

Youth Aspiration Formation, Perception and Opportunity Space in Pastoral and Agropastoral Areas of Ethiopia: Strategies for Targeting and Engaging Youth for Livelihood Transformation



Rural youth is an important yet neglected demography that can be harnessed to transform Ethiopia's agriculture and food system. The pastoral and agro-pastoral (PAP) areas shelter a large proportion of this demographic that contributes to agriculture and food production. However, there is a lack of policies based on a clearly defined career aspiration of rural youth. In general, research and interventions on PAP youth in Ethiopia suffer from at least two major limitations: first, the premises used to inform policy framing for rural and PAP youth are mostly based on the context of urban youth aspirations that are rarely applicable to youth from PAP areas who operate within a drastically different opportunity space. Second, PAP settings represent complex systems with a dynamic interplay of people, institutions, norms, and asset portfolio. Such complexities are not often adequately entertained in framing youth policies and strategies. Hence, the evidence bases to inform the policy debate on effective strategies for promoting youth economic engagement are not founded on primary studies on rural youth aspirations and opportunity structures.

Having won an award and signed a sub-agreement with Purdue University's LASER PULSE program in 2021, the research team at Haramaya University (HU), Ethiopia commissioned a study to understand youth career aspirations and enablers and challenges for youth livelihood transformation in PAP areas and proposed key strategies and entry points to guide the development of policies and interventions for targeting and engaging youth in PAP livelihood systems in Ethiopia.

The project at HU employed qualitative data analyses to address the following specific objectives: i) Assess occupational aspirations of male and female youth in PAP areas; ii) Assess youth perception of agriculture and rural life; and iii) Identify available opportunity structures and potential sources of livelihood opportunities to foster PAP youth participation for sustainable livelihood transformation.

- Consider the varying occupational aspirations and interests of male and female youth in early program design and implementation
- Adopt a more participatory research approaches to understand vast complexities and the context in which male and female youth operate.
- Stimulate and support youth agripreneurship
- Implement a culturally appropriate & financial services
- Promote inclusive & adaptive extension approaches tailored to specific livelihood aspirations of male and female youth
- Establish Muti-Stakeholders' innovation platforms (MSIPs) to promote co-learning and joint problem-solving to tackle structural, cultural, and attitudinal barriers to youth engagement

Key Takeaways

Key Findings



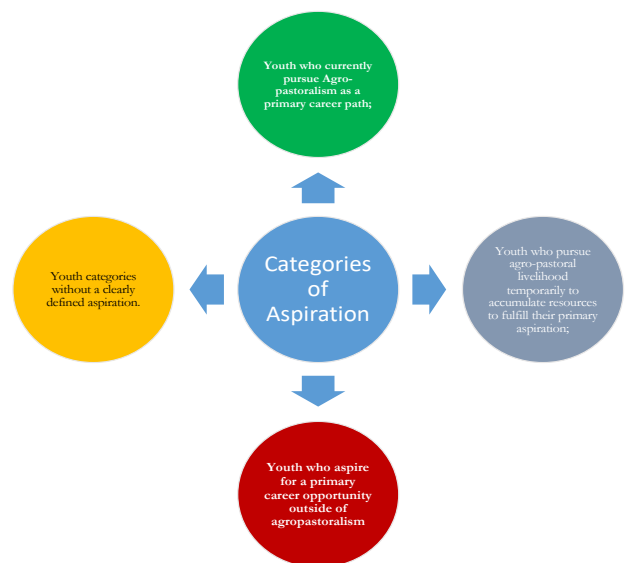
1 YOUTH ASPIRATION

- **Youth aspirations are diverse and heterogeneous.** The most common aspirations are: getting rich, being successful in work, marriage, and family, making contributions to society, educational and formal employment, and migrating to urban areas.
- **A general desire to live a fulfilled life drives all aspirations** - which is locally conceptualized as “a state of well-being with good health, income, access to good food, clean water, good housing, and electricity.”
- **Norms and value systems dictate youth aspirations.** Youth aspirations and expectations were largely formed within a socio-cultural framework as defined by society. Each stage in the person’s transition (from childhood to adolescence to adulthood) is marked by distinct stages accompanied by culturally assigned roles and responsibilities for male and female youth. Such norms govern how livelihood resources such as land are distributed between male and female youth and often to the detriment of the female youth.
- **Youth career aspiration is not an individual’s ego-centric pursuit.** It is a conscious and rational choice often involving an objective and subjective assessment of complex sets of variables to determine what is and what is not possible within their opportunity space – their geographical, socioeconomic and policy context. Access to productive resources, levels of education, personal characteristics, media narratives, and family background are key variables that determine and match career choices.
- **The study identified four major categories of youths in agriculture:** i) Youths who currently pursue Agro-pastoralism as a primary career path; ii) Youths who currently pursue Agro-pastoral livelihood temporarily to accumulate much-needed resources to fulfill their primary aspiration; iii) Youths who aspire for a primary career opportunity outside of agriculture, and iv) youths without clear aspiration.

- Each aspiration category features specific characteristics of male and female youth typologies who have differential packages of livelihood assets and face varying constraints in accessing and mobilizing essential resources to engage in their preferred career choices. Thus, it is important for interventions targeting rural youth to consider the different categories of youth aspirations.



2 YOUTH PERCEPTION OF AGRICULTURE



- **Youth aspiration to agriculture and the corresponding willingness to pursue it as a career is influenced by how the youth perceived agriculture as a livelihood option** – which, in turn, is influenced by the intersection of various other factors including perceived gains from agriculture (perceived financial gains, current level of satisfaction of their farming profession); shifting trends (generational and historical issues); youth-specific characteristics (age, sex, educational attainment, wealth level, and family background) and geography.
- **Contrary to the common narratives that portray young people as averse to agriculture, some youth see the potential of the area to transform their livelihoods.**



3 YOUTH PREFERRED AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAIN AND DESIRED SUPPORT

- Male and female youth generally have a positive interest in self-employment
- Male and female youth wanted to participate in modern mixed crop-livestock farming
- Male and female youth expressed the need for access to affordable financial services, time and labor-saving technologies such as drought-resilient crop & livestock technologies, and irrigation technologies, training and capacity-building support, research and extension support, and market linkages.



4 YOUTH OPPORTUNITY SPACE AND CONSTRAINTS

- There are several opportunity structures in PAP areas with the potential to support youth engagement in market-oriented mixed-livestock-crop farming in PAP areas.

mutual-support
 mining-sector committed-youth
 conducive-ecology mixed-farming
 organizations livestock policy-framework
 arable-land ample-labor
 underground-water
 product-market

- However, there are critical deficiencies limiting youth engagement in their preferred enterprises. Some of the constraints are limited access to affordable and culturally appropriate finance, limited market access and networks, agricultural extension services, climate change and drought, access to agricultural inputs, limited technical capacity, and lack of peace and stability.

The challenges youths face are complex. Strategies to address youth issues should consider these vast complexities and the context in which PAP youth operate, as well as the internal dynamics between and among the various youth categories.

Key Recommendations for Policy and Practice



Recommendation 1: Adopt a more participatory approach to understanding the context in which male and female youth operate.

Interventions seeking to address youth problems should consider the vast complexities and the context in which PAP youth operates, as well as the internal dynamics between and among various typologies of youth. The appropriate development pathways for youth livelihood transformation should be based on a clear understanding of these dynamics. Such a situation demands researchers to apply more participatory approaches and methods of data collection such as life history interviews and photo voice methods to capture the everyday life experiences and challenges male and female youth face.



Recommendation 4: Stimulate and support youth agripreneurship for youth economic empowerment.

Promoting youth employment for livelihood transformation requires investment in agripreneurship development and commercialized agriculture. Development partners and the government should consider supporting youth agripreneurship development in various ways, including through training for appropriate business selection, behavioral change communication training, technical training, financial support, market information and integration, and infrastructural development. Moreover, it is also important to mainstream entrepreneurship education in the formal education curricula. This requires collaboration between the Ministry of Education and other development partners.



Recommendation 2: Consider the varying occupational aspirations and interests of male and female youth in early program design and implementation.

Efforts to create agribusiness enterprises by government ministries and partners should consider the varying aspirations of male and female youth and the constraints they face in accessing productive assets. The fact that young rural men and women are affected differently by structural factors means that rural development programs and its youth-specific components must explicitly and differentially address the needs of each.



Recommendation 5: Promote a culturally appropriate and affordable financial service for youth livelihood transformation.

The availability of locally adaptable and affordable rural financial services offers youth the opportunity and leverage to invest in gainful employment. Loan schemes made available through conventional service providers and micro enterprises are often tied with interest which makes them contradictory to the religious values of the community. The local government and other NGOs providing such services should work together to provide the youth with culturally appropriate financial services.



Recommendation 3: Promote inclusive & adaptive extension approaches tailored to specific livelihood aspirations of male and female youth.

Agricultural extension services are often provided at the household level but mainly target the male household head, often excluding women and youth. This is also one of the major limitations of the evolution of Ethiopia's public extension system, which marginalizes the youth from agriculture and agriculture support programs. Thus, the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources should design a tailored extension system that targets both male and female youth and enforce its implementation by district bureaus of agriculture in PAP areas.



Recommendation 6: Recognize local social capital practices and networks for youth livelihood transformation.

PAP communities have expansive social and cultural resources including mutual insurance, labor sharing, and savings and credit groups. These can facilitate a meaningful transformation of the youth in the PAP areas. However, most of them have very limited financial and technical capacities, affecting their effectiveness. Most organized groups were also unable to forge meaningful connections with state and non-state actors to mobilize essential resources. To this end, greater effort must be made by government and development partners (such as USAID) to recognize their role and support rural youth livelihood transformation.



Recommendation 7: Establish Multi-Stakeholders' Innovation Platforms (MSIPs) to promote co-learning and joint problem-solving to tackle structural and attitudinal barriers.

Local government, customary institutions, and NGOs operating in the study area should work together to identify and address all forms of discrimination and its impact on the aspirations, employability, and general

welfare of male and female youth. This can be better facilitated by establishing Multi-stakeholder Innovation Platforms (MSIPs), constituting local elders, customary leaders, youth leaders, women's leaders, development agents, NGO representatives, and government officials, to promote co-learning and joint problem-solving to tackle structural and attitudinal barriers to youth engagement in livelihood activities in PAP areas. In this regard, the local government and NGOs should take the lead in creating the space for this type of partnership.

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