

Capitalizing the Demographic dividend of Pakistan-future prospects

Iram Yasir ¹

Demographic dividend refers to the economic growth and development resulting from a change in the age structure of a country's population.¹ Rapid growth in a country occurs as a consequence of declining fertility, facilitated by low child and infant mortality. A country with younger people and lessening fertility reaps a 'demographic dividend' by increasing productivity and decreasing dependency. With low dependency ratio, governments and people can redirect resources for investments in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, creating a virtuous cycle of development, as better education and healthcare can now lead to greater productivity gains.² The demographic dividend is specifically beneficial for those countries which accelerate their economic development through strategic investments and policies.³

The relationship of economic development and population changes has evolved into an important subject recently. Historically since the Second World War, a demographic shift has been undergoing in developing countries, from high to low rates of mortality and fertility. This transition produced a "boom" generation, that is, a generation larger than those immediately before and after it.⁴ The East Asian nations were at the forefront of this transition while Latin America, began their transitions afterwards, in the 1960s and 70s. Countries in the Middle East and Africa, have not yet fully begun, or are in the initial stages of this transition.⁵ Pakistan, like many other countries, stands at a critical juncture where the demographic dividend can either be a transformative force for economic growth or a missed opportunity. Currently, 64 percent of the nation is younger than 30 years of age. Pakistan now has more young people than it has ever had in the past, and predicted to continue to increase till 2050 with many needing jobs. The age distribution of Pakistan's population is heavily skewed towards youth. This presents both opportunities and challenges for the country's future development.⁶

A favorable age structure alone does not yield the dividend. It does not produce benefit automatically. Just like any opportunity, one must exert effort to realize its advantage. To materialize the dividend, the sizeable young and working-age population must be gainfully employed⁷. For economic growth, quality education, adequate nutrition and health, and access to sexual and reproductive health must be ensured to younger population. The country faces multifaceted challenges that intersect with the broader themes of the demographic dividend. One of the biggest challenges that Pakistan faces in realizing its demographic dividend is the lack of education.⁸ According to a recent report, only 58% of Pakistani children go to primary school, and just 28% complete secondary education. This lack of education limits the potential of the workforce and hinders economic growth.¹

Another challenge is the lack of healthcare. Pakistan is included among countries with highest contribution to burden of maternal mortality in the world, many people lack access to basic healthcare services. This not only affects the health and wellbeing of the population but also limits productivity and economic growth. Limited timeframe, mismatched skills, reform imperatives and equal opportunities for all genders are among few more of them.⁹ Demographic dividend cannot be earned provided half the country's population being an equal and active partner.

To fully realize the potential of demographic dividend in Pakistan, we recommend a multi-pronged approach that addresses the challenges and maximizes the benefits. First and foremost, investing in education and skills training is crucial to ensure that the growing youth population is equipped with the necessary knowledge and expertise to contribute to the economy. This includes vocational training programs, apprenticeships, and initiatives to promote entrepreneurship.⁸ Secondly, improving access to healthcare services is essential to address the high maternal and child mortality rates in Pakistan. This can be achieved through increased funding for healthcare infrastructure, expansion of health insurance coverage, and targeted interventions to address specific health issues. Lastly, promoting gender equality and empowering women is key for getting the full potential of demographic dividend. This involves measures to increase women's labor force participation, providing affordable childcare services and implementing policies that encourage work-life balance. It also requires addressing cultural norms and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequality.⁹

Addressing the educational and healthcare deficits is not just a matter of social welfare but a strategic imperative for sustainable development. To conclude, the demographic dividend offers a window of opportunity, but realizing its full potential requires concerted efforts, strategic investments, and a long-term vision. Appropriate policies are crucial, including investments in education, skills training, and job creation and health care to improve human capital and productivity.² Failure to act decisively could result in a lost decade for Pakistan, with long-lasting implications for its people and economy.

How to Cite This:

Yasir I. Capitalizing the Demographic dividend of Pakistan-future prospects. *Isra Med J.* 2023; 15(2): 45-46. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55282/imj.ed64>

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

REFERENCES:

1. Foley EE. In pursuit of the demographic dividend: the return of economic justifications for family planning in Africa. *Sex Reprod Health Matters*. 2022; 30(1):2133352. DOI: 10.1080/26410397.2022.2133352.
2. Cardona C, Rusatira JC, Cheng X, Silberg C, Salas I, Li Q, et al. Generating and capitalizing on the demographic dividend potential in sub-Saharan Africa: a conceptual framework from a systematic literature review. *Gates Open Res*. 2020; 4:145. DOI: 10.12688/gatesopenres.131761.
3. Chen X, Menezes PN, Rusatira JC. Demographic dividend-favorable policy environment in two pre-dividend African nations: review of national policies and prospects for policy amendments in Nigeria and Tanzania. *BMC Public Health*. 2023; 23: 1070. DOI: 10.1186/s12889-023-15690-z.
4. Bouk D. Generation Crisis: How Population Research Defined the Baby Boomers. *Modern American History*. 2018; 1(3):321-342. DOI:10.1017/mah.2018.31
5. Bavel VJ. The world population explosion: causes, backgrounds and -projections for the future. *Facts Views Vis Ob Gyn*. 2013; 5(4):281-291.
6. Batool Z, Idrees M, Ashraf R, Usman M. Exploring Challenges and Opportunities of Demographic Dividend in Punjab Pakistan. *CSSRJ*. 2022; 3(2): 486-495.
7. Idrees M, Batool Z, Ch MS, Mahmood S. Nexus between Demographic Dividend, Human Capital and socio-economic development: Mediating role of Labor force participation. *Sukkur IBA J Management Business*. 2022; 9(1):74-86.
8. Hafeez E, Fasih T. Growing Population of Pakistani Youth: A Ticking Time Bomb or a Demographic Dividend. *JoEED*. 2018; 5(2); 211-226.
9. Pradhan N, Jamali T, Bhamani S, Ali T. Out of School Children: Examining the reasons in semi-urban settings in Pakistan. *PJERE*. 2018;5(2):47-60

1. Associate Professor of Community Medicine,
Al-Nafees Medical College and Hospital
Isra University, Islamabad Campus, Islamabad

Correspondence:

Iram Yasir
Associate Professor of Community Medicine,
Al-Nafees Medical College and Hospital
Isra University, Islamabad Campus, Islamabad
email: iram.yasir75@gmail.com