by our engagement with former Heads of State, youth networks and faith leaders from the continent aimed at mobilizing interventions in support of the demographic dividend. Our work with young people across the region
has already succeeded to build a core group championing the demographic dividend at country and regional levels. (Liberia youth video on youth empowerment in support of SRH)

Secondly, we are walking the talk by facilitating the requisite capacity building for national research institutions for analysis and programming for the demographic dividend. We currently work with the Centre for Research in Applied Economics and Finance (CREFAT) of the University of Thies to develop demographic dividend profiles for countries in the region and also to train other research institutes and partners. 15 country teams have been formed and equipped to lead the demographic dividend process at country level (in one year).

As I speak, a team is in Guinea Bissau. Building on the West and Central Africa experience, another one from the region is on its way to Madagascar to share our experiences with another region just like we did a month ago when our Mauritania team went to Egypt to provide support to their demographic dividend initiative. And next week, our partner - the University of Ibadan’s Center for Sustainable Development - will be supporting the governmental seminar imitated by Liberia to quick start the development of their demographic dividend programming. We believe in investing in local institutions, and we are making tangible progress.

Thirdly, we are therefore moving from theory to action to reap the advantage. We have put the framework to practice though the flagship Sahel Women’s Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) regional initiative. The goal of the project is to accelerate the demographic transition, to spur the demographic dividend, and to reduce gender inequality in the Sahel region. Since its official launch in November 2015, the initiative has grown and is proceeding rapidly. We
are confident that this will be a model for scale up and expansion of DD initiatives in the region and the continent.

We are confident that our approach to integration will end the persisting siloed model of programming, by ensuring the mobilization of sister agencies through the UNDG and partners to work collectively for the young person, while getting ready to support the priorities of the African Union and our Heads of State who are leading the transformation of their countries as reflected in the theme of the two African Union Summits of 2017 and the vision of the African Union’s Agenda 2063. This is also in line with aspirations of the transformative and integrated 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Mr. President, Members of the Board, the demographic dividend is not only our development strategy, but also our approach for resilience building. Most importantly, for us in WCA, it is an important blueprint for human development that we have invested in and commit to champion and help replicate in other regions and sectors.

We therefore call for your continued support and indeed greater global solidarity so that the good efforts we see from the countries are amplified with a view to bringing the needed transformation to our part of the world; the most in need part of the world.

Let me take this opportunity to thank you for your unwavering support to help us in our efforts to Put Young People First. This is key to our mantra: no one left behind. Please reflect on this and provide guidance to ensure we continue to transform and uplift lives across West and Central Africa.
Thank you.