

THE EFFECTS OF A VERY YOUNG AGE STRUCTURE IN UGANDA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

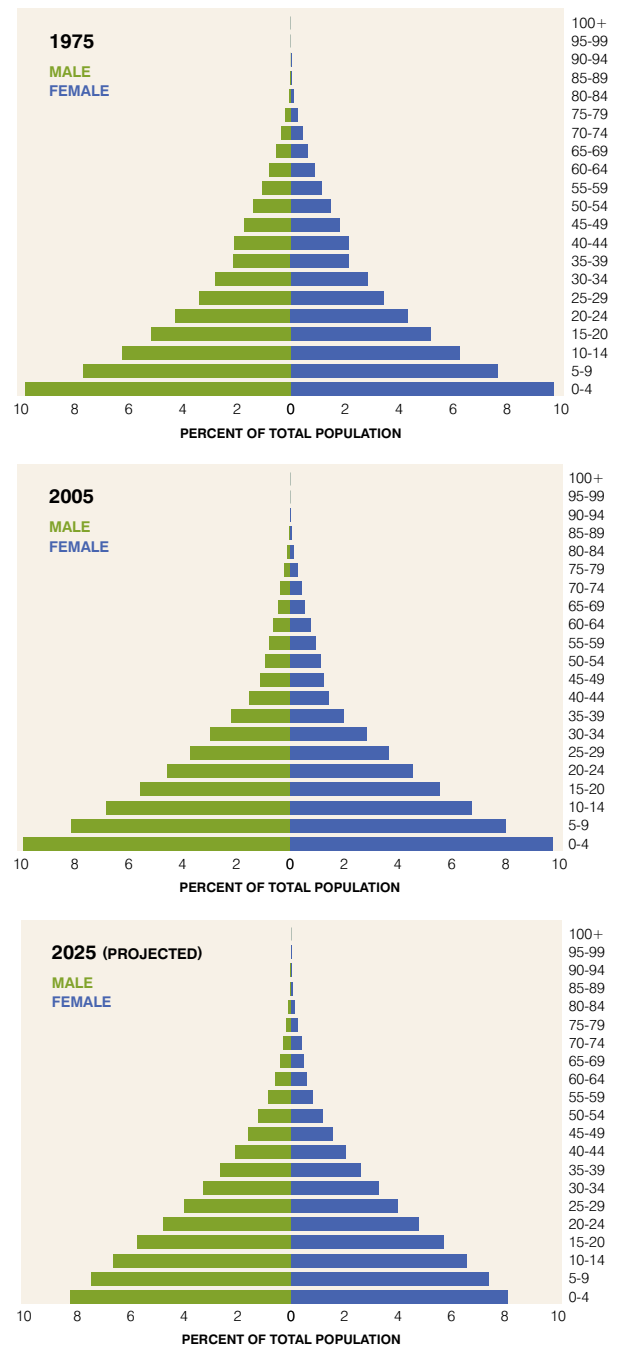
Uganda has the youngest age structure in the world, with 77 percent of its population under the age of 30. The population of Uganda is currently growing by about one million people per year, and given the force of demographic momentum, Uganda will see high rates of population growth for decades to come. Uganda's demographic situation impacts all aspects of its development, from economic growth to quality of education to health care provisions. Governance, political stability, security and adaptation to climate change are also deeply influenced by demographic mechanisms.

Uganda has experienced rapid population growth for several decades. Women in Uganda have an average of 6.7 children, a fertility rate largely driven by high fertility in rural areas of the country. Uganda's fertility rate has been among the highest in the world for 40 years. Between 1985 and 2005, the population nearly doubled, from 14.8 million to 28.7 million. If fertility stays constant, Uganda's population will quadruple by 2045. An important influence on high fertility is the level of unmet need for family planning: In Uganda, 41 percent of women wish to prevent or delay their next birth but are not using a contraceptive method. This is the second highest rate of unmet need for family planning in the world, following Yemen.

The government's efforts to increase access to family planning and reproductive health services have so far failed to meet women's and families' needs. Family planning and reproductive health programs represent only a small share of the national health budget and receive very little funding from the government. Stockouts of supplies are frequent, the number of health workers is inadequate to meet demand, and many providers are poorly trained. Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni advocates for a large population based on the rationale that it will translate into a potentially large economic market capable of supporting and sustaining a high demand for Ugandan products. However, some local policymakers worry about the challenge of providing sufficient resources for Uganda's youthful and growing population.

While the large number of young people in Uganda's population has the potential to be a tremendous asset for the country, Uganda's youth need opportunities in order to prosper. While solid unemployment estimates are rare, the country's deputy

FIGURE 1. UGANDA'S AGE STRUCTURES



prime minister has reported that the unemployment rate among Ugandan youth is more than 22 percent, and even higher among young people with university degrees and youth living in urban areas. This is in part driven by a mismatch between the desired credential of a university degree and the vocational skills that are in relatively more demand in the labor market. With fertility rates at their current high levels, Uganda's economy will have to sustain continuous expansion in order to keep pace with and provide sufficient jobs for the rapidly growing population. If sound policies are in place, growing youth cohorts can become an asset for economic growth as long as fertility levels and dependency ratios are declining. At current fertility levels, the proportion of the population dependent on the working-age population will remain very high for several decades to come. The demographic transition has stalled in Uganda, which has dramatic consequences for its population growth.

Uganda's very young age structure is deeply tied to its security as well. In 2007, Population Action International (PAI) published *The Shape of Things to Come: Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World*. The report found that population age structure can influence a country's stability, governance and the well-being of its people. Countries with very young and youthful age structures—those in which 60 percent or more of the population is younger than age 30—are the most likely to face outbreaks of civil conflict and autocratic governance. Although Uganda is making progress in some areas, the country's security and governance issues remain significant. The Ugandan army has worn down the long-standing uprising of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in the north; however, the LRA conflict has spilled over into the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, and pastoral violence is rampant along the eastern border with Kenya. Nearly one million Ugandans remain internally displaced. President Museveni, in power since 1986, is preparing to make a run at his fourth official term in 2011 after a referendum overturning presidential term limits passed earlier this decade.

Uganda's gender dynamics are related to the country's high fertility levels. Legal rights to gender equality are protected in Uganda's 1995 constitution, and more than one-quarter of the country's parliamentarians are women. Still, there seems to be a consensus that the government has concentrated on increasing women's political participation while neglecting issues of gender equality within households and families. Only 22 percent of married women report making decisions about their own health care, while nearly half of men report that husbands should have the primary role in decisions on how many children to have.

Countries with youthful and growing populations are overwhelmingly likely to be among those considered most vulnerable to climate change, and Uganda is no exception. In Uganda, 80 percent of the population is rural and depends on rainfed agriculture, while inherent fluctuations in the climate leave the country vulnerable to floods and droughts. Uganda's high fertility rate has been described as "a primary cause of poverty" due to shortages of land compounded through each successive generation. The future impacts of climate change are not yet fully known, but those who will feel them most directly—women, children and the poor—are already the most affected by the consequences of rapid population growth and unintended fertility, low education, and limited access to social services that will in turn diminish Uganda's capacity to adapt to climate change.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve Uganda's long-term development goals, PAI recommends that the United States government, working in coordination with the Ugandan government, other donors and in-country civil society partners:

- 1 Increase investments in family planning and reproductive health, including meeting the needs of youth.**
- 2 Support programs that respond to the needs of a large number of youth and focus on education, vocational training and jobs.**
- 3 Include age structure and broader demographic factors in efforts to foster political stability and security.**
- 4 Support policies and programs that promote gender equity and advance the legal rights of and economic opportunities for women.**
- 5 Develop and fund integrated approaches to climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability that include family planning and reproductive health.**
- 6 Strengthen efforts to integrate family planning within broader health policies, strategies and programs, such as maternal health and HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment.**

Full report on PAI's website www.populationaction.org

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME SERIES

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