



AUTONOMISATION
DES FEMMES ET
DIVIDENDE
DÉMOGRAPHIQUE
AU SAHEL

SAHEL WOMEN'S
EMPOWERMENT
AND
DEMOGRAPHIC
DIVIDEND

PROGRESS HIGHLIGHTS

AN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP
APPROACH TO REDUCE
GENDER INEQUALITIES AND
CAPTURE THE DEMOGRAPHIC
DIVIDEND IN AFRICAN
SUB-SAHARAN COUNTRIES



Our impact

The numbers speak for themselves:



The **retention rate of adolescent girls** in secondary schools has risen from 91.84% in 2020 to 95% in 2021 in the seven SWEDD pioneer countries



9,360+ religious and traditional leaders, 35 musicians/singers and 17 footballers raised awareness in communities across the SWEDD countries



The criminalisation of gender-based violence & **8 new laws to promote gender equality** adopted in 2021



Increase in the rate of **births assisted by qualified personnel** in 3 countries

Côte d'Ivoire: 70% in 2019 vs 50% in 2012
Mali: 27.5% in 2020 vs 15.6% in 2016
Niger: 35% in 2019 vs 21% in 2010





93% of beneficiary girls have acquired knowledge about child marriage, early pregnancy and birth spacing



3,420 safe spaces established by 2023 with SWEDD-II from 640 with SWEDD-I



7 national SD observatories operational



7,237 midwives trained and deployed in rural areas



96% of husbands reached by awareness campaigns, are in favour of birth spacing



101 students enrolled in Masters in Nursing and obstetrics trained in 3 centres of excellence



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SWEDD: How the partnership was formed in response to the Heads of State's appeal

Rapid population growth induced by high fertility, difficult access to decent jobs and very high youth dependency ratios are an economic burden on working people, families and governments. These factors hamper the expression and mobilisation of women's potential for growth and economic and social development in the Sahel countries. Removing these constraints is a matter of great urgency. To this end, African leaders want to invest in their countries' human capital and in strategic partnerships that will empower girls and women and enable them to build on these forces to transform Sahelian societies. This commitment is at the heart of the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) project. The project is designed as a regional integration and cooperation initiative focusing on economic empowerment of women, combating the vulnerability of adolescent girls and young women and gender inequalities in the region with a view to triggering the demographic dividend.



This aspiration gradually took shape during a historic trip to the region by the leaders of five international organisations - the United Nations, the World Bank, the African Union, the African Development Bank and the European Union. In the run-up to this visit, discussions were held between the World Bank, represented by Makhtar Diop, at the time Vice-President in charge of Africa, and UNFPA, represented by Dr Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, with a view to a partnership between the two institutions for the sustainable reduction of adolescent girls' vulnerability. On this occasion, on behalf of the presidents of six countries (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad), Niger's President Mahamadou Issoufou addressed his illustrious visitors on 6 November 2013: *"Too many children die in infancy, too many mothers die giving birth and too few girls have access to secondary school. We still have a lot of work to do"*.

Admittedly, with the policies implemented, most Sahelian countries have succeeded in reducing their infant mortality rates and maternal mortality rates in recent years, although the levels remain high. On the other hand, fertility rates remain high despite a marked increase in the use of contraceptive methods. According to President Issoufou, if current trends continue, *"my children's generation will be three times larger than mine"*.

Speaking in his capacity as a parent and as President, Mr Issoufou underlined the strength of the ties that bind families across the Sahel. He called for urgent, coordinated regional action to ensure that the children of Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal have a better future. Dr Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of UNFPA and Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations, concurred:

“ *High fertility rates, rapid population growth and increasing numbers of young people pose unique challenges for Sahelian countries. When women and girls have more choices, fertility drops and opportunities for prosperity multiply. By reducing the number of girls who marry and keeping them in school longer, by allowing women, through family planning, to decide on the number and spacing of their children, and by investing in the health and education of young people - especially girls - we can generate a significant demographic dividend and put the countries of the Sahel on the path to sustainable, socially inclusive economic growth.* **”**

In response to these shared concerns, the United Nations and the World Bank have pledged to support this call to action for women's health and girls' education in the Sahel. According to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, *"this call to action for women's empowerment and demography is not just about numbers. When we empower women and girls to shape their future, the whole population benefits"*.



The World Bank: the financial arm

“As we work to end poverty in the developing world, we know that investing in education and training is essential. Investing in girls’ education and increasing women’s access to health care will improve both the living conditions of families and the economic prospects of countries. This link between education, health and prosperity is even more obvious when countries, such as those in the Sahel, are faced with a demographic explosion of young people and are striving to make timely investments that will enable them to take advantage of the so-called ‘demographic dividend’.”

Jim Yong Kim, President of the World Bank Group.

From that moment on, the World Bank Group committed to entrusting the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) with up to \$100 million of the \$350 million pledged for the women’s empowerment and population programme. This sum will be allocated based on requests submitted by countries for reproductive health products and services.

Between phase I (2015-2019) and phase II (2020-2024), the World Bank’s total investment in SWEDD amounts to 680 million dollars, with a further 10 million euros invested by the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) under parallel financing received by Mali in 2020. As well as funding, the World Bank is providing technical support to countries through the Technical Team Leaders (TTL), the Gender Innovative Lab and the latest initiative to support the monitoring of countries by the GIRL (Gender Innovation and Regional Learning) initiative, financially supported by the Government of Canada.

The World Bank' total investment in SWEDD amounts to USD 680 million



This initiative aims to complement SWEDD's efforts to achieve the ambitious goals of empowering adolescent girls and women in the countries covered by SWEDD. Through its three components, the initiative aims to design and implement innovative interventions and generate evidence to highlight the added value of the project in development programmes.

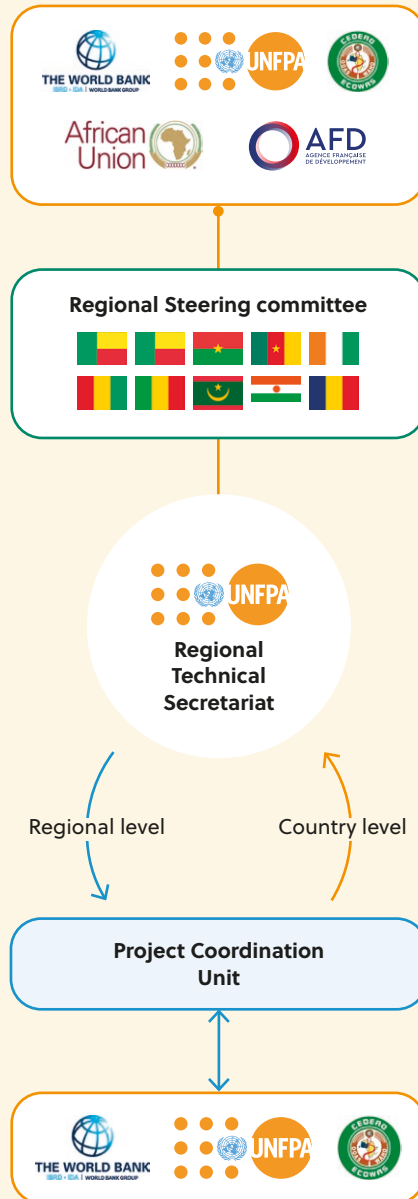
UNFPA: Proven expertise and technical assistance

In response to this call, the World Bank decided to delegate the technical development of this programme on women's empowerment and demography to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This choice was guided by the fact that the UNFPA's mandate corresponds perfectly with the new programme's orientation. The UNFPA Regional Office for West and Central Africa (WCARO), which played a key role in the design of the SWEDD project, managed the incubation phase. The West African Health Organisation (WAHO) was also chosen for its expertise in standardising protocols and training programmes for healthcare staff.

UNFPA, in collaboration with the World Bank, devoted 2014 to drawing up a request for the preparation of this programme, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

During this phase, the configuration of the project was largely inspired by UNFPA's successful country experiences. These include communication for social and behavioural change, safe spaces and husbands' schools initiated in Niger in 2013 under the name "*Adolescent Girls Initiative - Knowledge for Dignity*". Other successful initiatives include a strategy for the vocational guidance and training of young girls in and out of school, in trades that are not traditionally female; keeping girls in school; the prevention of GBV and care for survivors; and the supply chain for medicines and contraceptive products down to the last mile.

UNFPA has also successfully increased the capacity of midwives and deployed them in areas where access is difficult. In addition, it has carried out demographic dividend studies and the development of advocacy skills to engage decision-makers in taking measures to control population growth.



With the establishment of the Project's Regional Technical Secretariat and the mobilisation of expertise in UNFPA country offices, the following results have been achieved:

- A Regional Operational Manual for the Project has been drawn up and made available to member countries; support is being provided for adapting it to the country contexts and capacity building.
- Technical support for countries in the preparation of programmes:
 - 19 community projects on girls' education and women's self-empowerment (representing 55% of the project funds), selected and implemented in the countries since the project was launched,
 - 6 supply chain transformation sub-projects
- Partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and McKinsey to develop country plans to improve the supply chain and a regional resource mobilisation workshop was organised (Dakar, April 2017).
- Support for countries in setting up coordination and management units, national steering committees, etc. (management and governance bodies), in addition to capacity building.
- Establishment of the Project governance body at the level of supervisory ministries, and holding ordinary and extraordinary sessions as required, support for its operation and following up its recommendations.
- Regular monitoring of project performance and development of country acceleration plans.
- Technical assistance mobilised for countries that have enabled the adaptation of measurement and monitoring tools and the operationalisation of the Demographic Dividend. These include Programming guide, country profiles, policy briefs, training, National Observatories for the Demographic Dividend.

- An impact-based programming model developed and made available to countries (Camber Collective Impact Model).



- Flexible technical assistance focused on beneficiaries and capable of adapting to new societal challenges linked to crises in the beneficiary countries. These include the security and humanitarian crisis, political instability, the health crisis linked to COVID-19 and climate change, and their impact on young girls and women in West and Central Africa.

- UNFPA's support continued in line with the World Bank's programming cycles until it approved and granted financing to the first six countries (Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad) in April 2015 for phase I. This was followed by approval of the SWEDD project for Benin in 2019, phase II for Cameroon, Guinea and Chad in 2020, and phase III for the new countries (Congo, Gambia, Senegal and Togo) and old countries (Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad) in August 2023.







Strategic partnerships for progress: WAHO, African Union, ECCAS, AFD

Since its inception, SWEDD has built on strong partnerships and broader commitments involving national ministries responsible for economic planning, finance, health, gender, social affairs and education. Other key decision-makers, including clergy and traditional leaders, alongside international technical and financial partners. The multi-sectoral development objective explains the importance of mobilising the various partners to combine their efforts in a complementary manner. The regional SWEDD project has resulted in a series of investments to tackle the root causes of early marriage, gender disparities in education, low female participation in the labour market, low utilisation of health services and high fertility rates.

SWEDD is designed on the assumption that the fertility transition in the Sahel will require major progress in the empowerment of girls and women, and that empowerment will also produce benefits in terms of economic and human capital. Its interventions target different points in the life cycle, as well as different family and community members who play a role in maintaining opportunities for women and girls. The multi-sectoral approach is designed to capture a segment of the population that often finds itself in a disadvantaged position (for example, adolescent girls at risk of child marriage, early pregnancy and dropping out of school). It also aims to identify mutually reinforcing links between sectoral strategies.

The **West African Health Organisation (WAHO)** joined the project in 2015. WAHO's expertise in health is a major asset. It is part of the strategic cooperation of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Together with UNFPA, WAHO is now the main provider of technical assistance to member countries for the implementation of Component 2 of the project, which aims to strengthen the regional capacity and availability of

Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Nutrition (RMNCAHN) products and qualified health workers.

Since 2020, the project has been able to count on the involvement of the **African Union** and the **Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)** to extend the SWEDD approach across the continent.

African Heads of State, governments and leaders across Africa have integrated the demographic dividend, human capital and women's empowerment - which are intrinsically linked - into key sectoral, national and pan-African strategies.

Alongside UNFPA, WAHO is the main provider of technical assistance to member countries

Investing in women's empowerment and human capital is a development strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction. The success of the project also relies on a strong governance mechanism, led by the **Regional Steering Committee (RSC)**, composed of government ministers, and on the coordination of the project by specialised national **management units**. The latter receive technical assistance from the UNFPA Regional Office and country offices, in partnership with WAHO, the African Union Commission and designated World Bank officials.

The RSC operates as a ministerial office of SWEDD and draws on a diverse set of portfolios and experts from the different line ministries, facilitating access and enabling SWEDD to fulfil its mandate.

The RSC holds an annual meeting with rotating leadership and facilitates SWEDD's national and regional activities.

UNFPA is working to ensure that these two SWEDD bodies remain covenants that maintain essential accountability controls for transparent project implementation and support for international partnerships.

Other notable partners accompanying the implementation of SWEDD are multilateral agencies, international organisations and the private sector, which contribute to the implementation of innovative and essential approaches to last-mile distribution. They include Promundo, Population Council, Johns Hopkins University, CHMP, GBC Health, CREG/CREFAT, CEFA-PSD, Camber Collective, Plan International and the Agence Française de Développement (AFD) and Canada.

Community interventions are implemented by non-governmental organisations under the supervision of sectoral partner ministries. Youth networks, first ladies and the media are other partners who bring their various specialities and talents to bear in spreading the wider ideals espoused by the SWEDD project.

The integration and involvement of the media, celebrities and young people have helped to amplify the messages of the SWEDD campaigns and reinforce an attractive public image as well as the impact of the project.



Three SWEDD components: more and more milestones

SWEDD's objectives are anchored in the overall strategy of the three components. This strategy skillfully adds up the successes and multiplies the steps thanks to a three-pronged plan. The first is to accelerate change, build trust and persuade consent, which has led to significant results. These attributes are now driving empowerment and progress towards global, continental, and national development goals.

1. Accelerating change in social norms, attitudes and behaviour

Component 1 aims to improve regional demand for healthcare services and empower women and adolescents by implementing Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC) strategies.

The SBCC strategies implemented by countries under the leadership of the Lead Minister and the SWEDD Project Management Units are real engines for accelerating change. SWEDD mobilises a variety of the most influential players in communities such as religious and traditional leaders, young people, artists and music and sports celebrities.

The change can be seen in the SWEDD results:

- 93% of beneficiary girls have acquired adequate knowledge and skills on child marriage, pregnancy and sexuality, and birth spacing.
- 96% of husbands, reached by the awareness campaigns, have adopted the principles of the SWEDD programme at home, and accepted the spacing of births.

- 91% of men are involved in housework.
- SWEDD-II increased the number of safe spaces to 3,420 from 640 safe spaces during SWEDD-I.
- The retention rate of teenage girls in secondary schools has risen from 70% in 2015 to 91.84% in 2020 in the seven SWEDD pioneer countries and 95% by 2021 thanks to the Stronger Together campaign on girls' education and school support.
- The rate of first prenatal consultations increased by 13.4% in the project areas.
- 9,360 leaders from religious and traditional affiliations, 35 international music celebrities and 17 footballers are actively involved to raise awareness in the communities of the SWEDD countries.
- 8 new laws adopted in 2021 to promote gender equality and criminalise gender-based violence.

2. Strengthen regional capacity and availability of RMNCAHN products and qualified healthcare workers

Ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health for women and adolescent girls is an important pillar of empowerment for women and girls.

The SWEDD project, thanks to the expertise of its partners, has created a system to guarantee a favourable environment for access to quality health services.

- 3 centres of excellence have already awarded 101 Master's Degrees in Nursing and Obstetrics
- 7,237 midwives have been trained and deployed in rural areas.
- The capacity of 3 national drug quality control laboratories (Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Mali) has been strengthened to obtain ISO 17025 certification.



This in turn has led to:

- Increase contraceptive prevalence by 3 to 7 percentage points between 2015 and 2020.
- Availability of contraceptive products: Côte d'Ivoire: 80% | Mali: 97% | Burkina Faso: 97%.
- Increase in the rate of births attended by qualified personnel: Côte d'Ivoire: 70% in 2019 vs. 50% in 2012 | Mali: 27.5% in 2012 vs. 15.6% in 2016 | Niger: 35% in 2019 vs. 21% in 2010.
- 2,422,000 unwanted pregnancies avoided.
- 830,000 unsafe abortions avoided.
- 8,790 maternal deaths prevented.

3. Fostering commitment and capacity for developing policies and implementing projects to empower women

Component 3 of the SWEDD project aims to strengthen advocacy and high-level consultation to create a legal environment favourable to the empowerment of women and girls.

Since the project was set up, several programmes have been launched to facilitate policy dialogue and advocacy with national public authorities.

- 7 demographic dividend observatories have been set up to institutionalise analysis, monitor progress in implementing the demographic dividend and influence national policy decisions, including investment.
- A compendium of legal texts protecting girls and women has been produced with the support of parliamentarians, judges, and lawyers.
- In partnership with the University of Al Azhar, a teaching programme on Islam in relation to the objectives of the SWEDD project is being implemented, reinforcing its adoption and monitoring objectives.
- During SWEDD-I, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger revised their national development plans, with a focus on investment in human capital, and inequalities between men and women. Under SWEDD-II, these plans have been improved.

In 2020, SWEDD has also created a legal platform to ensure understanding of women's rights and strengthen skills in promoting and protecting women's rights. It also aims to improve the application of the law and the handling of cases of violation of women's rights to health, education and economic empowerment of women and facilitate access to entrepreneurial activities.

This platform brings together national lawyers from different professional backgrounds (solicitors, judges, teachers, parliamentarians, lawyers from technical ministries, etc.) and pan-African institutions, namely the West African Health Organisation, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the African Union (AU).

A robust evolution and the dawn of a new era

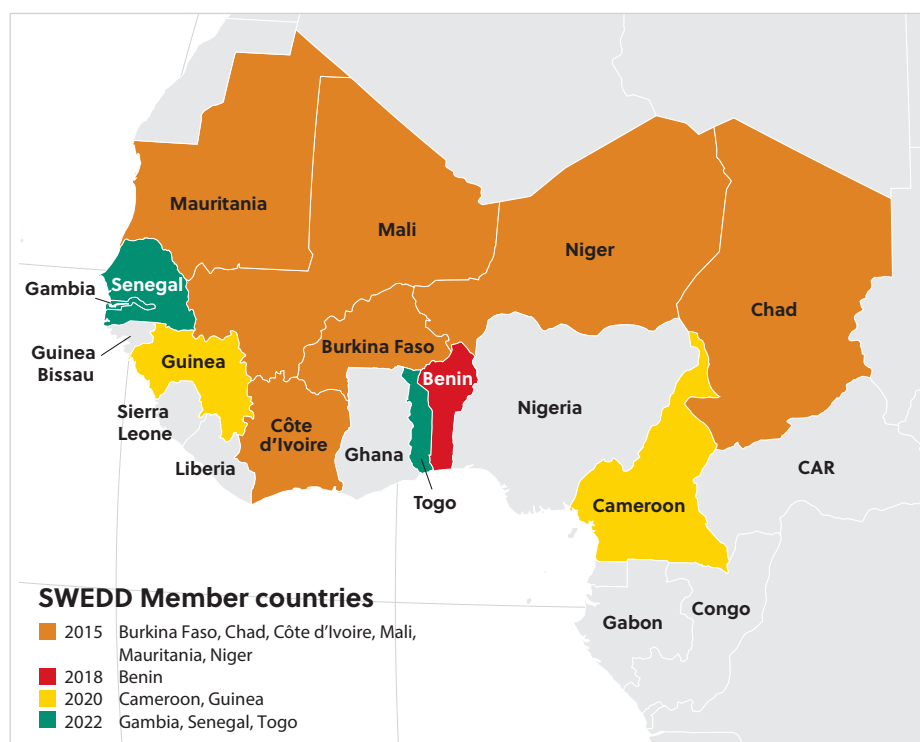
In just 7 years, from 2015 to 2022, the SWEDD project has grown from 6 to 13 countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Chad in 2015, Benin joined in 2018, Cameroon and Guinea in 2020, and Senegal, Gambia, Congo and Togo in 2022. The first two phases of the project involved various partners and actors consolidating their different assistance flows to achieve the initiative's main objectives. UNFPA has increased its technical assistance to member states. For its part, the World Bank has more than doubled its financial commitments in light of the expansion of the geographical coverage area, population growth and fluctuating economic realities.

In just 7 years, from 2015 to 2022 the SWEDD project has grown from 6 to 13 countries

Over the past decade, the Sahel region has experienced high population growth rates unlike other regions of the world. Amid this demographic boom are cross-border security challenges, fragile political transitions, environmental disasters, health pandemics and humanitarian emergencies. These situations have led to human rights violations, economic hardship, radicalisation, migration and the destruction of schools and health centres. They have also exposed women and girls to increased risks and vulnerabilities. These situations are linked to low school enrolment rates among adolescents, early unwanted pregnancies and high maternal mortality rates due to avoidable pregnancy-related causes, which pose immense socio-economic and political challenges.

As SWEDD is growing in numbers, it is also adapting to new realities to better serve the countries facing these emerging global challenges and socio-economic, political, and developmental constraints that are its key priority areas. SWEDD's steady progress, illustrated by the milestones achieved in Phases I and II, has led to new achievements and impressive feats. This has attracted new Member States, stronger partners and proud friends of co-partnerships leading to results-oriented interventions that change lives and incorporate community ideals.

It has proven to be a regional model that has promoted women's empowerment beyond the borders of the pioneering member countries. By forging beneficial alliances with the World Bank, the United Nations system, member states and other like-minded international organisations, SWEDD has harnessed the regional demographic dividend, promoted the MDGs and implemented effective strategies. These strategies have led to increased awareness of gender issues and the adoption of reproductive health in the region. With the involvement of the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Union, the project is at an advanced stage of scaling up and expanding across the African continent.



SWEDD: a powerful accelerator of the 3 transformative results and the SDGs

The third phase of SWEDD, named SWEDD+, takes a holistic approach and is fully aligned with UNFPA's Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The integration of climate change, migration trends, cultural traits, and geographical contexts, among other regional subtleties, have been considered in a holistic approach that takes into account commitment structures in an expanded SWEDD+. Its objective is now continental and integrated into the SDGs and the aspirations set out in Africa's Agenda 2063. In addition, collaboration with WAHO to elevate and strengthen the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), notably ECOWAS and ECCAS, with the support of the African Union, will be expanded with a view to broadening the strategic partnership for the empowerment of girls and women across the continent.

SWEDD has undoubtedly accelerated UNFPA's mandate. It has succeeded in eliminating systemic bottlenecks in the delivery of health services and in promoting policies that integrate population and gender at the centre of economic growth. To this end, SWEDD has played a leading role in the achievement of UNFPA's three transformative outcomes:

- **ending preventable maternal deaths**
- **ending the unmet need for family planning**
- **ending gender- based violence and all harmful practices**

SWEDD has also led its member states to achieve aspiration 6 of the African Union's development plan, Agenda 2063, which stipulates that: *"An Africa whose development is driven by the people, drawing on the potential offered by the people of Africa, in particular women, young people and children"*.

Of the 17 SDGs, SWEDD focuses on goal 3 on health, goal 4 on education, goal 5 on gender equality, and goal 17 on partnerships.

Other goals covered by the SWEDD project include goal 6 on ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all, goal 8 on decent work, goal 10 on reducing inequalities, goal 11 on sustainable cities and communities and goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.

Now in preparation for the third phase, SWEDD's ability to evolve and capture developmental dynamics has guided the initiative and strengthened it as an ambitious regional strategy to accelerate inclusive development and deliver on the promises of the demographic dividend.





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