



# POLICY BRIEF

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## THE ROLES OF LEGISLATURE IN HARNESSING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND IN NIGERIA

### INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has the largest number of children and youths in Africa. This is a potential growth driver if they could be harnessed towards demographic dividend. However, without good governance and strict adherence to rule of law, the expected demographic dividend may turn to demographic disaster. Nigeria runs a federal government comprising federal, State and local governments. While the executive arm of government should ensure adequate implementation of programmes and policies, the legislature at all levels are important for providing the enabling legal criteria as well as oversight functions towards achieving the development of the country. Given the age structure of Nigeria population, adequate governance structure is required for ensuring that everyone participates in the development process.

It is against this backdrop that Nigerian government launched her roadmap on harnessing demographic dividend through investments in Nigerian youths. The national roadmap sought to put Nigeria on the path to reaping demographic dividend within the shortest possible time, through key deliverables, milestones and concrete activities (Nigeria Roadmap, 2017). Specifically, the roadmap had recognized major areas that need quick interventions so as to position the country on the path of harnessing demographic dividend.

### ROLES OF LEGISLATURE IN HARNESSING DEMOGRAPHIC DIVIDEND

#### *Law making functions*

A main function of the legislature is law making. In this wise, the Legislative arm of government should critically examine the international conventions and agreement on harnessing demographic dividend and domesticate the convention at national level. The arm should use its constitutional power to facilitate domestication and implementation of international demographic dividend roadmap in the country.

In addition to the preparation of national roadmap on demographic dividend, the domestication of international convention on harnessing demographic dividend must be extended to states in the Federation. Furthermore, advocacy and awareness of need for Nigerian government and states in the Federation to put in place apparatus that will facilitate harnessing of demographic dividend must be embarked upon. Such advocacy should be pioneered by the legislative representative of the populace in terms of decision-making in the country.

Wider opportunity should be granted to youths to actively participate in the decision-making



process both at national and state level. The “*Not too young to run Act*” should be well implemented in order to widen youth participation in Nigerian politics. Youths are generally vibrant and could lead the development process. Youths of the country are well knowledgeable in information communication technology (ICT), and this could be tapped into Nigerian politics to bring about turning-point in the way political affairs are conducted in the country. Youths should be given opportunity to actively participate in strategic aspects of governance. Specific laws to encourage skill acquisition of youth and employment potentials should be enacted.

### ***Legislative Oversight Function***

The Nigerian Constitution empowers the legislature to conduct an oversight function on ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs). This aims at strengthening and promoting value-for-money in the public sector and to further promote checks and balances in the systems. Oversight function by the legislature is a means of auditing the performance of MDAs to ensure that resources allocated to them are not misappropriated. This is crucial for MDAs that are germane to harnessing demographic dividend. These include MDAs in charge of health, education, skills development, job creation and women affairs, etc. Oversight efforts must continue to be instituted to ensure that allocated resources to these MDAs are effectively and efficiently utilized.

### ***Budget Appropriation Functions***

Harnessing demographic dividend requires adequate investment decisions in education, health, job creation and skills development. Legislature can rescue the country from not achieving demographic dividend by ensuring that substantial public resources are devoted to these sectors. At the moment, education attracts less than 8 per cent of total budget. If Nigeria must harness demographic dividend, there must be turning-point in terms of amount of public resources allocated to education and health. Furthermore, the Nigerian Legislature needs to budget for programmes & activities that will facilitate employment generation and job

creation in the country so as to absorb the bulging youth population. Policies to stimulate skills development of the youths must be instituted in order to make them job creators rather than being job-seekers. In all, legislative arm of government in Nigeria must support youth employment policies and programmes in the country. through adequate budgetary allocations.

### ***House Debates and Public Hearings***

This is one of the steps involved before bills are passed at both National and State Houses of Assembly. Debates and public hearings draw public attention and further educate the populace on issues going on at the legislative chambers. Harnessing demographic dividend in Nigeria requires maximum publicity so that an average Nigerian on the street will have better understanding on why it is pertinent for Nigeria to tap into the window of opportunity brought up by the changes in the configuration of the country’s population. Organisation of house debate and public hearing on how to harness demographic dividend in Nigeria, and its everlasting benefit to economic growth and development of Nigeria by Nigerian legislative arm of government will go a long way in putting the country in the right position to harnessing demographic dividend.

### ***Cross Party Collaboration***

Collaboration among various political parties in the country is crucial to implementation of roadmap on demographic dividend and harnessing demographic dividend in the country. Continuity is key and crucial to successful policy implementation. Legislature needs to spearhead the awareness that harnessing demographic dividend is not in any way a work plan of any political party but an agenda for the country. Therefore, every political parties must identify themselves as partners aiming to harness demographic dividend for the country. The country’s diversity in terms of different political parties should never be considered as adversity to harnessing demographic dividend.



### *Cooperation with Executive and Judiciary Arms of Government*

Another critical role of legislature in harnessing demographic dividend in Nigeria is to ensure cordial relationship with the executive and judicial arms of government in the country. All the three arms of government must be in harmony and have better understanding on why it is necessary for Nigeria to harness demographic dividend. Supportive policies to harness demographic dividend must spring up from legislature, their effective and efficient implementation must be championed by the executive and the interpretation of the policies must be carried out by the judiciary. This must be replicated by the state legislature.

## **POLICY OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Harnessing demographic dividend could be difficult and remain unrealistic if investments in some strategic sectors and areas that are crucial to demographic dividend are not done. The legislature is very important in making the investment possible. Some of the policy options and recommendations for the legislature include the following:

- The legislative arm of government at all levels should spearhead the domestication of International Roadmap on harnessing demographic dividend in Nigeria. The domestication should be extended to all the states of federation with full awareness of its important to economic growth and development.
- Family planning and responsible family size are key to creating the demographic dividend. Hence, the support of the legislature in the success of family planning investments and programme is crucial.
- The legislative arm should ensure that the Nigeria Roadmap on harnessing demographic dividend shapes the finance structure and resource allocation to various sectors, most especially sectors that have

direct link to harnessing demographic dividend in the country. These sectors include health, education, population, skills acquisition and development and job creations. It is highly recommended that resource allocations to MDAs in-charge of the highlighted sectors above be improved.

- Oversight function of the Legislature should be extended to children and youth education, health financing and old age insurance scheme. Children and youths are propellers of demographic dividend. Financing their health and education is critical to harnessing demographic dividend. Such oversight function should ensure adequate resource allocation to the sectors (health, education, employment, skill acquisition and development, job creation) and also guarantee value-for-money, effectiveness and efficiency of public resources allocated to the sectors.
- Youths are crucial to tapping demographic dividend. Policies to encourage youth participation in governance should be formulated and strengthened while the existing policies should be consolidated to widen youth participation in Nigeria political system. It is high time youth took active roles in the process of law making and implementation at national and state levels.
- Legislation to promote efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery should be enacted. Such laws should include those that will guide against corruption and promote accountability, transparency and responsibility in the service delivery and reward system of labour in the country.
- Information is crucial to harnessing demographic dividend. Based on this, Nigerian Legislative arm of government should pioneer the awareness of demographic dividend in the country and



across the states. Every Nigerian must speak demographic dividend.

- The Legislative arm of Nigerian government should critically examine the National Youth Service Corps scheme. The scheme can further be strengthened and repackaged to ensure Nigerian youths are more of job creators by providing necessary assistance in terms of skills development and credit facilities. With this, harnessing demographic dividend in Nigeria can become a reality.

## CONCLUSION

Nigerian Legislature cannot be left behind in the process of harnessing demographic dividend in Nigeria. String and well-coordinated policies are needed to equip Nigerian youth in terms of education, health, job creation and skills development. Also, the arm must champion the awareness of demographic dividend in the country and across states in the federation and further ensure domestication of international conventions on harnessing demographic dividend in the country and across states. With this, Nigeria can be said to be on the right path of harnessing demographic dividend.

## REFERENCE

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