

**CONFERENCE ANNOUNCEMENT**  
**Union for African Population Studies (UAPS)**  
**9<sup>th</sup> African Population Conference**  
**Lilongwe, Malawi**  
**May 20-24, 2024**

**Theme:**

**“Road to 2030: Leveraging Africa’s human capital to achieve transformation in a world of uncertainty”**

The African continent is experiencing the impacts of COVID-19, a global economic downturn, wars and conflicts, as well as the effects of the triple planetary crises (climate change, loss of biodiversity, and waste and pollution). This has dampened the continent’s already lack-lustre performance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which were agreed upon by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity as well as the African Union (AU) *Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want*, which is Africa’s development blueprint to achieve inclusive and sustainable socioeconomic development over 50 years. All regions of the world are unlikely to achieve many of the SDGs especially those on climate change, gender equality, eradication of extreme poverty, and ending preventable maternal mortality. Uniquely for Africa, these challenges are impacted by its demography, low investment in human capital, entrenched cultural norms that perpetuate the low position of women and harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and gender-based violence. These challenges have been further exacerbated by devastating effects and impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, affecting lives and livelihoods and stifling development efforts across the continent and have threatened to reverse the socio-economic gains achieved by the continent in the implementation of Agenda 2063’s First Ten-Year Implementation.

On average, an African woman is expected to have 4.1 children in her lifetime, two children higher than the global average. This is due to the low status of women, pronatalist attitudes, early start of childbearing, low investment in education and healthcare, and poor access to effective contraceptive methods. While there is some progress on other aspects of gender equality such as school enrolment of females, women still lag in paid labour force participation and make up a very small percentage of political leaders and leaders in the private sector. By 2030, Africa’s population will be 1.68 billion, an increase of 42% from 1.19 billion in 2015. Such high population growth is putting pressure on the continent’s resources and hampering its ability to develop further and feed its people. The continent is rapidly losing its forests at a rate of 2.2 million hectares per year as land is converted to agricultural and other uses. Although Africa is responsible for less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, the continent is vulnerable to many climate-induced disasters such as flooding, drought, and high temperatures which are affecting the health of people and food production. The percentage of Africans who are undernourished has increased from 17% in 2015 to over 20% in 2022. For the first time in a decade, in 2021, the number of people who were reported to be severely food insecure rose to more than 322 million, up from 192 million just before the SDGs were agreed upon.

For decades, the African continent has not invested significantly in its human capital. As a result, it has unfavourable health indicators including neonatal, child and maternal mortality and undernutrition, low knowledge and skills base, and low resilience, among others. Low human capacity is directly linked to

economic productivity. The World Bank estimates that a child born in sub-Saharan Africa today will only achieve 40% of his/her productivity potential. The average maternal mortality ratio for sub-Saharan Africa is 545 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, more than seven times the 2030 SDG target of fewer than 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. Low utilisation and limited access to high-quality maternity services and reproductive behaviours such as adolescent childbearing, rapid repeat pregnancies, and older age childbearing are some of the challenges that the continent must deal with to reduce maternal deaths.

The majority of people's movements in Africa is within the continent, often in search of better economic prospects. Between 2000 and 2019, more than 26 million people had crossed borders, a 76% increase from 15.1 million at the turn of the century. Conflict is by far the major driver of involuntary displacement. In the Sahel, almost all countries are affected by armed conflicts, turning the region into a hotbed of insecurity, with livelihoods destroyed, increased food insecurity and exacerbated displacement of populations. Other conflicts in Sudan, the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region are major causes of people's displacement, hunger, and poverty.

Since 2015, there has been some optimism for Africa's socio-economic prospects because of the potential of harnessing a demographic dividend if the continent transitions rapidly to lower fertility and a favourable age structure of more working-age people to young dependents. While the demographic dividend is indeed underway in several African countries, the magnitude of benefits that were seen in Asia in the 1980s and 90s has not materialized because of insufficient investment in human capital, poor governance, and corruption. As we approach 2030, the African continent needs transformative actions to redress decades of under-investment in human capital, and to counter the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, armed conflict, and other crises. The role of population studies in this quest as well as the furtherance of the scientific study of population and related fields cannot be over-emphasised.

In this regard, the Union for African Population Studies (UAPS) invites the scientific community, policymakers, and practitioners to the **9<sup>th</sup> African Population Conference to be held in Lilongwe, Malawi from 20<sup>th</sup>- 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024** to deliberate and discuss how the African continent can leverage its human capital to accelerate its sustainable development in a world of uncertainty. Almost 10 years after the adoption of the SDGs and implementation of the First Ten-Year of the AU Agenda 2063, thirty years after the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and fifty years after the Bucharest World Population Conference, this conference will offer a unique opportunity and a platform for all the stakeholders to engage and discuss how Africa can leverage its human capital for achieving a sustainable future for its population. The conference will aim to respond to the following questions: Since the adoption of the SDGs and after a decade of implementing the AU Agenda 2063, what has worked? What has not worked, and why? Three elements will be key in measuring the conference's success: the quality of the papers presented, the level of participation, and ultimately the contribution of the conference deliberations to informing Africa's Agenda 2063 as well as the SDGs transformational agenda.