

## African Dialogues on Faith and Demography

### Advancing Gender Equality to Realize the Demographic Dividend

**Date:** 7 July 2022

**Time:** 3:00-4:45 pm (Nairobi), 2:00-3:45 pm (Johannesburg & Berlin), 1:00-2:45 pm (Abuja), 12:00-1:45 pm (Dakar), 8:00-9:45 am (New York)

**Location:** Virtual (Zoom)

**Language(s):** English; French simultaneous translation available

#### Background

Gender inequality does not just negatively impact women and girls, it precludes the full achievement of Africa's potential social and economic development. In fact, advances in gender equality could unleash economic growth across the continent. However, despite some countries' successes in improving women's political representation and combatting discrimination and violence against women, Africa lags other world regions in key areas necessary for achieving broad gender equality.

Understanding that “[n]o society can reach its full potential, unless it empowers women and youth and removes all obstacles to women's full participation in all areas of human endeavours,” the African Union's AGENDA 2063: The Africa We Want—the blueprint for equitable people-centred growth to transform Africa into the global powerhouse of the future—calls for “gender parity in public and private institutions, and the removal of all forms of gender discrimination in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres” as well as the immediate end to “child marriages, female genital mutilation and other harmful cultural practises that discriminate against women and girls.”

Gender equality is also one of the central keys to unlocking the potential of a demographic dividend. To realize the demographic dividend, fertility rates (along with child mortality rates) must decline, resulting in smaller family sizes. And family sizes only become smaller when women become empowered. When girls can stay in school longer and get married later, when women are empowered within their relationships, families and communities, and when women are able to participate fully in the labour force, then they are able to choose the number of children they really want to have. Coupled with the availability of family planning resources, this results in smaller families and the demographic dividend can come within reach.

Following the first of this series of African virtual dialogues on faith and demography, which explored the concept of the demographic dividend and the role of religious actors

to open the window of demographic opportunities, this second dialogue will dive deeper into the concept of gender equality as a pre-requisite to realize the demographic dividend.

Faith leaders and communities have the power to advance gender equality by mobilising moral, spiritual and material resources to combat gender-based violence and harmful practices, and to transform socially prescribed gender roles for both men and women. Furthermore, religious leaders, faith-based organisations and multireligious networks can examine the potential marginalization of women in their own institutions and make powerful strides towards women's empowerment by creating change from within.

### Objectives

- Explore the role of multi-religious engagement in advancing gender equality as part of efforts to harness the demographic dividend.
- Exchange experiences and best practices in addressing key gender equality issues at the community level, including **transforming men's gender roles**, supporting **women's economic empowerment** and **leadership including within religious settings**, and addressing **gender-based violence** and **harmful practices**.
- Foster networking and cooperation with and between governments, interreligious bodies, religious leaders, and civil society actors.

### Participants

The second virtual dialogue event in this series will include representatives from religious organizations as well as multi-religious networks and initiatives, and government and civil society representatives from selected countries across the continent, aiming at representation from diverse regions, genders, and age groups. Additionally, an expert on gender equality and demographic change will be invited for input(s) into the subject.

### Programme (Nairobi time)

- 3:00 – 3:15**    **Welcome session**  
Moment of Silence  
Words of welcome from organisers
- 3:15 – 3:30**    **Input by Expert**
- 3:30 – 4:15**    **5 Parallel Roundtables (led by moderators and rapporteur) on selected sub-topics:** Discussion on best practices for faith actors to engage on the following issues: **transforming men's gender roles; women's economic empowerment; women's participation in leadership and decision-making; gender-based violence; child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation** and other **harmful practices**.
- 4:15 – 4:35**    **Wrap-up in Plenary**  
Reporting back from roundtables
- 4:35 – 4:45**    **Closing Session**