

Chapter 2

Population Ageing in Africa

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2.1 Introduction

Worldwide, the number of persons aged 60 and over has been increasing at an unparalleled rate. In 1980, there were 378 million people aged 60 or above; 3 decades later, this figure doubled to 759 million and by 2050 is projected to rise almost threefold to 2 billion people (United Nations 2010). In almost all of the regions of the world, the older population is growing faster than the total population (United Nations 2009). In particular, the older population in developing countries has a higher speed of growth than in developed countries. Compared with other regions of the world, the population of Africa is growing older faster, at a rate of 2.27% (United Nations 2011). Although the size of the older population in percentage terms is expected to remain small, the absolute number of older persons is expected to increase dramatically over the next few decades.

Africa, like other parts of the world, is undergoing rapid demographic changes, and although the population is largely youthful, the proportion of older persons has increased tremendously over the past few decades. The growth of the ageing population of Africa is accompanied by an increase in the median age of the population, as well as changes in the dependency ratio, resulting in a decline in the proportion of the population composed of children, and an increase in the population aged 60 years and

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over. The change in the age structure of the African population is likely to have far-reaching consequences for the continent. This requires a shift in policy-making and developmental efforts in order to respond to the changes resulting from this demographic phenomenon. In order to achieve this, accurate and reliable data on the ageing population in Africa must be easily and widely accessible to ensure that programmes incorporate current and projected population trends into their planning processes.

These requirements can be assisted by the scope of the following chapter which begins by discussing the context of population ageing in Africa, its features at a continental level, and its determinants. This is followed by an examination of the demographic characteristics of the ageing population in Africa, which includes information on the magnitude and pace of population ageing being experienced by the continent. The next section profiles the absolute size, percentages, and growth rates of each of the five African regions. Thereafter, current and future demographic trends in ageing are explored within each African region. This is followed by a country-level examination of the differentials in population ageing across and within African countries. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of these demographic changes on the African ageing population.

2.2 Population Ageing in Africa

In many parts of Africa, older people are making a valuable contribution to society—from providing care for sick and/or dying children and orphaned grandchildren to providing much needed financial support for the household (HelpAge International 2008). In traditional African societies, the elderly occupied a high status in the community. Relations between the young and the old were marked by respect for the elderly and recognition of their accumulated wisdom, experience, and authority (Rwezaura 1989). With the advent of modernisation, urbanisation, and migration, there has been a marked change in attitudes towards the elderly. The elderly have been largely ignored or excluded. The emphasis that is placed on the younger generation is to some extent justified as Africa is a relatively youthful continent, with more than 40% of its population below the age of 15 years. A youthful African population has meant that the elderly often do not feature in national policies. However, projections for the future suggest that the age structure of Africa is likely to be altered dramatically, and the continent is likely to experience an accelerated rate of growth of numbers of older people in the population than any region in the world, and thus there should be more focus on this group. What remains an issue is the inadequate care and consideration given to the ageing population in development initiatives. This becomes an urgent priority given that Africa has one of the fastest growing rates in the world.

However, an issue for many African countries is the lack of data on a national scale that will assist in making informed decisions; this is especially so for the ageing population (UNFPA 2008a). What can be stated with certainty is that the ageing population in Africa will double in size from 25 million to 52 million people over a span of 25 years (UNFPA 2008a). On a proportional scale, in the year 2000 those

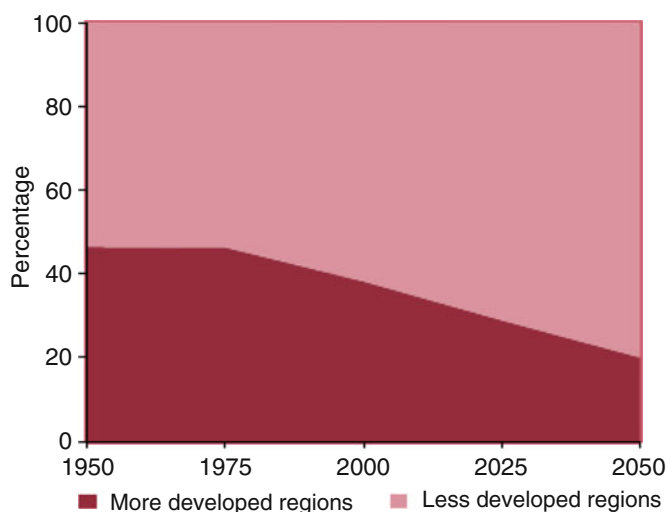


Fig. 2.1 The distribution of the population aged 60 years and over by development regions 1950–2050. *Source:* United Nations (2001)

over 60 years of age constituted 5.1% of the African population and this figure is expected to more than double to 10.4% in 2050 (United Nations 2007). One would assume that the AIDS pandemic would reduce the life expectancy of the population and thus prevent the growth of the older population, but according to Van Dulleman (2006), in the next 3 decades, neither AIDS, nor domestic wars will prevent the number of elderly in most African countries from doubling.

On a proportional scale less, developed regions have had a larger ageing population than more developed regions. As Fig. 2.1 illustrates, during the 1950s, the more developed regions contributed 47% of the world's ageing population, compared to the less developed regions, which contributed 53%. Over the span of 50 years those people over 60 years of age decreased in more developed regions and comprised 38% of the world's population, and less developed regions comprised 62%. By the year 2050 projections indicate that more developed regions and less developed regions will constitute 23% and 77%, respectively.

Thus the gap between less developed regions and more developed regions in the ageing population is expected to widen over the decades, with over two-thirds of the world's ageing population originating from less developed regions. According to United Nations (2001), the ageing population in less developed regions will quadruple from 2000 to 2050. This raises important considerations for the African continent given that most countries fall within the less and least developed categories (United Nations 2009).

A comparison of the age structures of the working-age group and the older age group, according to region (Fig. 2.2) shows that, in 2010, youth made up 75% of the world's population, and the elderly 25%. More developed regions in 2010 had a youth population of 45% and less developed regions had a higher

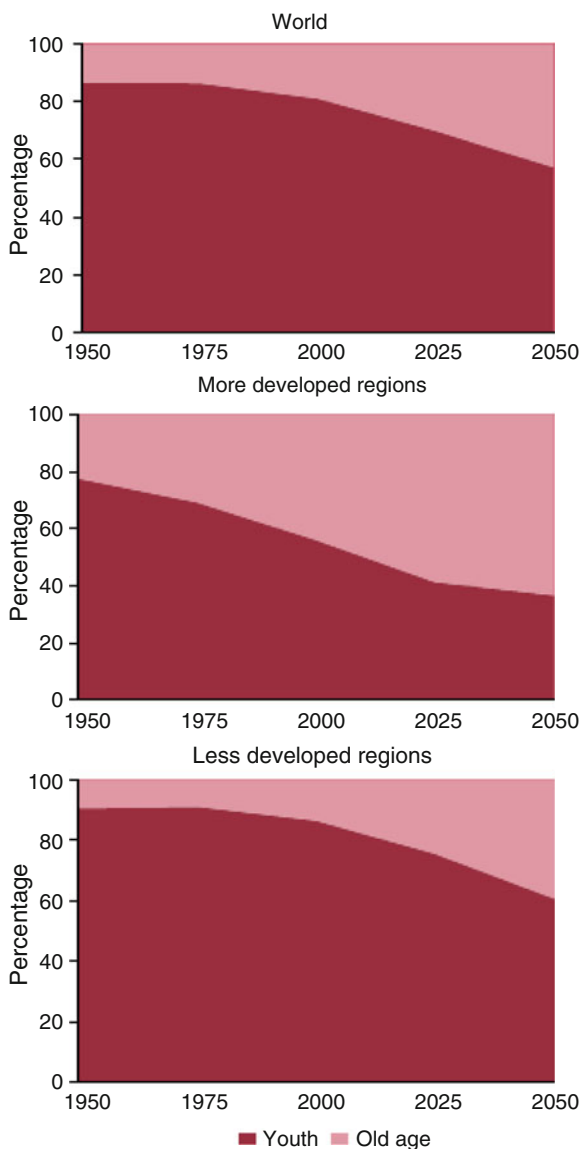


Fig. 2.2 The composition of the youth versus the ageing population by development region, 1950–2050. *Source:* United Nations (2001)

composition of 78%. It is expected that the less developed regions would have greater numbers of youth per elderly person, as the age structure of these nations is younger, especially in Africa.

Projections made for the year 2050 show that the global percentage of youth per elderly person will decrease to 56%, and a decrease is also expected for more developed regions, as the number will decrease to 33%. Less developed countries will

also see a decrease; however, the percentage will remain considerably high, with a youthful population comprising 60% of the total population. Thus, whilst the number of ageing persons will be expected to grow over the decades, those of the working age will still proportionately outweigh them in less developed regions.

A disadvantage for the ageing population, as a result of the relatively larger proportion of working-age persons, is the slanting of policies and efforts towards the younger population. However, some argue that the current dependency ratio can work in favour of the elderly if African governments take advantage of the opportunity to maximise employment and economic growth for the working-age population as a means to support the growing number of elderly persons that will be seen in the future.

2.3 Characteristics of the Ageing Population in Africa

It is inevitable that the ageing population of Africa will continue to grow for a number of decades into the future. According to the UNFPA (2008a), the increasing number of ageing people in Africa is a demographic phenomenon linked to decreases in fertility and mortality and is not merely the consequence of economic development. Projections suggest that the number of people over the age of 60 will increase from 64.5 million in 2015 to 103 million in 2030 to 205 million in 2050 (United Nations 2007). These figures indicate that the growth rate of the elderly population will be exponential.

In terms of regional differences across Africa, the fastest rate of growth of the ageing population will occur in Northern and Southern Africa. By 2050, the elderly will comprise 20% of the total population of Northern Africa (Apt 2000). The rate of growth will be much slower in other regions. Regional differences aside, projections suggest that the African population will be growing at a tremendous exponential rate. This is all the more reason to examine the past, present, and future profile of the African ageing population as it will help illuminate the ways that policies and actions can be improved to better suit this demographic phenomenon.

2.3.1 The Demographic Determinants of Population Ageing

Before examining the characteristics of population ageing in the continent of Africa, it is important to understand the demographic determinants of population ageing. The age structure of a population is dependent on the interplay of three main factors: fertility, mortality, and migration rates. However, according to Lesthaeghe (2000), fertility and mortality are far more important demographic factors contributing to the increase in the ageing population than migration. Although the migratory movements of people in and out of the population impacts on the age structure, it is the demographic phenomenon of decreasing fertility and mortality that accounts for the largest growth in the ageing population. An examination of the

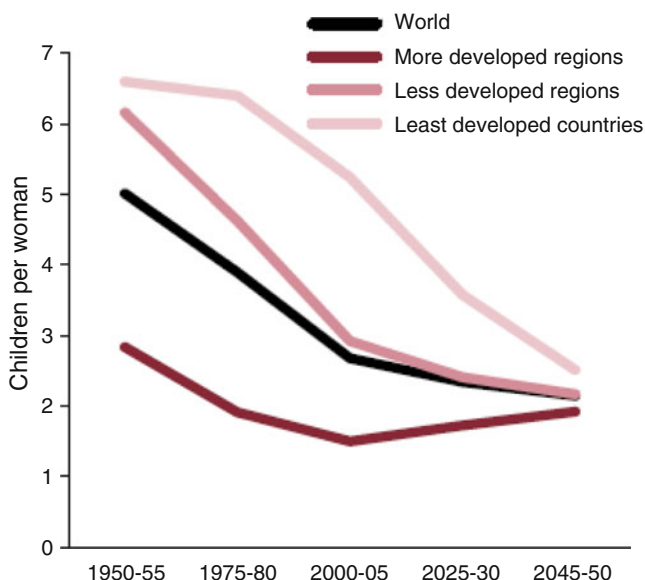


Fig. 2.3 Total fertility rate of the world and development regions, 1950–2050. *Source:* United Nations (2001)

total fertility rate shows a projected decline over a number of decades (Fig. 2.3). Worldwide, the total fertility rate is projected to decline from 5 children per women in 1950–1955 to 2.6 children per women in 2045–2050. In less and least developed countries, the total fertility rate is projected to decrease from 6.6 and 6.4 children in 1950–1955 to 2.6 and 2.3 in 2045–2050, respectively.

The effect of the decreasing fertility rate for the African region, coupled with decreasing mortality, will create an older population in the future. With regard to most developed regions, the total fertility rate is projected to increase from 2001–2005 to 2045–2050. Thus, less and least developed regions are characterised by decreasing total fertility—in contrast to other world regions—which contributes to their increasing ageing population.

The life expectancy of all the world's regions has been increasing over the decades and will continue to do so in the future. A greater life expectancy in a population indicates that the population has control of its mortality rates, and the effect of this will be a larger number of people who survive to older ages. According to Fig. 2.4, the global life expectancy is projected to increase from 45 years in 1950–1955 to 72 years in 2045–2050. More developed regions have always had a higher life expectancy than other world regions and this trend is likely to continue. Less and least developed regions are also projected to increase their life expectancy. In contrast to more developed regions, less and least developed regions have a far lower life expectancy. However, life expectancy is expected to increase for all the major regions and will contribute to a greater proportion of elderly people worldwide in future decades.

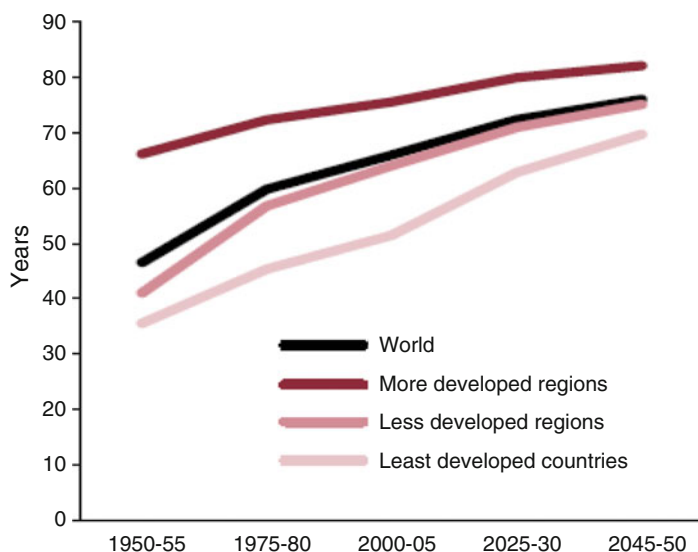


Fig. 2.4 Life expectancy at birth in the world and development regions, 1950–2050. *Source:* United Nations (2001)

Future trends indicate that more developed regions, as well as less and least developed regions, will all continue to increase their life expectancies. Despite this, the range between the different regions will decrease. Projections for 2040–2050 indicate that the global life expectancy will reach 72 years, more developed regions will increase to 83 years, and less and least developed regions will increase to 72 and 65 years, respectively. All this confirms that in the future there will be higher numbers of elderly people in the world.

2.3.2 *The Magnitude and Pace of Ageing in Africa*

Africa consists mainly of the less and least developed countries of the world, and according to the Human Development Report by the United Nations (2009), almost all the nations ranked in the bottom 25 are situated on the continent. African countries are experiencing an increase in the ageing population at a much faster growth rate than more developed regions. During the period 1950–1955, the annual growth rate of the population aged 60 years and over in more and less developed countries was almost the same, but over the next period, 1975–1980, the growth rates in less and least developed countries continued to increase, but decreased in more developed countries (Fig. 2.5). Currently the average annual growth rate of the population aged 60 years and over is 2.8% in less developed countries, 3% in least developed countries, and 0.8% in more developed countries regions. In fact, the less and least developed countries have an annual growth rate which is more

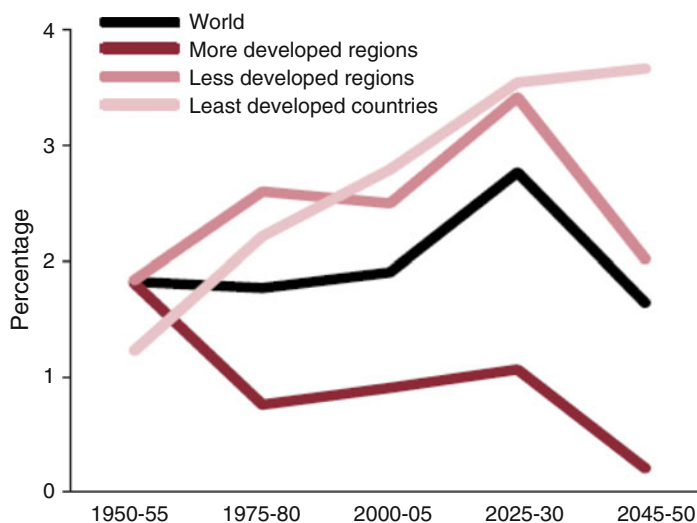


Fig. 2.5 The average annual growth rate of the population aged 60 years+, 1950–2050. *Source:* United Nations (2001)

than 3 times that of more developed countries. This highlights how much faster the annual growth rate of the ageing population of African countries are in comparison with more developed regions. By 2045–2050, less developed regions will have an annual ageing growth rate of 2%, compared with 0.2% in more developed regions. This indicates that less developed regions will have an annual ageing growth rate that is ten times as high as that in the more developed regions. For the least developing regions their annual ageing growth rate will continue to rise in the future, and by 2045–2050 will have the highest rate at 3.7%. For Africa, this means that the increase in the growth rate of the ageing population is a demographic inevitability in the coming decades.

There are striking variations in the age structure of the populations in the more developed regions and the less developed regions. According to Fig. 2.6 from the United Nations (2004), the percentage of individuals aged 60 and over has increased over the decades. In 1950, 9% of the African population was 60 years and over and this is projected to increase to 20% by the year 2020. Projections indicate that by the year 2050, 24% of all Africans will be 60 years and over. In other words almost a quarter of the African population is projected to be elderly. Again this highlights the exponential growth of the ageing population and the changes it will make to the age structure of the African continent. For the African continent, the increase in the ageing population, according to the UNFPA (2008a, b), is due to the large proportion of the working-age population who will in the future contribute to the ageing population. As of 2008, the working-age population in less developed regions stood at 2.5 billion and is expected to increase over time reaching 3.6 billion by 1950 (UNFPA 2008a, b).

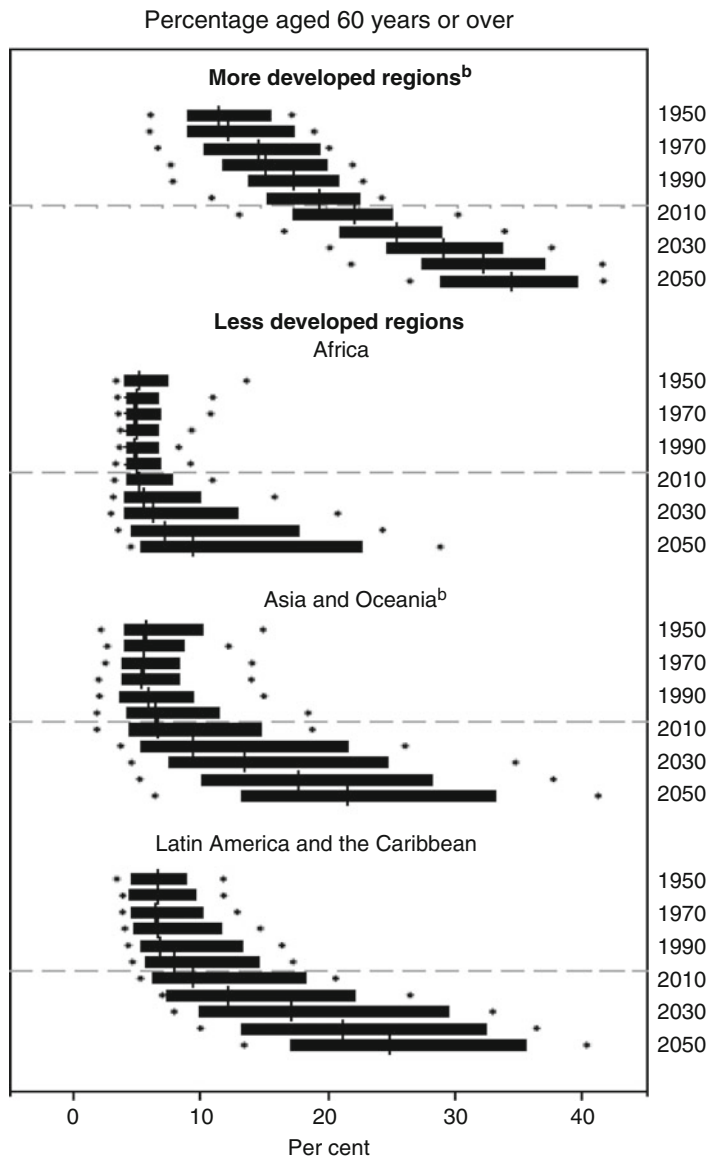


Fig. 2.6 Proportion of the population aged 60 years+, 1950–2050. *Source:* United Nations (2004)

In contrast to this, in the more developed regions, which are mostly made of European countries, a steady increase in the percentage of the population aged 60 years and over will be seen. The percentage of the ageing population is projected to increase according to Fig. 2.6, but this is not a result of population growth. It is clear from Fig. 2.5 the annual growth rate of the ageing population is declining in

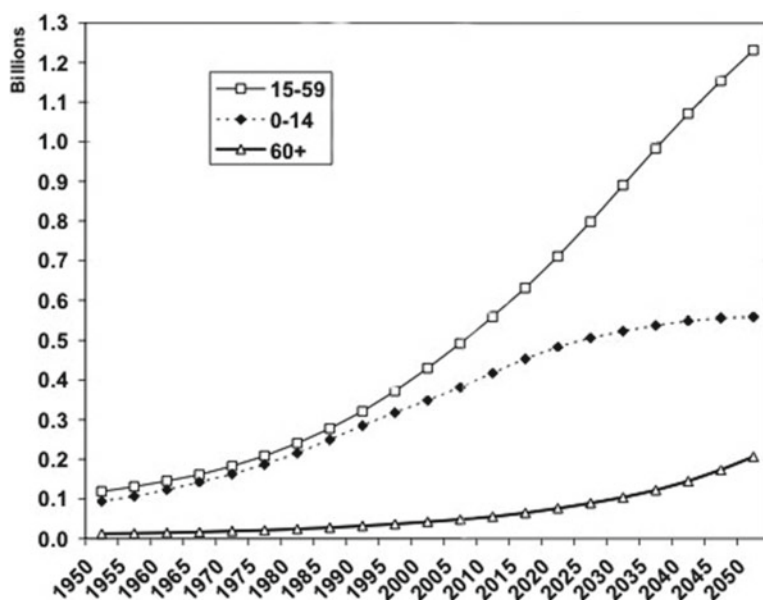


Fig. 2.7 Growth of the African population by age groups. *Source:* United Nations (2007)

more developed regions. According to the UNFPA (2008a, b) the increased proportion of the elderly population in more developed regions will not be due to the population growth of its ageing population, but rather other population phenomena such as migration and improvements in life expectancy associated with high levels of development.

Figure 2.6 shows the distribution of countries according to the percentages of the population aged 60 and over by development region. While more developed regions will experience a further growth in the ageing population, this will not present a major problem since most of the countries in this region are at an advanced stage of the demographic transition, and therefore have greater control of their fertility and mortality rates. According to the UNFPA (2008a, b), over time, the ageing population in more developed regions will stagnate and is not expected in the future to contribute substantially to global population ageing. However, for less developed regions, including most of Africa, the growing ageing population will continue to rise over the next few decades, largely due to the large proportion of the population in the working ages. This demographic phenomenon has the added burden of decreasing fertility, which is foreseen for Africa, from 2.73 children per woman in 2005–2010 to 2.05 in 2045–2050 (UNFPA 2008a, b). The reduction in fertility is beneficial to a nation's development, but will cause population ageing to increase.

Figure 2.7 illustrates that the age structure of the African population has been changing over time. The absolute size of three age categories are shown; these are the dependent groups aged 0–14 years and 60 years and above, and the working-age group of 15–59 years. The working-age group in Africa had a population size of

around 0.13 billion in the year 1950 and over time increased to approximately 0.48 billion people. It is projected that by 2050 this group will comprise the majority of the African population, almost 1.23 billion. However, this is not surprising, since it is widely recognised that the African population is youthful.

Although the working-age population will form the majority of the African population, it is important to note that the ageing population will also continue to steadily grow in numbers. In 1950, the African population aged over 60 years was around 0.03 billion and is projected to increase to 0.14 billion by 2050. This may not appear to be significant growth in population size when analysed in billions, but over 100 years from 1950 to 2050 the ageing population will have multiplied almost five times. This significance can be highlighted by comparing Africa to Europe. The ageing population of Europe is projected to grow from 10% in 1950 to 33% in 2050 (European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research 2008). Over the period of 100 years, from 1950 to 2050, the older population in Europe is expected to increase threefold.

2.4 The Profile of the African Ageing Population

Projections reveal that the number of people aged 60 years and over is expected to rise over the next few decades. Table 2.1 indicates that the number of people aged 60 and over was 53,770,000 in 2009, and this is projected to increase to 212,763,000 in 2050 (United Nations 2008a). In 2009, the population aged 60 and over accounted for 5% of the total African population, and this is expected to increase to 11% by 2050. Furthermore, the oldest age group, those 80 years and older, constitute 8% of the African population and will account for 10% of the population in 2050.

An important variable to consider when analysing data on the ageing population is gender. Studies conducted by various organisations including the World Bank stress the importance of gathering data on gender differentials, as the continuation of gender-based inequality serves as a hindrance to Africa's growth (Gelb 2001). Table 2.2 shows that the sex ratio of the African population is such that there are 85 men per 100 women.

Thus, in Africa there are more women aged 60 years and over than men. This also applies to the oldest age groups who are 80 years and above, with 68 men for every 100 women, or in other words, slightly more than 25% females than males. This is expected, given that most studies suggest that women live longer than men,

Table 2.1 The African population aged 60 years and over, 2009 and 2050

	2009	2050
Number (thousands)	53,770	212,763
Percentage of total population	5	11
Share of persons 80 years or over	8	10

Source: United Nations (2008a)

Table 2.2 The African population sex ratio, 2009

Sex ratio (men per 100 women)	
60 years+	80 years+
85	68

Source: United Nations (2008b)

Table 2.3 Gender differentials of the African population

	Men	Women
Life expectancy at age 60, 2005–2010	15	17
% Married ^a , 60 years+	85	39
% Living alone, 60 years+	6	11
% Participating in labour force, 60 years+	61	34

^a“Married” includes those in consensual unions

Source: United Nations (2008b, c)

and thus they form the majority in the elderly category. It is important to ascertain whether policies are attuned to the predominantly ageing female population.

Further examination of gender differentials reveals that the life expectancy of women aged 60 years is higher than men (Table 2.3). Women aged 60 are expected to live an additional 17 years, and men an additional 15 years. With regard to marital status, a far greater percentage of elderly men are married than women. Almost 85% of men aged 60 years and over are either married or in a consensual union, compared with 39% of women. Thus, elderly men are more likely to be married or in a consensual union than women.

According to Waite (1995), the benefit of analysing marriage statistics is that it gives a good indication of the socio-economic status of households, and since married individuals have better health than non-married individuals, it serves as an indicator of a population's health status. Considering the large discrepancy between the number of married elderly males and the number of married elderly females, it appears that gender inequalities are highly prevalent in African society.

Elderly men are in an advantaged position, since most of them are married, and by being married they enjoy better health and a better socio-economic position than the 15% of men who are not. As for women, the majority are disadvantaged in terms of marital status, as only 39% are married or in a consensual union. This means that 61% of elderly African females have a decreased health and socio-economic status in relation to the remaining elderly females. In addition, there are more elderly women who live alone than elderly men. There are 6% of elderly men living alone compared with 11% of elderly women. With regard to economic activity, men aged 60 and over are also more economically active than their female counterparts. In Africa, among those aged 60 years and over, 61% are males. This percentage is much lower for females, with only 34% of women aged 60 years or older still economically active.

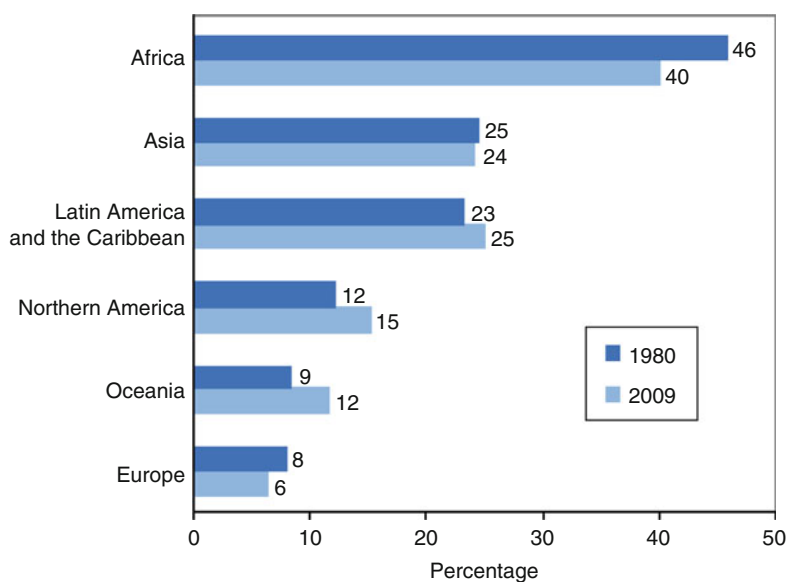


Fig. 2.8 Labour force participation of those 60 years and over, 1980 and 2009. *Source:* United Nations (2009)

Figure 2.8 shows that Africa remains the most economically active ageing population. In 1980, 46% of the population aged 60 years and above were participating in the labour force, but this declined to 40% in 2009. However, labour force participation by the older population still remains higher in Africa than other regions of the world. What this implies is that the elderly in Africa are continuing to participate in the labour force partly due to difficulties in securing a pension in their old age.

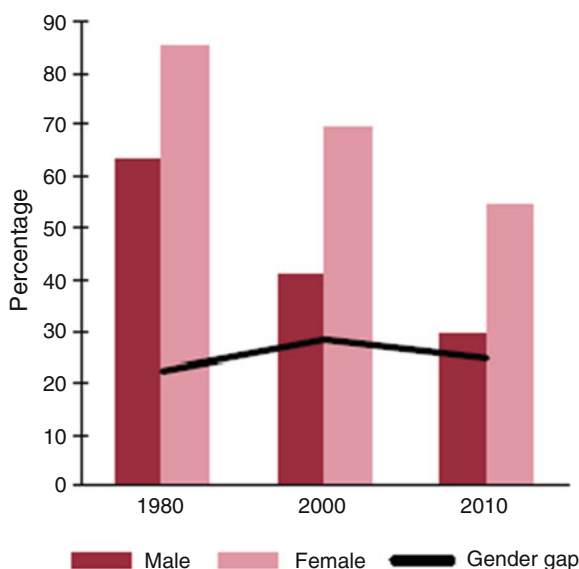
According to Lam et al. (2006), employment rates are higher amongst the elderly who do not receive a pension, and considering that Africa has the most economically active elderly population, this suggests that they are more likely to participate in the labour force in the absence of pension benefits.

When the ageing population of Africa is disaggregated according to place of residence, it is clear that there is only a minor difference in elderly people living in rural and urban areas (Table 2.4). According to UNDP (2005), 6% of the population who live in rural areas in Africa are aged 60 years and over, while 5% of the population who live in urban areas in Africa are aged 60 years and over. Thus, the ageing population is almost equally distributed in urban and rural areas. One would expect a far greater proportion of the elderly to be concentrated in the rural areas, since Africa is known to be a developing continent. Asia also has an equal distribution of elderly people in urban and rural areas. Northern America, like Africa, has a slightly greater percentage of elderly who live in rural areas. However, Europe has the highest proportional difference, with far more elderly people found in rural areas than in urban areas, 21% and 17%, respectively.

Table 2.4 Percentage of the population in urban and rural areas aged 60 years and over

	Urban	Rural
Africa	5	6
Asia	9	9
Northern America	16	18
Europe	17	21

Source: UNDP (2005)

**Fig. 2.9** The male and female illiteracy rate for those aged 60 and over and the gender gap, in less developed countries, 1980–2010. Source: United Nations (2001)

Earlier projections of the level of education of elderly Africans (Fig. 2.9) suggest that by 2010 less than half of all Africans aged 60 years and older will be illiterate. Although the illiteracy rate is expected to decrease over the decades, there is likely to remain a substantial number of illiterate people in this age group. Furthermore, levels of illiteracy are higher among women in this age group than men. Again, women are in a disadvantageous position on the basis of their gender. The total percentage of elderly Africans who are illiterate is 43% (57% literate), in addition, as discussed previously almost half of all elderly Africans participate in the labour force (Fig. 2.8). The relationship between literacy and employment confirms the findings of Lam et al. (2006) that literacy and employment have a positive correlation and an almost equal percentile.

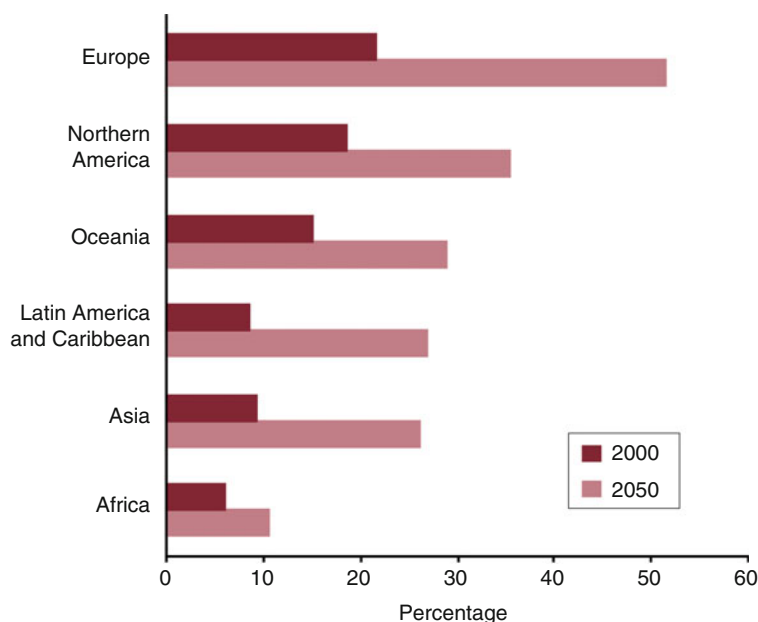


Fig. 2.10 Elderly dependency ratio by area, 2000 and 2050. *Source:* United Nations (2001)

2.4.1 The Dependency of the Ageing Population on the Working-Age Population

One would expect to find that the number of people of working age in Africa outnumbers the ageing population, since Africa is known to have a youthful population. According to data from the United Nations (2008a), the age pyramid of the African population is comprised mostly of the working-age population. Furthermore, it is important to ascertain the proportional difference or ratio of the working-age population to the ageing population. These figures are important since it will help determine how dependent the ageing population is on the working-age population for their social and economic needs. The dependency ratio shown in Fig. 2.10 indicates that in 2000, 5% of the elderly in Africa were dependent on the working-age population (United Nations 2001). In contrast, in 2000, 20% of the elderly in Europe were dependent on the working-age population. Figure 2.10 shows that in Africa the elderly dependency ratio is on the increase. However, the other continents have a higher dependency ratio than Africa. This paints a relatively favourable situation for the African ageing population, as the elderly dependency ratio is much smaller than the wealthier continents.

The projections show that support for the ageing population will decline in the future. The percentage of elderly to the economically active population will increase over time and will reach 10%. The figure will double over the course of 5 decades.

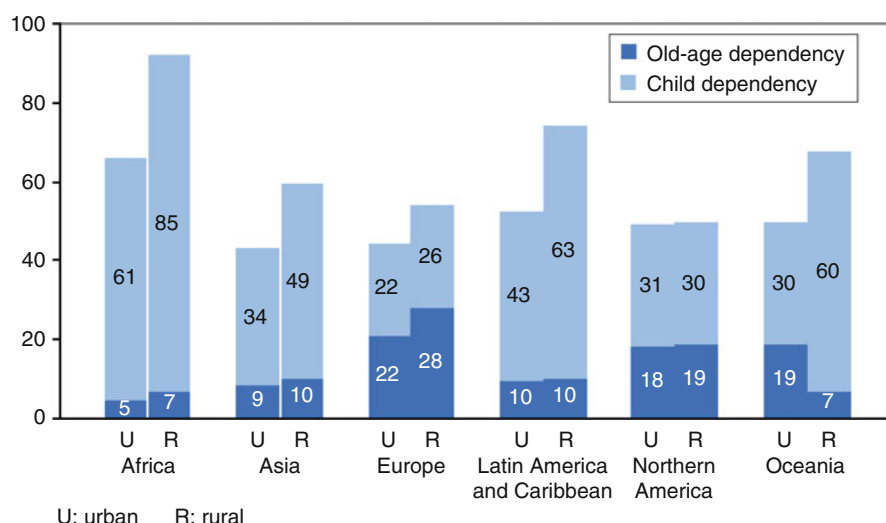


Fig. 2.11 Old age dependency percentage versus child dependency percentage in urban and rural areas. *Source:* United Nations (2009)

The increase in the dependency ratio will have negative implications for the African ageing population, especially if the increase continues in the years beyond 2050. The ageing population will not receive as much support in the future from the working-age population because they will also increase in numbers, which will change the age structure, and thus increase the dependency ratio.

Recent figures by United Nations (2009), Fig. 2.11, indicate that the ageing population of Africa is far more dependent on the working-age population than children aged 0–14 years. The elderly who live in rural areas comprise 85% of all those who are dependent, compared with children who constitute only 7%. In urban areas, the elderly comprise 61% of all those who are dependent, compared with children who constitute only 5%.

Unlike Africa, in Europe the elderly and children are both equally dependent on the working-age population, which implies that they place a similar “burden of responsibility” on the working-age population. The elderly in Africa, on the other hand, place a far greater burden of responsibility than children on the working-age population. The elderly, who form the proportional majority, are not extensively acknowledged on the developmental front, as attention is often paid to children; this results in the vast majority of elderly in Africa being excluded from national priorities.

2.4.2 Regional Trends in Ageing

The following section examines the trends in ageing in the African continent. Population ageing in Africa varies substantially by region. The regions will be classified under five main categories: Northern Africa, Southern Africa, Eastern

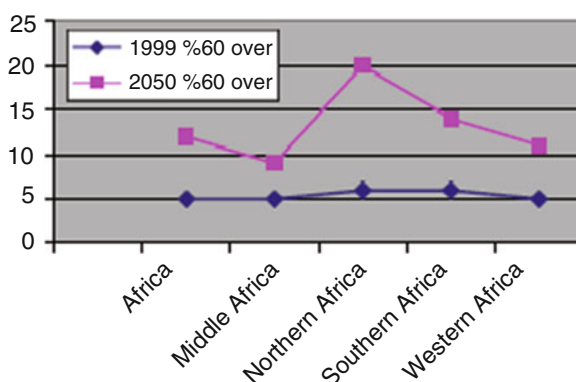


Fig. 2.12 Increase in the percentage of the ageing population in Africa, by region. *Source:* Kalasa (2004)

Africa, Western Africa, and Central/Middle Africa. Each region is characterised by the trends of the countries within it, and thus some regions differ substantially from others based on which countries fall into its category. Specific country-level trends will be discussed in the next section, but before zoning in on countries, it is important to examine the five African regions, in order to ascertain the differences and similarities in ageing trends.

Projections indicate that, of all the regions, the largest increase in the ageing population will occur in Northern Africa. According to Fig. 2.12, in 1999, 6% of the Northern African population was 60 years and over, and this is expected to increase to 20% in 2050. This is almost a fifth of the Northern African population and will represent the greatest proportion of ageing adults within all the five African regions.

Southern Africa will also witness a steady increase in its ageing population, from 6% in 1999 to 14% in 2050. However, the sharpest increase in the ageing population will occur in Northern Africa. The ageing population in Southern Africa is expected to double over the next 5 decades, whereas the ageing population of Northern Africa is expected to treble over the next 5 decades. The ageing population of Western Africa will also increase from 5% in 1999 to 11% in 2050, almost doubling over this period. The smallest increase will occur in Middle (Central) Africa, from 5% in 1999 to 8% in 2050.

When the regional comparison is shifted to consider the sub-Saharan region in relation to gender, it can be seen that males in the region fare far better than females. Figure 2.13 illustrates the gender differences by place of residence and living arrangements in the sub-Saharan region. Only 6% of elderly men in rural areas, and 7% of elderly men in urban areas live alone, compared to 13% of elderly women in rural areas and 10% in urban areas. Elderly women thus face a greater risk of loneliness and abandonment than their male counterparts at older ages.

The majority of elderly men live with at least one child, 69% in rural areas and 73% in urban areas. Fewer elderly women live with at least one child, 50% in rural areas and 55% in urban areas. Elderly women are also tasked with more familial and household responsibility than elderly men, as the percentage having to fend for their

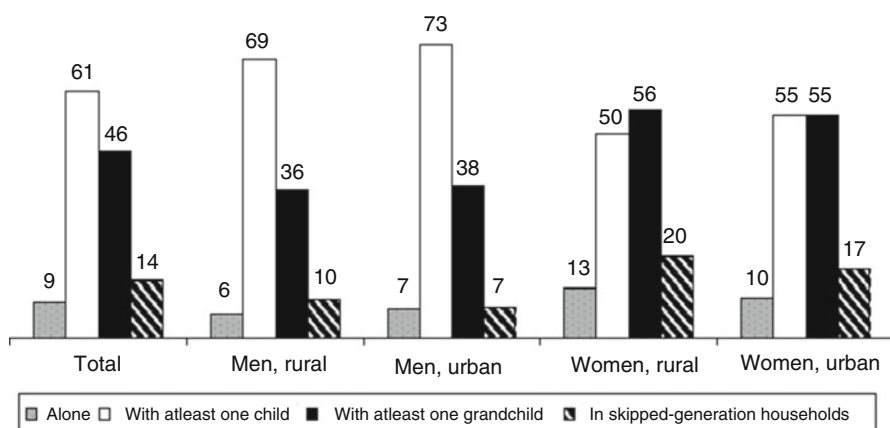


Fig. 2.13 Living arrangements of persons aged 60 and over in sub-Saharan Africa around 2003 by place of residence. *Source:* Kinsella and Wan (2009)

grandchildren, and the percentage without assistance from the grandchild's parent is both higher for women.

From these figures one can assume that the AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa is impacting the living arrangements of the elderly. At a demographic level, the younger cohort has a high mortality rate due to AIDS, resulting in a higher proportion of elderly people compared with the younger population (Lloyd-Sherlock 2000). At a social and household level, often when the child of the elderly person has died or is severely ill due to HIV/AIDS, the elderly person is tasked with the responsibility of caring for, or even raising the grandchild. However, elderly women are more disadvantaged by this situation than elderly males, as they have a higher percentage of skipped generation households. Thus elderly women have to assume far greater responsibility than elderly men and they are also likely to be alone and have less support from those around them than their male counterparts.

At a regional level (Fig. 2.14), the highest concentration of elderly men is in Eastern, Northern, and Western Africa, with 46%. This figure is similar to other regions in the world such as South-eastern Asia, Western Asia, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. The percentage of the population that is men aged 60 and over is 44% in Middle Africa and 40% in Southern Africa. However whilst the gender composition of most African regions is similar to other world regions, the impact of the gender imbalance at older ages in Africa can pose a problem for females who are often alone in their old age, since Africa is home to twenty of the world's worst health systems (Robinson 2007). Thus, inadequate health systems in Africa will negatively impact females in their old age to a much larger extent than in other world regions. It is important to take this gender imbalance into consideration when designing ageing policies.

At the older ages, there are a high percentage of women than men. In Africa, women as a group tend to live longer than men, and this means that they are likely

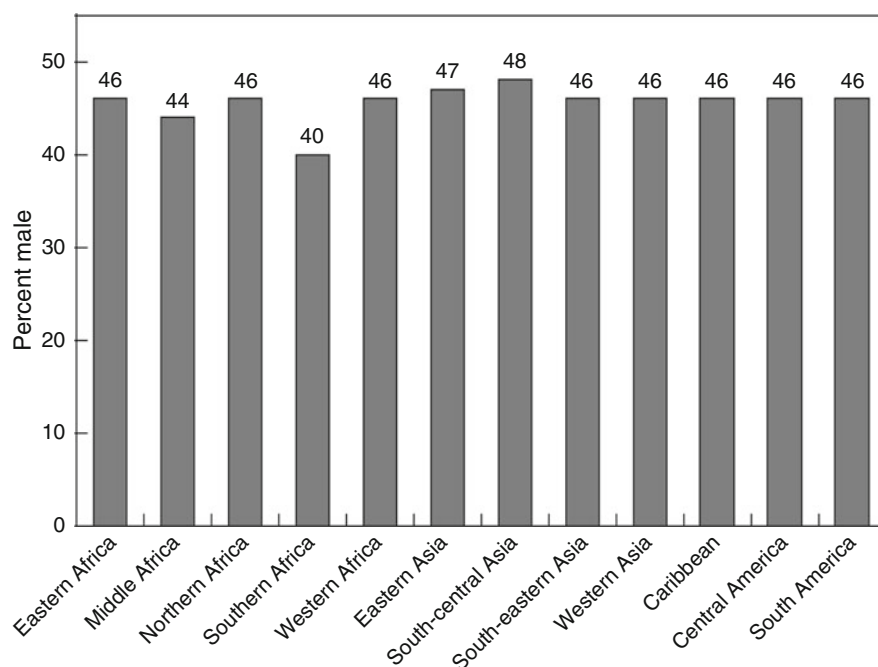


Fig. 2.14 The percentage of males amongst the population aged 60 years and over by region.
Source: Knodel and Ofstedal (2003)

to outlive their male partners, and, as a result, spend more of their time living alone. Knodel and Ofstedal (2003) note that the extent of difficulties facing elderly women is heavily dependent on their social and economic context; however, they note that their widowhood negatively impacts on their lives nevertheless.

Table 2.5 shows that the life expectancy in Africa is much lower than other continents for 2000–2005 at 51.3 years, but it is projected to increase to 69.5 years for 2045–2050. This indicates that Africans will have a longer life expectancy in the future, thus the increase in the ageing population will become a trend of the continent as a whole. In particular, men and women aged 60 and 65 years will experience the highest increase in life expectancy of all the elderly in Africa. Both elderly men and women are expected to see a large increase in their life expectancy over the next few decades. The life expectancy of men and women will rise from 50.5 years and 52.1 years in 2000–2005 to 67.9 years and 71.2 years in 2045–2050, respectively.

Over the next few decades the largest increase in the life expectancy of all the African regions will occur in East Africa, from 45.4 years in 2000–2005 to 67.2 years in 2045–2050. The growth in life expectancy will occur in other regions, but it will be a more gradual process. With regard to gender differentials, females have a higher growth in life expectancy than males in all African regions. This indicates that females will continue to outlive males into old age, and if gender inequalities persist into the future, this will only magnify the problems that elderly women face in

Table 2.5 Life expectancy by sex and particular ages in Africa and its regions

Region	Total				Female				Male			
	Birth	60	65	80	Birth	60	65	80	Birth	60	65	80
Africa												
2000–2005	51.3	16.2	13.1	5.8	52.1	17.0	13.7	6.1	50.5	13.3	12.4	5.5
2045–2050	69.5	20.2	16.4	7.3	71.2	21.4	17.4	7.9	67.9	18.9	15.3	6.6
East Africa												
2000–2005	45.4	15.6	12.7	5.7	46.0	16.3	13.3	5.9	44.8	14.8	12.2	5.4
2045–2050	67.2	19.7	16.0	7.1	68.7	20.6	16.7	7.4	65.8	18.7	15.2	6.7
Middle Africa												
2000–2005	50.0	16.0	12.9	5.7	51.1	16.7	13.4	5.9	48.8	15.3	12.4	5.4
2045–2050	69.0	19.7	16.0	7.0	70.4	20.5	16.6	7.3	67.6	18.9	15.3	6.7
Northern Africa												
2000–2005	66.4	17.1	13.6	5.6	68.0	17.9	14.3	5.9	64.8	16.1	12.8	5.3
2045–2050	77.0	21.0	17.0	7.5	79.3	22.7	18.5	8.4	74.7	19.2	15.3	6.5
Southern Africa												
2000–2005	46.4	15.6	13.0	6.3	47.1	17.6	14.6	6.8	45.6	13.2	11.0	5.3
2045–2050	66.2	20.6	17.1	8.4	67.2	23.1	19.2	9.3	65.1	18.1	14.7	6.8
Western Africa												
2000–2005	51.3	16.3	13.2	6.1	51.8	16.9	13.6	6.3	50.7	15.7	12.7	5.8
2045–2050	69.0	19.9	16.1	7.1	70.4	20.7	16.8	7.4	67.7	19.0	15.4	6.8

Source: United Nations (2007)

their old age. Knodel and Ofstedal (2003) argue that, instead of focusing on the challenges facing elderly women, more attention should be directed at improving male survivorship as a means to reduce the number of elderly widows. As stated by Van Dulleman (2006), old age is a gendered experience; however, it is important to consider the elderly male perspective as it may serve as an effective conceptual tool to help reduce gender inequalities and the challenges facing the elderly. Taking the elderly male perspective into consideration would prove helpful during policy-making and at a programmatic and developmental level, as the continual focus on elderly women's issues emphasises a "victimised" ideology which may in fact perpetuate their issues.

2.5 Demographic Trends in Ageing

At a regional level, Fig. 2.15 shows that Northern, Eastern, and Western Africa have similar numbers of elderly men and women, at 14,758,000, 14,996,000, and 14,332,000 aged 60 years and over in the year 2009, respectively.

As of 2009, the region with the smallest ageing population was firstly Southern Africa with 4,013,000, followed by Central Africa with 5,671,000. By 2050, Northern Africa will have the highest concentration of elderly people in the continent. Projections suggest that the ageing population of Northern Africa will

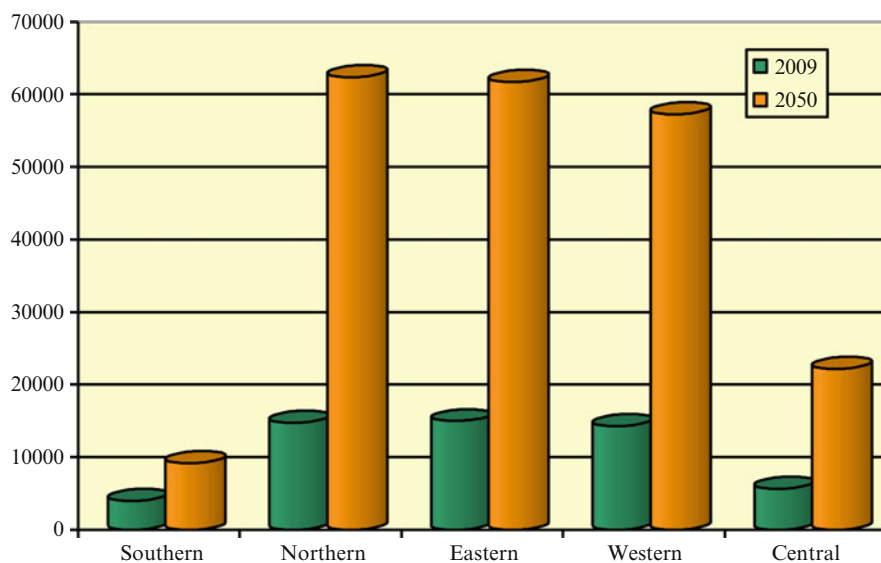


Fig. 2.15 The ageing population in thousands, 60 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008a)

increase almost fourfold to 62,388,000 in 2050. This will be followed by Eastern Africa which will increase to 61,740,000 and Western Africa to 57,251,000 in 2050.

While not as large an increase as the other regions, the population aged 60 and over in Central Africa will increase from 5,671,000 in 2009 to 22,181,000 in 2050, and the population aged 60 and over in Southern Africa will double from 4,013,000 in 2009 to 9,203,000 in 2050.

The ageing population constitutes 7% of the total population of Southern Africa and Northern Africa, according to 2009 figures (Fig. 2.16). In Eastern, Western, and Central Africa, the elderly constitutes 5% of the total population.

In Northern Africa, the ageing population will constitute the largest share of the total population compared to all African regions. The ageing population will comprise 19% of the total population by the year 2050. By 2050 the ageing population of Southern Africa will comprise 14% of the total population. In addition, by 2050 the ageing population of Eastern Africa and Western Africa will increase to 9% of the total population, and Central Africa to 8% of the total population.

The population aged 80 years and over constitutes 8% of the Southern African population in 2009 and will almost double to 15% in 2050 (Fig. 2.17). The increase in the size of the oldest demographic group concurs with previous observations in this chapter that the life expectancy of the ageing population is increasing in Africa. In Northern Africa the life expectancy will also increase over the decades, as the share of the population aged 80 years and over will rise from 9% in 2009 to 13% in 2050.

In the future, the oldest cohort, the proportion of the population aged 80 and above in Eastern, Western, and Central Africa, is expected to increase only slightly

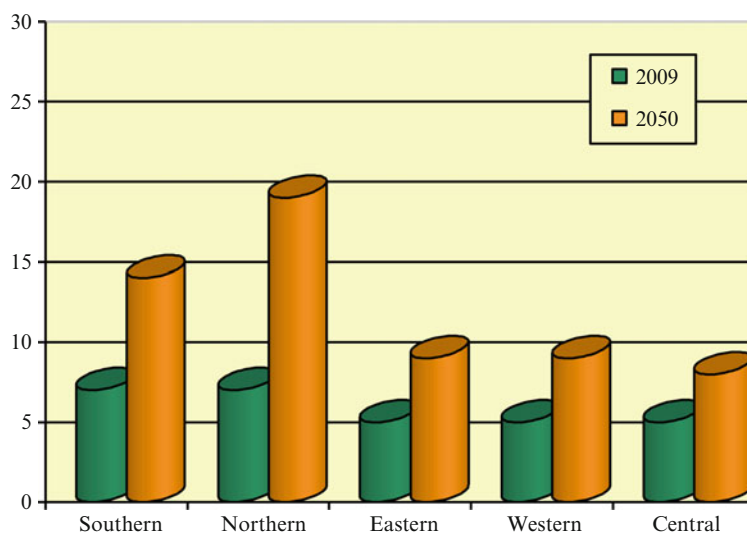


Fig. 2.16 Percentage of the total population, 60 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008a)

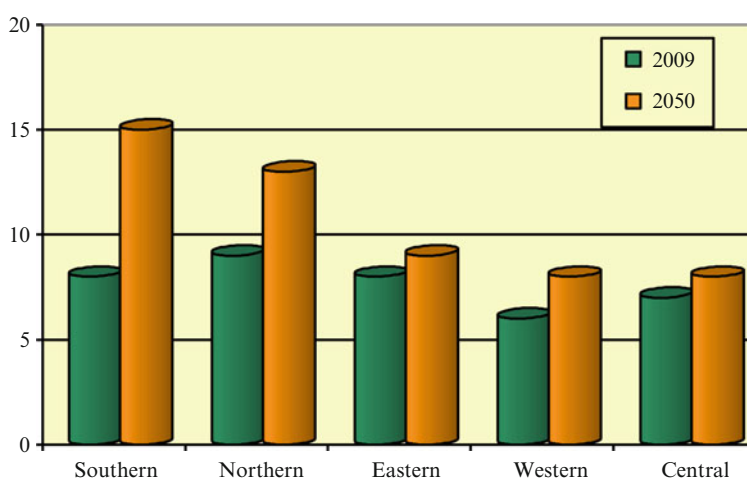


Fig. 2.17 Share of the total population aged 80 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008a)

and constitute a slightly larger share of the total population than in 2009. Over the next few decades the life expectancy of the oldest cohort in Eastern Africa will not alter much. In 2009, 8% of the Eastern African population was aged 80 years and over, and by the year 2050 it will increase by just one percent to 9%.

In Western Africa the percentage of the oldest old group will increase from 6% in 2009 to 8% in 2050. Thus, life expectancy of the oldest cohort will not see much change in this region over the decades. Similarly, Central Africa will experience

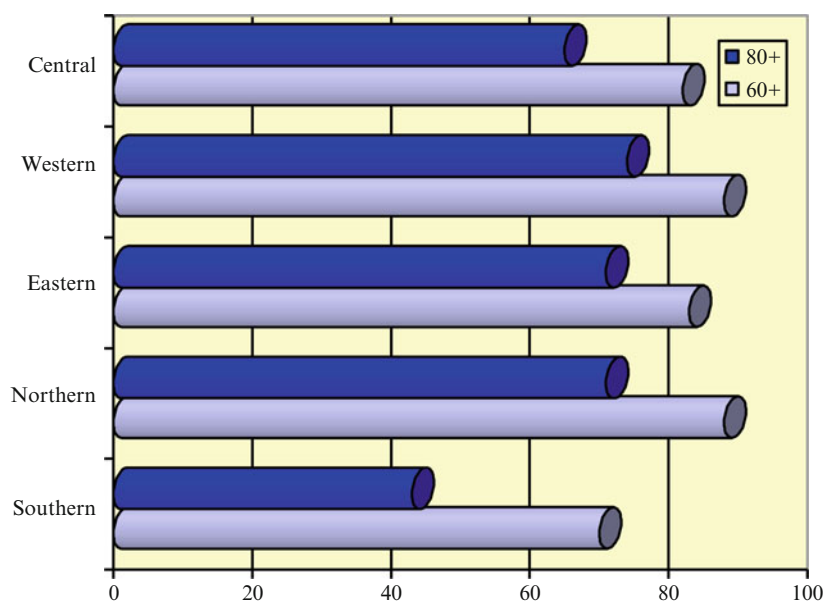


Fig. 2.18 The sex ratio of the ageing population. *Source:* United Nations (2008b)

only a slight increase in the share of population aged 80 years and above, from 7% in 2009 to 8% in 2050.

The sex ratios (Fig. 2.18) indicate that Western Africa has the highest sex ratio for both cohorts 60+ and 80+. This is followed by Northern and Eastern Africa. The figures for Western Africa indicate that there are 88 men for every 100 women aged 60 years and above. This figure decreases slightly for the oldest cohort, with 74 men for every 100 women aged 80 years and above. Similar figures are seen in Northern Africa with 88 men for every 100 women. This figure decreases for the oldest cohort, with 71 males for every 100 women aged 80 years and above.

In Eastern Africa, there are 83 men for every 100 women aged 60 years and above. For the oldest age bracket, those aged 80 years and above, there are 71 men for every 100 women. In Central Africa there are 82 men for every 100 women aged 60 years and above, this ratio decreases slightly with increasing age, with 65 men aged 80 years and over for every 100 women.

Southern Africa has the lowest sex ratio, with far fewer men than women. In 2009, for every 100 women aged 60 years and over, there were 70 men. In other words, there were 30% more women of this age than men. This indicates the difficulties that women of this age are likely to face, since their male partners are less likely to survive as long as they do, and as a result they spend most of their elderly years without a male partner. This issue only worsens with age, as there are only 43 men for every 100 women aged 80 years and over. Thus more than half of all women in the oldest cohort are without a male partner companion in Southern Africa.

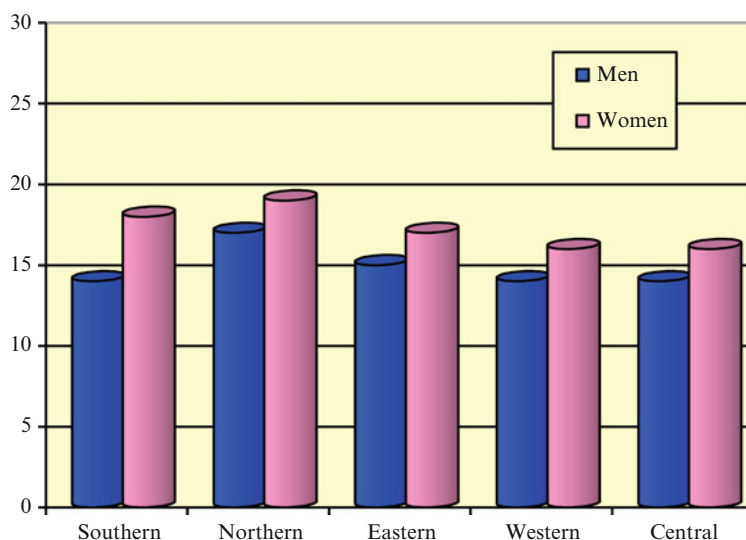


Fig. 2.19 Life expectancy at age 60, 2005–2010. *Source:* United Nations (2008b, c)

2.5.1 Gender Differentials

Figure 2.19 shows the life expectancy for both men and women aged 60 years and over, by region. Of all the African regions, the life expectancy for men and women aged 60 years and over is highest for Northern Africa; however, the regional differences are small. What is common across all regions is that elderly women have a longer life expectancy than men; however, the gender differentials are not large. In Northern Africa, men aged 60 years and over are likely to live an additional 17 years, compared with women with a slightly higher life expectancy of an additional 19 years. In Eastern Africa, men are likely to live a further 15 more years after reaching age 60, whereas females are expected to live a further 17 years.

In Central Africa, the life expectancy at age 60 for women is higher than for men. The life expectancy is 16 years for women and 14 years for men who live to 60 years. Similarly, in Southern Africa the life expectancy for women is higher than that of men. According to Fig. 2.19, men are likely to live an additional 14 years after they turn 60, compared with women who are likely to live an additional 18 years. In the case of Western Africa, the life expectancy of elderly women is slightly greater than men. The life expectancy is a further 16 years for women and 14 years for men who live to 60 years.

With regard to marital status and consensual unions (Fig. 2.20), Northern Africa has the highest percentage of married men aged 60 and above, and Southern Africa has the largest percentage of married women aged 60 and above. In Northern Africa, 90% of all men aged 60 and over are married compared with less than 40% of women. Men aged 60 and over in this region thus have far greater companionship in

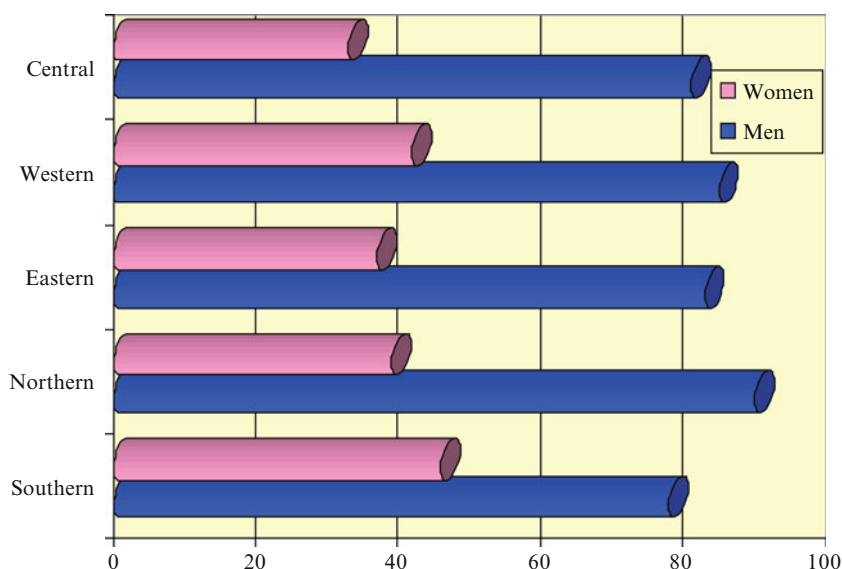


Fig. 2.20 Percentage married, 60 years and over. (“married” includes those in consensual unions).
Source: United Nations (2008b, c)

their old age than women. Similarly in Western Africa fewer women are married or in a consensual union at 60 years and over. Men are two times more likely than women to be married or in a consensual union at age 60 and over.

In Southern Africa, a far greater percentage of older men (78%) are married or in a consensual union than women (46%). In Eastern Africa, 83% of all older men are either married or in a consensual union, compared with 37% of older women. Similarly, in Central Africa, 81% of older men are either married or in a consensual union, compared with 33% of older women. The figures indicate that, for all African regions, men are more likely than women aged 60 and over to have greater companionship and support as a result of being married in their older age.

Figure 2.21 shows that the percentage of the population aged 60 and over who live alone is highest for women in Central Africa, at 13%, and highest for men in Southern Africa, at 8%. A gender comparison shows that in Southern Africa, despite the percentage of older, married men being much higher than older women, there is an almost equal percentage of men and women living alone. In Southern Africa, 8% of men and women aged 60 and over are living alone. However for Central Africa, around twice as many older females live alone than older males, at 13% and 6%, respectively. Similarly in Eastern Africa twice as many women are alone as men, at 12% and 6%, respectively.

The gender disparity in living arrangements is greatest in Northern Africa. Older men have far greater companionship in their old age compared with older women, and this is corroborated by the percentage living alone. Only 4% of older men live alone, compared with 12% of older women who live alone. In Western Africa almost

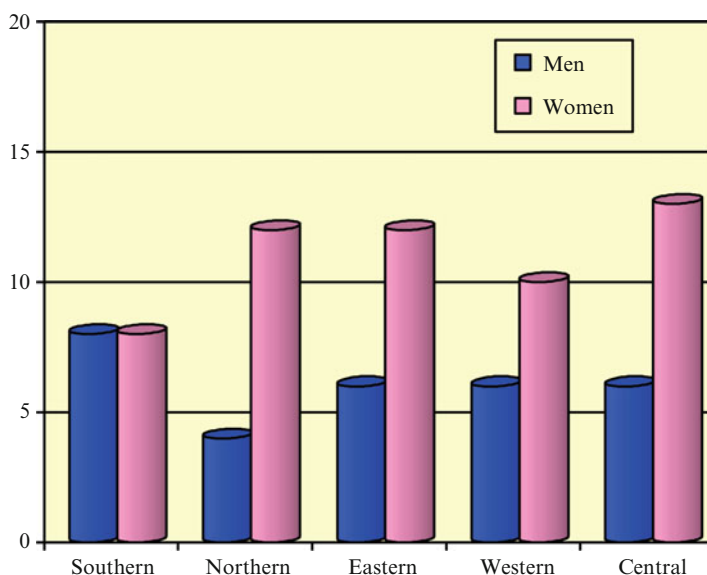


Fig. 2.21 Percentage living alone, 60 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008b, c)

twice as many older women (10%) live alone than older men (6%). In all the African regions, apart from Southern Africa, women are more likely to be living alone at older ages than men. At least twice as many older women than older men live by themselves.

In comparison to the other regions, Eastern Africa has the largest percentage of men and women aged 60 years and over in the labour force. Gender comparisons show that, in Eastern Africa, 79% of men, compared with 56% of women, are in the labour force. This is followed by Central Africa where labour force participation is 75% for men and 47% for women aged 60 years and over. The third highest region in terms of labour force participation is Western Africa. Figure 2.22 shows that 65% of elderly men in Western Africa are economically active, compared with only 36% of women.

In Northern Africa, men aged 60 and over are five times more likely to participate in the labour force than women. Only 8% of women aged 60 years and over participate in labour force, compared with 41% of men. The participation of the population aged 60 years and over is lowest in Southern Africa. Men aged 60 years and over are almost two times more active in the labour force than women. Almost 38% of men aged 60 years and over are economically active, compared with 18% of all women aged 60 years and over. In all the African regions, older men are more economically active than older women.

The old-age support ratio is a key indicator of the pressures that population ageing is likely to pose for pension systems. It measures how many people there are of working age (20–64) relative to the number of retirement age (65+). Figure 2.23 shows the old age support ratio by African region.

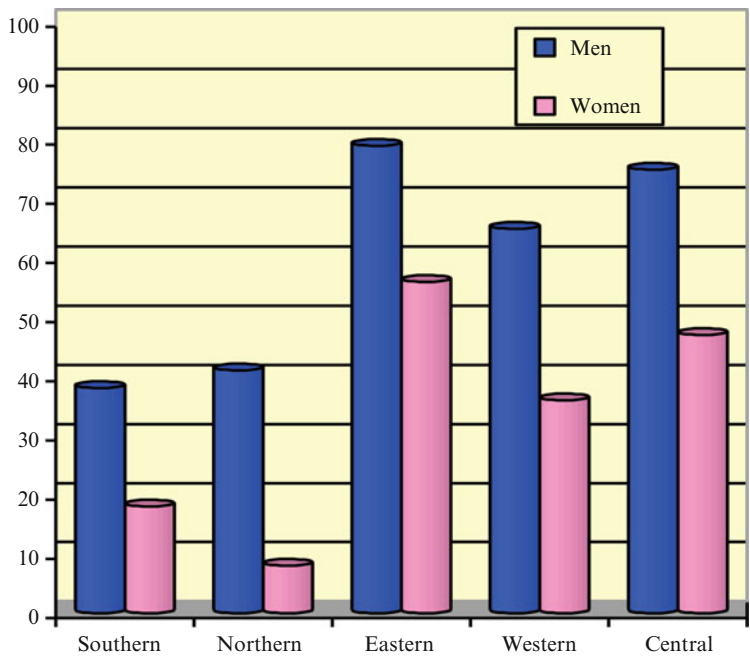


Fig. 2.22 Percentage in the labour force, 60 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008b, c)

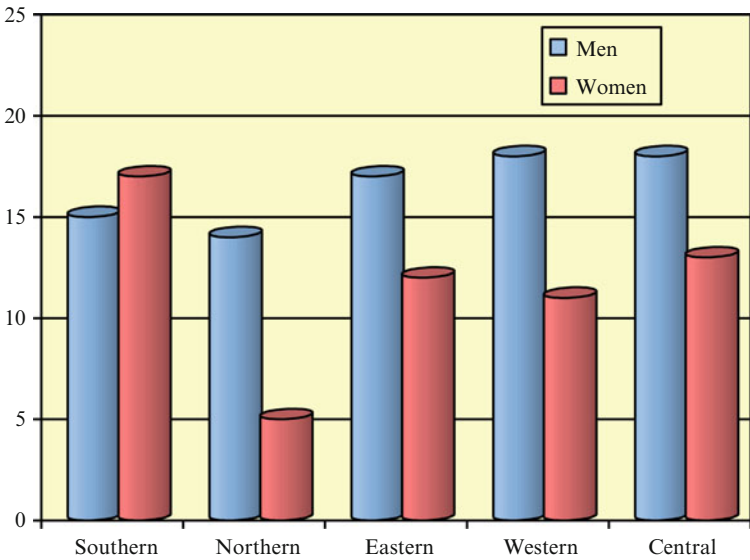


Fig. 2.23 Old age support ratio, 2009. *Source:* United Nations (2008b)

There are minor variations in the old age support ratio by region in Africa, and it can be seen that in all the African regions the elderly have a generally similar support ratio, with Central and Western Africa as the leading regions. However, in all regions, excluding Southern Africa, older men receive greater support than women. For instance, in Western Africa older men receive better support than females. The support ratio of Central Africa is almost the same as Western Africa where elderly men are offered more support from the economically active population than women. In Eastern Africa, older men are able to receive support and care from 17 economically active persons, whereas older women find less support with only 12 economically active persons per woman.

The greatest disparity between male and female old age support ratios is seen in Northern Africa, where men find far greater support from the economically active population than women at the more advanced age. The figure for older men is almost three times more than for older women, as 14 economically active people are found for every older man, whereas only 5 people are able to support every older woman. The region which makes an exception to these trends is Southern Africa where women find more support from the economically active population than men. This is an unlikely occurrence, as gender differentials tend to work in favour of men; however in this region, older women find greater support from the younger population than older men. For each older woman, there are 17 economically active people to provide support, in comparison with older men who have 15 economically active people to support them.

2.6 The Country-Level Differentials in Population Ageing

The following section will analyse differentials in ageing across African countries. Figure 2.24 shows the percentage of the ageing population of the total population in select African countries. Mauritius has the highest percentage of the ageing population with 9.5%, followed by South Africa (7.8%) and Lesotho (6.9%). In Central Africa Republic the ageing population constitutes 6.1% of the total population.

In four countries, the population aged 60 and over constitutes 5% or more of the total population: Eritrea, Botswana, Nigeria, and Ghana. In the other countries, including Senegal, Mozambique, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso, the share of older people was slightly smaller, ranging from 4 to 4.8% of the total population. The country with the lowest share of the ageing population is Uganda (3.4%), followed by Kenya (3.6%), Zambia (3.7%), and Rwanda (3.8%).

Figure 2.25 shows that older people will constitute a large share of the total population of South Africa. Projections suggest that the ageing population of South Africa will increase from 7% in 2000 to 11.5% in 2030. In 2000, the ageing population constituted 7% of the total population of South Africa, followed by Cameroon with 5.2% and Ghana with 5.1%. By 2030, projections suggest that South Africa's ageing population will form 11.5% of the total population, followed by Ghana with 9.5% and Kenya with 6.7%.

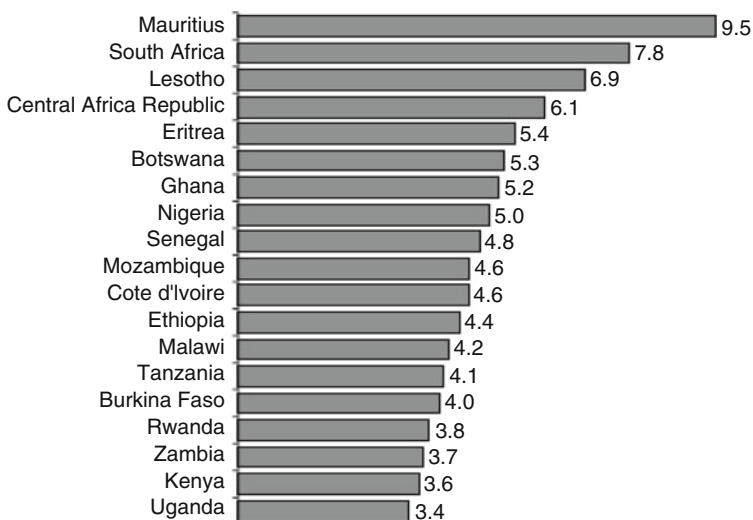


Fig. 2.24 The percentage of the ageing population in Africa countries, 2005. *Source:* Cohen and Menken (2006)

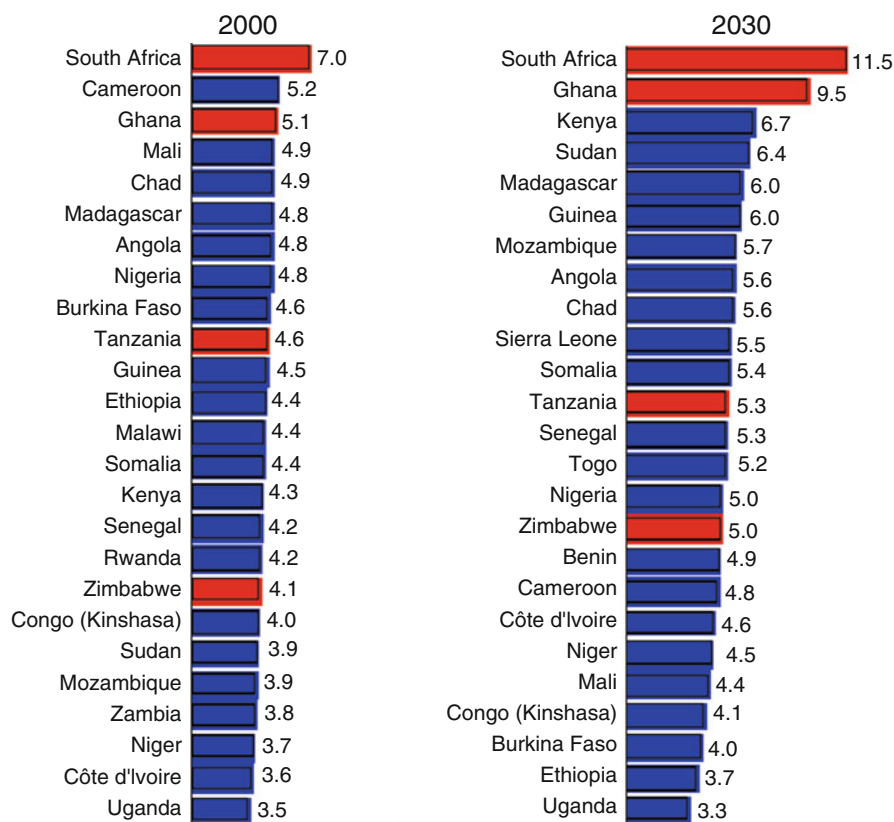


Fig. 2.25 The percentage of the population 60 years and over in African countries, 2000 and 2030. *Source:* WHO (2000)

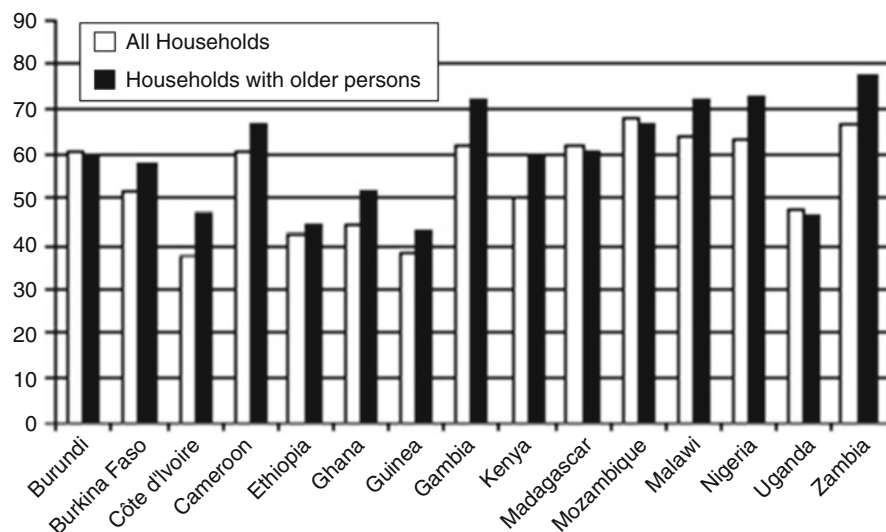


Fig. 2.26 The incidence of poverty in select African countries. *Source:* Kakwani and Subbarao (2005)

Overall, countries are not expected to experience substantial growth of the population aged 60 years and over from 2000 to 2030. While the ranking of some countries may change in relation to other African countries, the percentage of the older population is expected to grow only slightly over the 3 decades. However, there are exceptions; for instance, the older population of Sudan will grow from 3.9% in 2000 to 6.4% in 2030. High growth rates of the older population will also be seen in Mozambique, with projections suggesting an increase from 3.9% in 2000 to 5.7% in 2030. In Kenya, the population aged 60 and above is also expected to increase from 4.3% in 2000 to 6.7%, which will be the third highest in 2030. On the other hand, it would appear that the share of the older population in the total population is likely to decline in Zambia. Zambia does not feature in the chart in 2003 due to the decrease in size of its elderly population.

Figure 2.26 shows that households that include older persons are poorer than other households. One reason why older people are in a disadvantaged position is largely because household income has to be shared amongst more members, which increases the poverty rate. The countries with the highest level of poverty in households with older persons are Zambia (78%), followed by Gambia (73%), Nigeria (72%), and Malawi (71%).

The countries with the lowest level of poverty in households with older people are Guinea (42%), Ethiopia (43%), Uganda (46%), and Cote d'Ivoire (47%). The issue of high levels of poverty is exacerbated in African countries as the household income has to be shared among older as well as younger family members. Thus, the poverty rate is expected to be higher in a household that includes older people as there are more people to share the household income and resources. Unless the

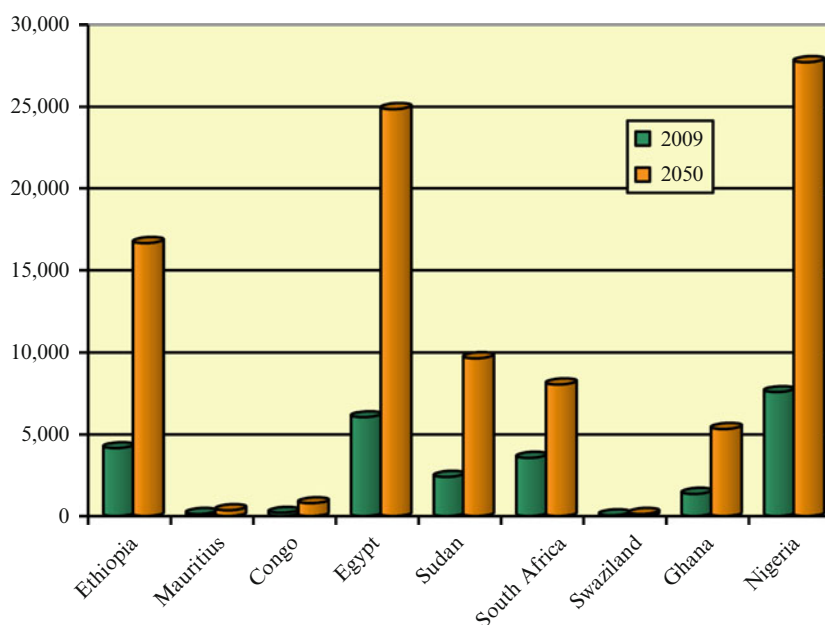


Fig. 2.27 The ageing population in thousands in select African countries, 60 years and over.
Source: United Nations (2008a)

poverty rate in Africa is decreased to a level comparable with other continents, older people and the other household members they reside with will continue to suffer the burdens of poverty.

2.6.1 Country-Level Demographics

The following section provides an examination of the population aged 60 and over in select African countries from the five regions: Ethiopia and Mauritius in East Africa, Democratic Republic of the Congo in Central Africa, Egypt and Sudan in Northern Africa, South Africa and Swaziland in Southern Africa, and Ghana and Nigeria in West Africa. Two countries per African region were randomly selected from the United Nations World Population Prospects Comprehensive Tables (2008a). According to data from the United Nations (2008a) (Fig. 2.27), Nigeria had the highest number of people aged 60 years and over in 2009, in comparison with other select African countries, with 7,591,000, followed by Egypt with 6,054,000, and Ethiopia with 4,162,000.

In 2009, Mauritius and Swaziland had the fewest number of people aged 60 and over of the select African countries, with 145,000 and 62,000, respectively. Projections for 2050 show that if the situation remains unchanged, Nigeria will

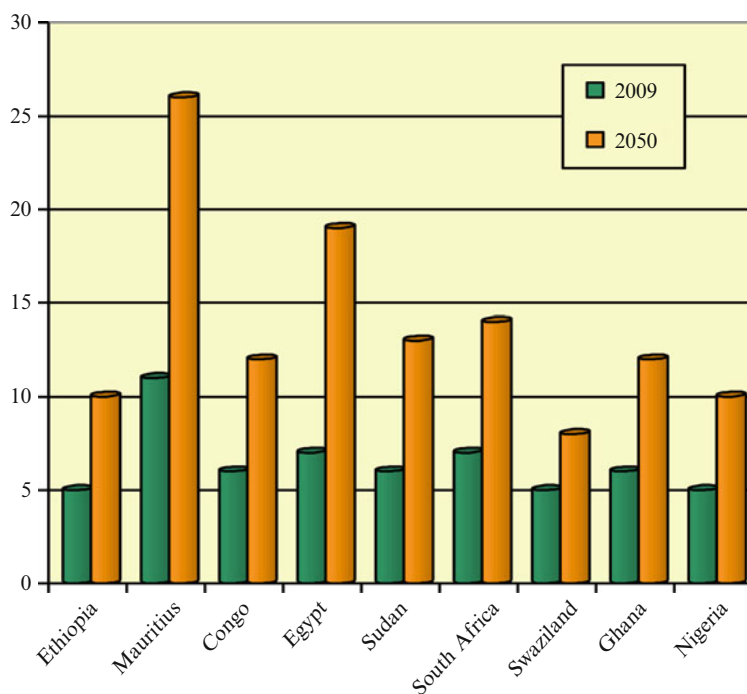


Fig. 2.28 Percentage of the total population in select African countries, 60 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008a)

continue to have the largest number of elderly people, at 27,719,000, followed by Egypt (24,846,000) and Ethiopia (16,658,000).

The ranking of the select countries do not alter much, as Mauritius and Swaziland will remain the countries with the lowest number of older people. It is important to point out the high numbers of older people in Northern, Western, and Eastern Africa, in comparison with the Southern and Central African countries. There is a large disparity in the size of the ageing population by region.

Although Mauritius has the second lowest number of older men and women (Fig. 2.27), when the population aged 60 and over are considered as a percentage of the total population (Fig. 2.28), the country has the largest share of the older population. Mauritius ranks the highest of all the countries with 11% of older people contributing to its total population in 2009. The share of elderly in the total population of the other countries ranges between 5 and 7%.

Projections for 2050 indicate that Mauritius will remain the leading country with the highest percentage of elderly in the total population. However, the percentage of elderly in Mauritius will rise to 26%, followed by Egypt with 19%, and South Africa with 14%.

In the remaining countries, the share of the elderly as a proportion of the total population will range from 8 to 13%. It is important to note that, other than Mauritius

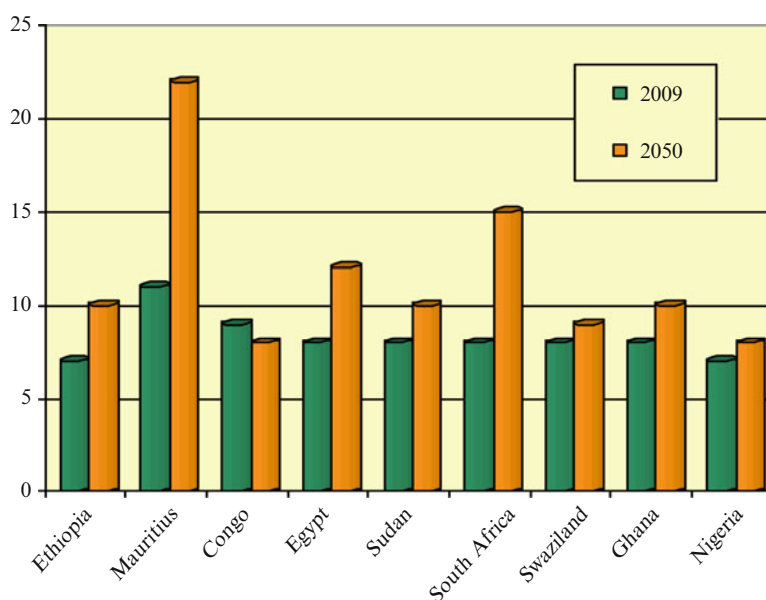


Fig. 2.29 Share of older persons in select African countries, 80 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008a)

with an elderly population that forms one fifth of the total population, all the other countries have a percentage of elderly people who form less than a fifth of the total population. Over the next few decades the ageing population is expected to grow, but the population will continue to consist mainly of the youth and the economically active age group. This validates the future demographic trend of a “young” African population majority.

Figure 2.29 illustrates the percentage share of persons aged 80 years and over in the total population. Mauritius has the highest share of people in the oldest age cohort (11%), followed by Congo (9%), then Egypt, Sudan, South Africa, Swaziland, and Ghana, all with 8%. The share of elderly above the age of 80 years per country ranges from 7 to 11% in 2009.

Projections for 2050 indicate that Mauritius will continue to have the largest share of the population aged 80 years and over, with 22%. South Africa will have the second largest share with 15%, followed by Egypt with 12%. The oldest cohort in the remaining countries ranges from 8 to 10%. Other than Mauritius, in these select African countries, the oldest cohort comprises less than a fifth of the total population.

Figure 2.30 illustrates the sex ratio of the ageing population for select African countries, with Ghana as the leading country for both age groups: 60 years and over and 80 years and over. An examination of the population aged 60 years and over shows that Ghana has 94 men for every 100 women, followed by Sudan with 88

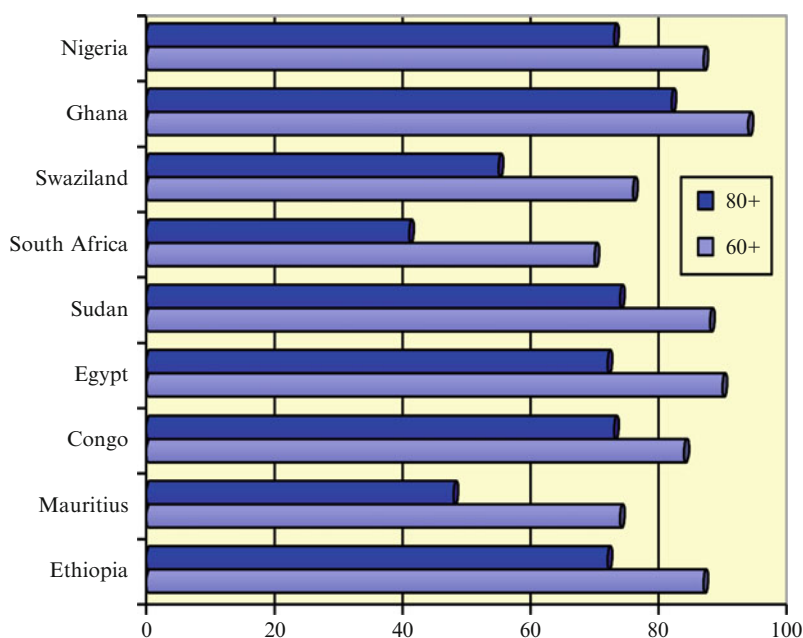


Fig. 2.30 The sex ratio of the ageing population in select African countries, 2009. *Source:* United Nations (2008b)

men for every 100 women, and Congo and Nigeria with 87 for every 100 women, respectively. These are relatively high sex ratios, which indicate that there are almost as many men as there are women in the population aged 60 years and over. The sex ratios for Mauritius and South Africa vary somewhat from other countries, with less than 75 men for every 100 women aged 60 years and over.

An examination of the sex ratios of the oldest age cohort in the population shows that Ghana has the highest ratio of men to women. There are 82 men for every 100 women aged 80 years and over. Thus, in Ghana, in the oldest cohort there are almost as many men as women. This is followed closely by Sudan with 74 men per 100 women, and Nigeria and Congo with 73 men per 100 women. All the other African countries have a sex ratio above 50 men per 100 women, with the lowest in South Africa with 41 men per 100 women.

2.6.2 Gender Differentials

Figure 2.31 shows that the life expectancy of the selected countries is similar overall, at a country level, and for both men and women. In all the countries, women are expected to outlive men. The country with the highest life expectancy at age 60 for men is Mauritius, with men living an additional 17 years after reaching the age of

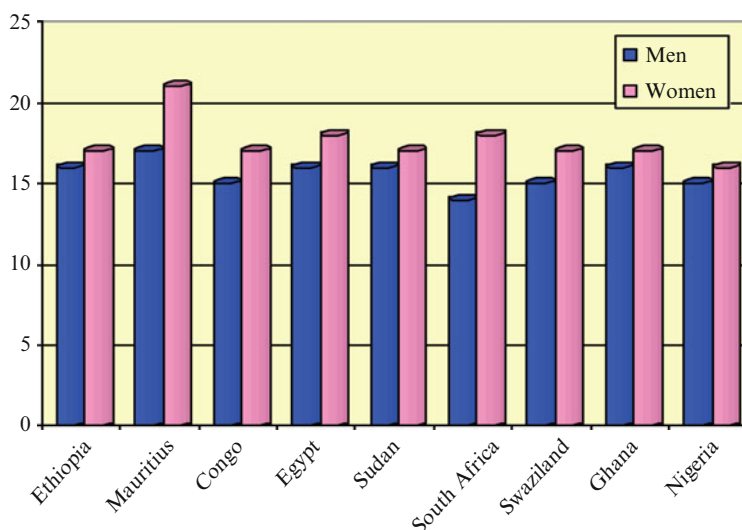


Fig. 2.31 Life expectancy at age 60 in select African countries, 2005–2010. *Source:* United Nations (2008b, c)

60. Women in Mauritius also experience the highest life expectancy at age 60, with women living an additional 21 years after reaching the age 60. South Africa has the second highest life expectancy of all selected African countries, with women expected to live an additional 18 years after reaching the age of 60.

The life expectancy for men at 60 years in these African countries ranges from 14 to 17 years, and for women ranges from 16 to 21 years. Thus, women have a longer life expectancy at age 60 than men. However, although African women may have a longer life expectancy than African men, the downside is that they may have to contend with greater ill-health in their lifetime. In addition, they are more likely to be alone as they may have outlived their male partners.

According to Fig. 2.32, in all the selected African countries, a higher percentage of older men are married than women. The greatest percentage of older, married men is found in Nigeria and Sudan with 89%, followed by Ethiopia with 87%. Older women are less likely to be married than older men, and the country with the highest percentage of married is Swaziland, with 64% of older, married women.

Figure 2.33 shows that men in select African countries are expected to have greater companionship in their old age than women due to their greater propensity to be married in their old age.

In five of the seven select countries (Fig. 2.33), there are more older women living alone than older men, with Egypt and Ghana taking the lead with 16% each. This is in stark contrast to South Africa and Swaziland. In South Africa a similar proportion of older men and women live alone, at 8%. In Swaziland, more older men than women live alone. In Swaziland 9% of older men live alone, compared with 6% of older women.

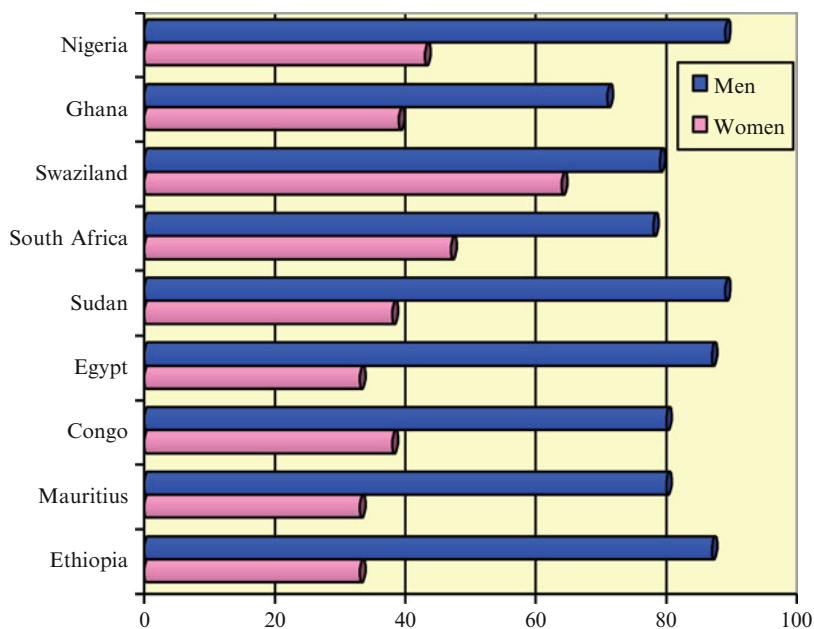


Fig. 2.32 Percentage married in select African countries, 60 years and over (“married” includes those in consensual unions). *Source:* United Nations (2008b, c)

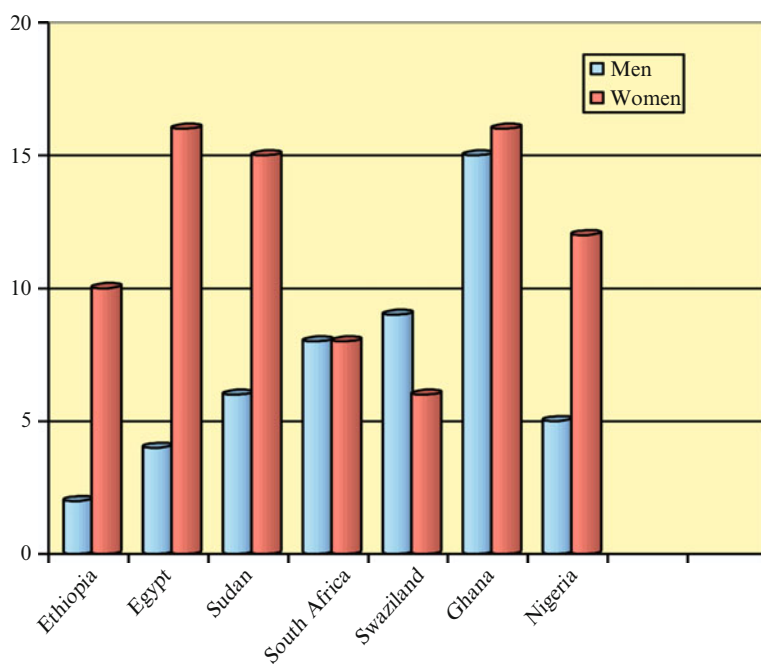


Fig. 2.33 Percentage living alone in select African countries, 60 years and over. *Data not available for Congo and Mauritius. *Source:* United Nations (2008a, b)

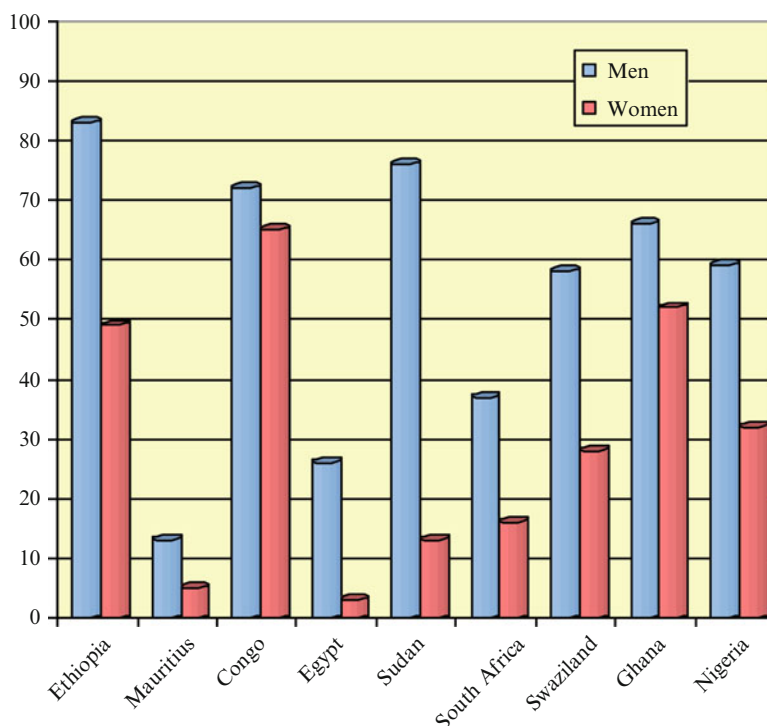


Fig. 2.34 Percentage in the labour force in select African countries, 60 years and over. *Source:* United Nations (2008b, c)

What is striking in selected African countries is the disparity between older men and women who live alone. For instance, in Egypt, older women (16%) are four times more likely than older men (4%) to live alone. In Ethiopia, older women (10%) are five times more likely than older men (2%) to live alone, and in Sudan and Nigeria more than twice as many older women live alone than men. Thus older women are in a far less advantageous position than older men in African countries as they are more likely to lack companionship in their old age. This highlights the issue of gender inequality in select African countries.

In all the select African countries men aged 60 and over are more economically active than women (Fig. 2.34). In Ethiopia, men aged 60 and over are the most economically active with 83% in the labour force. The percentage of economically active older men ranges from 13% in Mauritius to 83% in Ethiopia.

Congo has the most economically active women aged 60 and over, with 65% in the labour force, followed by Ghana with 52%, and Ethiopia with 49%. The proportion of older women in select African countries participating in the labour force ranges from 3% in Egypt to 65% in Congo. The greatest disparity in the labour force participation of men and women is seen in Sudan with 76% of older men still part of the labour force, compared with only 13% of older women.

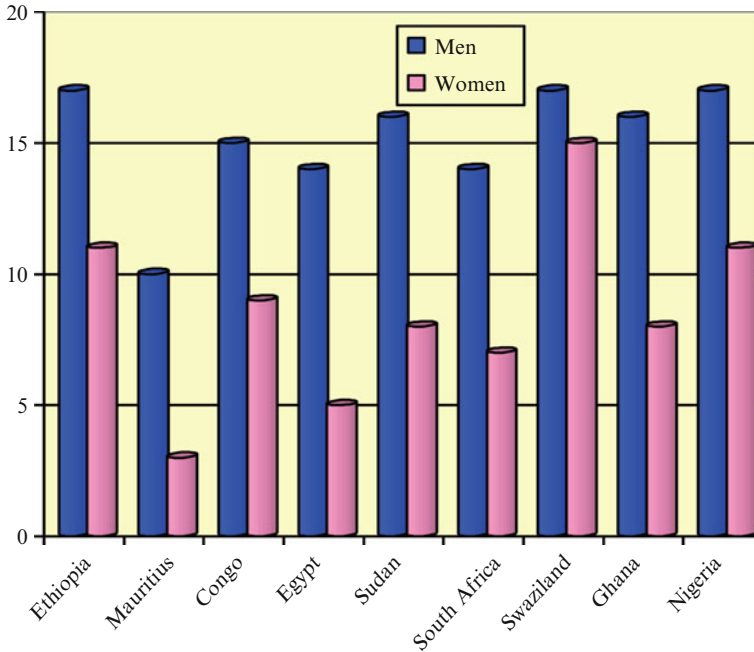


Fig. 2.35 Old age support ratio in select African countries, 2009. *Source:* United Nations [2008b](#)

Figure [2.35](#) illustrates the support ratio of older men and women, with older men having more support from the economically active population. Comparison shows that the countries have a similar old age support ratio. For each older man in Ethiopia, Swaziland, and Nigeria, there are 17 economically active persons to support them. In Swaziland, older women have almost as much support as men, with 15 economically active persons per older woman.

However, older women from the other select African countries do not receive as much support as older men. The greatest disparity is seen in Mauritius with a support ratio of 10 for older men and 3 for older women. In the select African countries, men receive far greater support than women from the economically active.

2.7 Conclusion

Over the next 4 decades Africa will experience exponential growth of its ageing population. The ageing population of Africa is growing at a much faster pace than any other continent. By the year 2050, the population aged 60 years and over will comprise 10.4% of the total African population (United Nations [2007](#)). Thus, more

effort should be focused on population ageing, since the elderly will constitute a substantial share of the total population of Africa in the near future.

The profile of the ageing population in Africa shows that the life expectancy is expected to increase steadily. This is consistent with the argument by Van Dulleman (2006), who observed that the impact of HIV and AIDS and other factors which decrease population size will not offset the growth of the elderly population. Furthermore, there will be more elderly women in Africa than men. In other words, older women will have a higher life expectancy than men. The greater life expectancy for both older men and women necessitates greater social protection for them in the form of old age pensions, health services, and housing.

In terms of geographical location, older people are evenly dispersed between rural and urban areas. This is a population trend that will continue into the future, as projections indicate that by 2017, the number of urban dwellers will equal rural dwellers (Gündel 2006). An examination of gender differentials indicate that older men are more likely than older women to be married in Africa which have implications for their health. Studies suggest that the married have better health than the unmarried (Waite 1995). Furthermore, economic data indicate that men dominate the older workforce, with more men participating in the labour force at older ages than women. In addition to this, older men have a further advantage over women as they encounter greater support from the economically active population. Thus, elderly men are more likely to have a better socio-economic status than women. The feminisation of the older population and the prevailing gender inequalities are likely to act as a barrier to the growth and success of the continent, therefore, structured efforts must be made to address this issue.

In terms of educational status a little more than half of all older Africans are literate; however, despite their lack of education in comparison with older people in other continents, they remain the most economically active ageing population in the world. The high level of economic activity among the population aged 60 and over is not surprising, given the lack of social protection schemes in many African countries.

The regional trends in ageing have shown that Northern Africa will experience the largest growth of its ageing population over the upcoming decades. Projections indicate that by 2050, Northern Africa's ageing population will be four times larger than today. Life expectancy will increase in all African regions. Thus, these regional trends indicate that adequate focus must be placed on the elderly in Northern Africa especially, as this region will constitute a sizeable portion of the older African population, due to population growth and increasing longevity, respectively. The increase in the older population calls for an improvement in the health systems of African nations. However, there is a recognition that an improvement in African health systems remains challenging, considering that the continent is home to the worst health systems in the world (Robinson 2007). Nevertheless, it is vital that national governments in Africa take the necessary steps to address deficiencies in their health system in order to promote a supportive and sustainable future for older Africans.

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