The Shape of Things to Come:
Why Age Structure Matters to a Safer, More Equitable World

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The Demographic Transition

- Gradual shift from high death and birth rates to smaller families and longer lives
- Affects share of young people, working-age adults, and seniors in a population
- Already completed in most highly developed countries, where populations are aging
- Developing countries at various stages – some just beginning demographic transition
Age Structure Defined

- Share of people younger than 30 in a population compared to share of people age 60+

- Each country fits into one of 4 major types of age structures:
  1. Very Young (>67% under 30)
  2. Youthful (60-67% under 30)
  3. Transitional (45-60% under 30)
  4. Mature (<45% under 30)
Very Young Age Structures

61 countries: Including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Haiti, Syria, some of Central America, most of sub-Saharan Africa

High mortality and fertility rates
Youthful Age Structures

28 countries: Including Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Iran, Morocco, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Africa

Fertility rates declining, but still above replacement level
Transitional Age Structures

48 countries: Including Brazil, China, Ireland, Israel, Indonesia, Lebanon, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey

Middle of demographic transition
**The Demographic Dividend**

- Fertility decline creates economic opportunities through lower dependency ratios
- Greater per capita spending and savings
- Higher wages and increased capital investment
- “Window of opportunity” lasts 40-60 years
- Countries with transitional structures are nearing end of window of opportunity; youthful structures at beginning
Mature Age Structures

49 countries:
Including Australia, Canada, Cuba, Russia, South Korea, nearly all of Europe, U.S.

Low mortality and fertility rates
Age Structure and Conflict

80% of all new conflicts occurred in countries in which at least 60% of the population was under age 30.
Nearly 90% of countries with very young structures had autocratic or weakly democratic governments.

More than 80% of countries with mature age structures were fully democratic.
Age Structure and Failed States

- 51% of countries with a very young age structure ranked as “critical” or “in danger” by Failed States Index
- No countries with a very young age structure were ranked as “stable” or “most stable”
- 73% of countries with a mature structure were considered stable or most stable
- Every country ranked as “most stable” has a mature age structure
Key Findings

- Population age structure impacts countries’ stability, governance, economic development
- Very young and youthful age structures present greatest challenges to development
- Mature structures have been most stable
- Age structures are dynamic and can be influenced through health and education programs
- Important to invest in opportunities for youth
Mexico 1975 - 2005

Very Young
72% under 30

Transitional
57% under 30
Haiti 1975 - 2005

Very Young
67% under 30

Transitional
68% under 30
Policy Recommendations

- Governments and international partners should support programs to foster more balanced age structures
- Comprehensive family planning and reproductive health programs
- Girls’ education and legal protections for women
- Investments in health, education and employment opportunities for young people