

IITA-NRCRI Policy Brief based on IFAD-IDS funded and led work on rural youth.

# Beyond survival opportunities: enhancing youth livelihoods within the rural space through informed policies in Nigeria

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Photo made by youth study  
participant on the theme:  
'imagined work'.



## Summary

Addressing rural youth livelihood development should not be misinformed or based on assumptions relating to unemployment, passiveness or restiveness of youth but on research evidence including stakeholders validation. Our research shows rural youth have diverse capacities and involvement based on available resources, parental influence and mentoring by social networks; they learn and actively choose and grow their livelihoods. Within our study area, identified rural youth livelihood are a mix of agricultural and gendered vocational/skilled works. Youths among the rural areas in Nigeria perceive agriculture as a crucial means of survival and food security and not so much as a main income generating business.

Agriculture is however part of the imagined future of many youths and many have a passion for it but also many see the dominant manual labour and related drudgery as a major bottleneck to profitability. Youths are prepared to work hard but expect a corresponding reward. Hence, the call for inclusive, dynamic policies related to agriculture as well as off farm activities that create more opportunities in the rural areas and will make agricultural and off farm activities more lucrative. This demand for engagement of policies with rural social networks. The creation of accessible education with special attention for the disadvantaged position of girls

related to their cultural assumed role of caretakers together with sustainable infrastructural facilities and basic amenities and generating strong linkages to all economic sectors. It should also involve levy reduction in relation to the movement of agricultural produce. These recommendations are not necessarily youth specific but concern the whole rural population. Aligning policies and interventions with existing opportunities within the rural space and with youth's active and entrepreneurial spirit can complement efforts on rural youth development and rural transformation in Nigeria in general and will largely contribute to reverse outmigration from rural areas to cities.

## Key Messages

- There is enough affection among rural youth for agriculture. Many rural young people have not turned their back on agriculture as a present livelihood option and imagined future. This research acknowledges that rural young people actively combine work in agriculture with other non-farm self- and/or wage employment and domestic work. While most engage in agriculture in one way or another, it is neither correct nor helpful to assume they are simply or even primarily 'farmers' or stuck in 'waithood'.



Youth representatives and researchers at the results validation workshop event in Awka, March, 2021.



- Reactions to our research results by some stakeholders assumed that youths are not doing enough to shape their livelihoods actively and they were depending on interventions or support mainly from the government. Our results however show the contrary: most youths in the study area have no experience with aids from the government or NGOs and are used to coping with the challenges of no or dilapidated infrastructure. Therefore, youth are obliged to practice and aspire a combination of very different activities for their upkeep.
- Off farm income has been identified as a requisite to facilitate the necessary investment to perform agriculture in a more mechanised and profitable way, including less drudgery.
- Access to affordable quality education in all aspired domains is highly valued by youth in relation to any activity undertaken by them and thus a necessary investment in effective development of agricultural and non-agricultural activities (UN development goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all).
  - The culturally assumed domestic roles of young women impinges on their aspirations especially

in acquiring higher levels of education and/or vocational skills in their communities.

- Social networks within selected communities have been identified to mentor and assist youths' livelihoods as much as possible and to foster positive transformation.
- Policies and targeted interventions should seek beyond creating survival opportunities towards transformative livelihood options for the youth and seek to improving rural infrastructure and basic amenities that affect both youth and non-youth. This will also contribute to reverse outmigration from rural areas to cities.

## Research methodology

Between 2018 and 2019, a consortium led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), with funding from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), undertook a research on young people's engagement with the rural economy in sub-Saharan Africa. The qualitative research was conducted in seven African countries including Nigeria. In Nigeria, the research was carried out in Osun and Anambra States. The International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) carried out the research in two sites



*Photo made by a youth study participant on the theme: 'imagined work'.*



(Oba–Oke and Idi-Amu communities) in Osun State, while the National Root Crops Research Institute (NRCRI) carried out the research in two sites (Umumbo and Igbariam communities) in Anambra State.

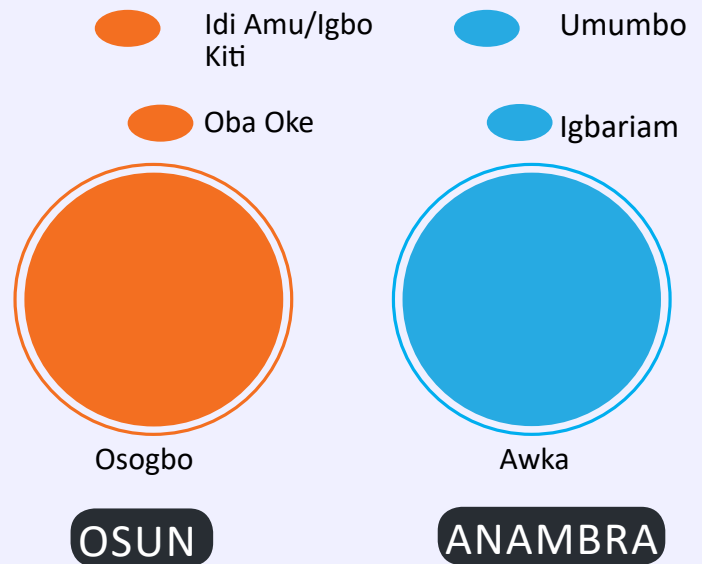
Analysis of 416 interviews using life histories, photo voices, and eight focus group discussions with young people (aged between 15 and 29) gave findings validated by a short film and a workshop with stakeholders. IITA provided support to IDS UK in making a short film in the Osun State research locations featuring highlights of the research in 2020:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aYJNlOwLsk>.

A stakeholder’s validation workshop was organized in March 2021 to bring together relevant Nigerian government state and federal ministries to respond to the research findings and the key messages presented by the rural youth representatives from the study areas. The discussions and feedback obtained during this meeting and the research results informed the development of this policy brief.

### Researchers and youth involved

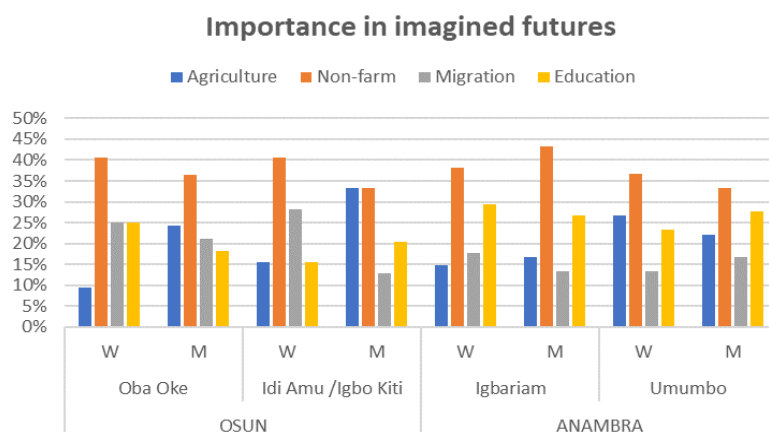
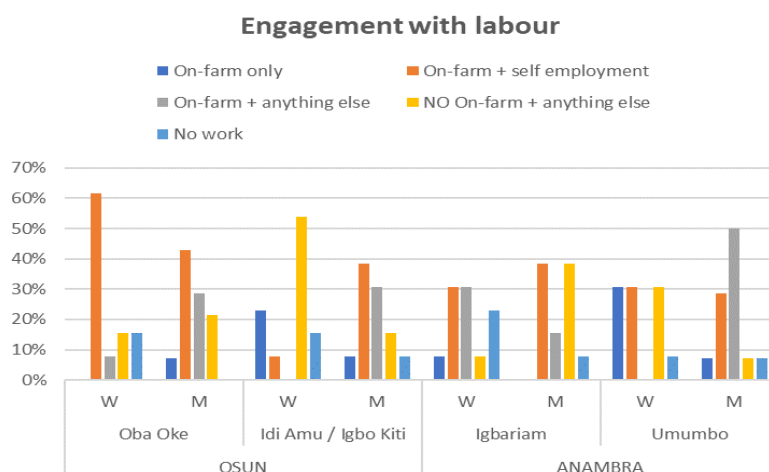
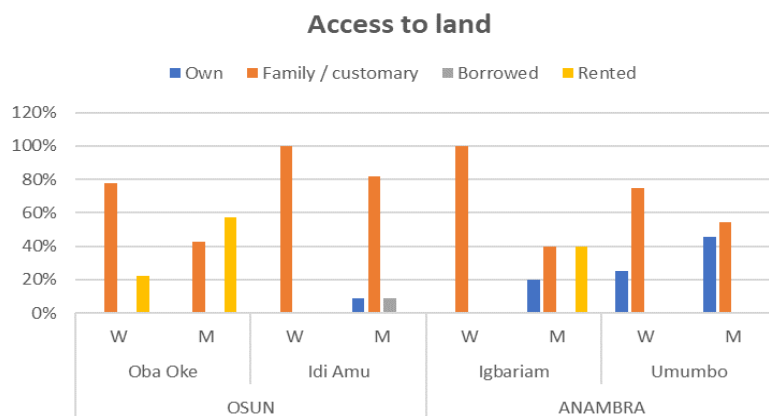
Young researchers were part of the project research team, undertook roles as enumerators, facilitators and workshop coordinators and youths from the



study areas validated the research results. As a result, the research is unique and has in itself been an active process of developing young people’s capacity to participate, validate, lead and think about appropriate policies. The research heightened awareness and provided an opportunity for rural youths to articulate their views and make inputs to an informed and evidence-based policy brief.



Youth representatives (squatting), Government officials, NRCRI-IITA Director representatives and community leaders at the stakeholder's research results' validation workshop event in Awka, March, 2021.



*Some key quantitative results of the study.*

## Identifying challenges and harnessing existing opportunities and resources

Young people's livelihoods reflect shifting patterns of engagement with the rural economy, combining unpaid caring and domestic work, with farming, non-farm wage employment and/or non-farm self-employment. Through their own hard work and with the support of their families and social networks, male and female youths set about to build their livelihoods and aspire that the gains from their livelihoods will not only meet their survival needs but extends to transformative gain that is recognised and impacts their communities. Our research results show that the majority of young people in rural areas continue to maintain engagement with

agriculture. The idea that rural young people have turned their backs on agriculture *en masse* is clearly not supported by the evidence. There is widespread involvement of male youths in farming, while females feature more in supportive value chain roles. In the selected sites, it may be quite wrong to conceive of or label these young people simply as 'farmers' (or even 'primarily farmers'). While some young people admit a deep attachment to farming, for others farming is the obvious (and perhaps only) choice for food security, earn some income, and forge a potential path to raising a family. Currently, these livelihoods are



being built under severe and persistent constraints due to infrastructural deprivation, taxation / levies of agricultural produce, limited access to productive resources and seasonal nature of economic activities; creating instability, diverse risks, limited financial reward, and lack of protection.

In spite of these challenges, access to land within the rural space (selected study sites) remains the assuring asset partly stable for rural youth engagement in agriculture, while other opportunities like trainings on how to access soft loans from the government do not reach the intended youths. Therefore, while young people will continue to be involved in agriculture because there are few other options, there is uncertainty about the scope for obtaining decent livelihoods from agriculture with limited opportunities. Rural youth livelihoods are clearly enhanced through social networks of community leaders and influential persons who provide guidance and financial and inputs support.

An approach to development driven and guided by young people's and adults' (who importantly mentor youths and often share the same needs) energy and skills to create positive change is key. Access to resources (infrastructure, inputs, training etc.) is crucial for addressing identified challenges. Beyond meeting basic needs that are mostly not youth specific, intervention must be linked to the potential to raise productivity and income in both agricultural and non-farm livelihoods. Non-farm income has

been identified by youth as essential to raise income for investment in agricultural practices that are more mechanized making them more profitable with less drudgery involved.

## Policy Recommendation

Insight from the study conducted in Osun and Anambra States Nigeria, revealed the need for government recognition of youth's activeness in chosen livelihoods, agricultural and non-agricultural, and positively engage them by leveraging on identified local social networks within targeted interventions (infrastructure, inputs, and loans) to enhance these livelihoods.

- Explore how one or more social protection interventions could be used to mitigate the negative effects of shocks and hazards on young people's efforts and the rural population in general to build their livelihoods. Effective protection during the early stages of livelihood building could be transformative for many young people.

Specific protection interventions may include:

- Bringing down multiple taxation/levies or total exemption from levies, especially related to movement of agricultural produce.
- Effective access to loans (exempt collateral).
- Training on and facilitation of affordable agriculture-related and non-agricultural insurance schemes to reduce risks associated with both livelihoods.



Still from the short film on the research made in Osun state showing a young girl study participant engaged in her tailor work (Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aYJNlOwLsk&t=253s>).

- Community based investment platforms (e.g. Saving wallets schemes).
- Stimulate childcare facilities with high social community/professional management control.
- Go back to the rural development basics – including provision or renovation of better infrastructure, market access, rural services, and education to reduce the transaction cost of marketing for enhanced livelihoods.
- Explicit attention should be given to facilitate schooling and training of girls given their serious restriction because of their assumed and “unpaid” roles of household managers and caretakers that becomes even more restrictive when reaching the age society assumes them to marry and have children. In Anambra, there is informal tutorage on business related to young men dropping out of school. This tutorage should be connected to formal education.
- Emphasis on inclusive approaches, considering partnership or collaboration with identified local social networks in addressing challenges facing young people. These challenges can be influenced by location (distance from the cities), and social factors like gender, age and ethnicity; and the local and national politics that can significantly influence who is able to access economic and other opportunities.
- Involvement in non-farm income is seen as a perquisite to be able to perform agriculture in a more (mechanised) profitable way so mechanisation with units that fit existing farming and processing activities and initiatives and improve working conditions, should be encouraged.
- The livelihoods of youth that necessarily combine many different activities together with their aspirations and activities outside of agriculture can provide an opportunity for interventions encouraging investment in agriculture by other domains and the development of value chains linking agriculture to these other domains.

## Annex

Research Results PowerPoint presentation

### Related policy briefs:

IDS Policy Briefing 177 - [Youth and Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa: Time to Reset Policy](#)

IDS Policy Briefing 178 - [Are Young People in Rural Sub-Saharan Africa Caught in Waithood?](#)

IDS Policy Briefing 179 - [Youth, Land and Rural Livelihoods in Africa](#)

IDS Policy Briefing 180 - [Imagined Futures: Gaps in Support for Rural Youth in Côte d'Ivoire](#)

IDS Policy Briefing 181 - [Avenir imaginé : insuffisances du soutien aux jeunes en milieu rural en Côte d'Ivoire](#)

### Film

Fisher, K. (director) (2020) How do young people engage with the rural economy in sub-Saharan Africa? FJ Productions: London. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aYJNIOwLsk>

## Further Reading

Adesugba, M. A., and G. Mavrotas. (2016). Delving Deeper into the Agricultural Transformation and Youth Employment Nexus: The Nigerian Case. Nigeria Strategy Support Program Working Paper 31. Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.

Adesugba M, and Mavrotas G. (2016), youth employment, agricultural transformation and rural labour dynamics in Nigeria, IFPRI discussion paper 01579: IFPRI. <https://ypard.net/sites/default/files/resources/1.pdf>

Carreras, M., Sumberg, J. and Saha, A. (2020). Work and Rural Livelihoods: The Micro Dynamics of Africa's 'Youth Employment Crisis'. *Eur J Dev Res* <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-020-00310-y>

Crossouard, B., Dunne, M., Szyp, C., Madu, T., & Teeken, B. (2021). Rural youth in southern Nigeria: fractured lives and ambitious futures. *Journal of Sociology* (Special Issue on Imagining rural futures in times of uncertainty and possibility). doi:10.1177/14407833211042422

Leavy, J. and S. Smith. (2010). *Future Farmers: Youth Aspirations, Expectations and Life Choices*. Discussion Paper 013. Brighton: Future Agricultures Consortium, University of Sussex.

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Sumberg, J., Anyidoho, A.N., Chasukwa, M., Chinsinga, B., Leavy, J.,Tadele, G., Whitfield, S. and Yaro, J. (2014). Young People, Agriculture, and Employment in Rural Africa; WIDER Working Paper, No. 2014/080, Helsinki, Finland: the United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER)

Sumberg, J. (2021) Youth and the Rural Economy in Africa (Booklet), Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: 10.19088/IDS.2021.043 <https://www.ids.ac.uk/publications/youth-and-the-rural-economy-in-africa/>