

Addressing Africa's challenges

By 2050, Africa's population will more than double, from 1.2bn to 2.5bn. That's according to projections from the UN Children's Fund, which hopes that this extraordinary growth will deliver a 'demographic dividend' that could lift hundreds of millions out of extreme poverty. In a [Mail & Guardian](#) analysis, Simon Allison notes that while it's a nice idea, the theory rests on precarious foundations – it depends entirely on all these new Africans being provided with the necessary education, healthcare and infrastructure to thrive. 'The opposite scenario, as envisaged by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, seems more likely. He says that his greatest fear is that exponentially growing numbers of uneducated, unskilled, unemployed and frustrated youth will be impossible to control. When that frustration explodes, which it must, there will be widespread political instability that cuts across boundaries of borders, class and ethnicity. **It is a threat that policymakers are starting to take seriously.** Earlier this year, parliamentarians in the Economic Community of West African States (Ecowas) suggested instituting a "three child policy" to reduce the region's birth rate, which currently sits at between five and seven children per woman. Obasanjo says this policy would be impossible to implement, and instead governments should put far more resources into girl child education – including sex education – which would allow women to make informed choices about conception.'