

LOOKING AHEAD IN TIMES OF CRISIS

THE ASPIRATIONS AND RESILIENCE OF YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN IN GHANA



Prepared by : Thomas Yeboah, Thomas Appai, Jemima Diakpeng
Edited by : Joel Otieno, Jim Kaketch, Racheal Makokha, Daniel Doh

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ACRONYMS

COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EA	Electoral Area
ECH	Ethics Committee for Humanities
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GSS	Ghana Statistical Service
IDI	In-Depth Interview
ILO	International Labor Organization
MMDAs	Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies
NEET	Young person's not engaged in Education, Employment or Training
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NYA	National Youth Authority
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PHC	Population and Housing Census
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PWDs	Persons With Disabilities
TV	Television
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
YEA	Youth Employment Agency

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Narratives about young women and men in Africa and their aspirations are in constant flux. Initially perceived as individuals who dislike hard work and engage in risky behaviours, young women and men typically recognise themselves as creative, productive, and resilient actors who make the most out of the limited options and possibilities in their social and economic environment. However, a new and emerging global and local crisis, such as COVID-19, appeared to have shaped young women and men's lives and aspirations in diverse ways. There is also growing recognition that young men and women in Africa have a positive outlook toward their future and actively seek opportunities to improve their lives even in times of crisis.

The overarching aim of the research is to explore young women and men's aspirations and resilience in Africa during COVID-19 in order to understand the implications of the crisis for the lives and livelihoods of young women and men now and in the future. Specifically, the study examined the young men and women's understanding of youthhood, their aspirations and the barriers they face in pursuing their aspirations, the impact of COVID-19 on the lives and aspirations of the youth, opportunities and challenges young men and women faced during COVID-19 and the resilience and adaptability strategies employed by young men and women in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research employed the concurrent mixed method design involving the simultaneous collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. Using a survey questionnaire, quantitative data were gathered from a nationally representative sample of 1639 young men and women. The qualitative component of the research involved 18 focus group discussions with young men and women, including PWDs, 30 semi-structured interviews, and 10 key informant interviews, which were selected through a purposive sampling approach. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and the thematic analysis approach.

Key Findings

A key finding of the research is that many young men (60.3%) and women (60.1%) in Ghana aspire to establish their own businesses rather than becoming employees in the public or private

sector. Nevertheless, the qualitative findings show that some young men and women want to secure professional salaried employment (e.g., lawyer, nurse, medical doctor) in the future. Many young men and women in urban and rural areas of Ghana regard success as having a good job (Male=57.5%, Female=60.7%) and being financially prosperous (Male= 62.7%, Female=61.0%). The qualitative findings further highlight the enjoyment of peace, absence of conflict or war, good marriage, righteous life, socializing and being comfortable and popular in society as key indicators of success. Results from the survey and findings from the qualitative study confirm that financial constraint is the major hurdle young men and women face in realizing their economic aspirations around establishing their own businesses. The top three indicators of a dignified and fulfilling job, according to the youth surveyed, are appropriate pay (Male=57.1%, Female=56.3%), job security (Male=51.1%, Female=48.7%) and respect (Male=43.4%, Female=40.0%). However, further inquiry through the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions reveal that jobs that offer protection and opportunities for one to use his skills and passion, representation, and equal treatment of all workers no matter the gender or class, as well as having a voice in decision-making at the workplace are all critical to defining dignified and fulfilling work.

Migration to other countries outside of Africa is a feature of the aspirations of young men (50.6%) and women (43.0%) in both rural (42.7%) and urban areas (49.2%). The youth envisage moving out of Ghana to Europe and other advanced economies owing to the dire economic challenges and hardships that seem to have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. The youth studied in Ghana have high aspirations to get married (Male=82.5%, Female=85.4%), and, in most cases, a greater share of young men (70.7%) and women (76.6%) would like to get married to whomever they love. While many of the youth aspire to migrate outside of Africa and marry, they would still want to be closer to their families.

Education and training are also featured in the aspirations of the young men and women studied. 40.6% of the youth studied are interested in attaining formal education and training. Slightly more young women (42.5%) than young men (38.5%) are

more likely to seek formal education in the future. Contrary to the claim that today's youth in Ghana are unpatriotic and have little interest in pursuing civic duties, findings from this research highlight that more than half of Ghanaian youth (56.4%) would like to be responsible citizens and fulfil civic obligations. This is true for both young men and young women, with more than half of each young man (56.5%) and young woman (56.3%) affirming that they want to be responsible citizens and fulfil civic obligations in the future.

In terms of the impact of COVID-19 on the aspirations of the youth, findings show that most young men (61.2%) and young women (61%) had their economic aspirations (employment/business) affected. Similarly, many young men (45%) and women (46.2%) also mentioned that covid-19 affected their education and training aspirations. The specific reported impact of COVID-19 on businesses/employment includes losing income significantly. The qualitative findings show that young men and women, especially in the urban areas, had their businesses closed and lost their business capital and savings. For those in school, the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated closure of schools and lockdown presented learning difficulties and increased the length of time they were supposed to have graduated from school. COVID-19 also led to limited opportunities for socialization and expression of young people's identity through hairstyles and costumes, as well as disruption to romantic relationships owing to economic hardships, making providing financial support for relations challenging. The extra burden here is likely dire for young men with societal expectations to provide for their relations.

However, the qualitative findings also show that young men and women recognized and capitalized on diverse opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. They moved swiftly to establish new businesses (sale of COVID-19 essential PPEs) using digital infrastructure (social media, online marketing) and other digital platforms. Other young men and women developed new skills in different fields, gained workplace promotions and discovered their talents and skills. The recognition and exploitation of these opportunities allowed the young men and women to become productive and earn income to sustain themselves and their families.

In terms of resilience, it is evident from the

quantitative results that with an average score of about 4, most respondents tend to agree or strongly agree to be resilient in terms of perseverance and commitment, positive self-image and optimism, relationship regulation, humor and positive thinking, emotional regulation, spirituality/faith and personal confidence and responsibility.

Based on factor analysis, the composite index for each domain is also considerably high, above 0.7 (out of 1). The findings from the qualitative work highlight a positive mindset, being focused, hard work, persistence, self-encouragement, hope of new possibilities and total dependence on God as the main resilience strategies of young men and women in the face of the pandemic.

On the issue of adaptability, the results show that the mean score for each adaptability domain is above 4 (out of 5), indicating most youth either agree or strongly agree to have a high perceived ability to adjust their thoughts and behaviors to effectively respond to uncertainty, new information, or changing circumstances. The qualitative findings highlight mobility to other places and the use of digital technology for online education/learning and business establishment as key adaptation mechanisms.

Implications for policy and practice

These findings have important implications for policies promoting youth employment and supporting young men and women to advance their lives in the most advantageous ways.

- i. The government should invest in and improve digital infrastructure to enable young men and women to recognize and capitalize on the opportunities in the digital economy.
- ii. The government, donors, and non-state actors focusing on youth employment should enhance young people's skills in the digital economy to capitalize on social media and other platforms to enhance business operations.
- iii. The government should provide an environment that enables young people to pursue entrepreneurial drive. This would require addressing the structural barriers through enhancing youth access to financial capital, productivity and viability of micro-enterprises, market linkages,

- macro-economic instability (inflation) and power crisis. Efforts must also be geared toward equipping young men and women with knowledge and skills in business plan preparation and processes of registering a business, financial literacy, and management skills to enable young people to sustain their businesses.
- iv. Government and development partners should improve access to and quality of education both now and in the future and align school curricula to the changing demands and expectations of the labour market, which is key in the post-COVID-19 era. This will require investment in technology and teaching of new and different sets of competency-based skills that are in demand in the formal labour market.
 - v. The government should focus development efforts on broad-based growth and employment creation policies through an industrial policy to increase labour-intensive and productive manufacturing and services in a post-covid-19 reconstruction of Ghana's economies to deliver jobs that meet the ambitions, aspirations and expectations of young men and women for decades to come.
 - vi. The government should develop and improve social protection systems (formal and informal social insurance mechanisms) to protect young men and women's assets, businesses and livelihoods from the disruptive effects of unforeseen events such as those posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - vii. Donors and development partners should increase the voice and participation of youth in policymaking processes by factoring their aspirations, expectations, ambitions, views, challenges, energies, creativity, skillsets, and productivity in youth-specific employment and programmes. This will require widespread consultation with youth civil society and the diverse group of young men and women in both rural and urban areas, capacity building for youth society in terms of advocacy skills to formulate their messages clearly, and how to use effective communication tools to engage with policy actors.
 - viii. Government should facilitate safe, orderly, and regular migration pathways for the youth through awareness creation of the dangers of irregular migration and the enforcement of existing policies and regulations to promote safe and regular responsible migration for young people.

INTRODUCTION

Dominant narratives in the media and academic circles consider young people in Africa as being caught up in waithood (a prolonged period between childhood and adulthood), as lazy individuals who dislike hard work and engage in risky behaviors including gambling, drug abuse, crime, and violent protests (Abebe, 2020; Abbink & Kessel, 2005; Atnafu et al., 2014; Branch and Mampillay, 2015; Coulter et al., 2008, Honwana 2014; 2012, Iwilade, 2020 ; UNDP, 2010). Others are labelled as only interested in making dangerous and perilous journeys or what is popularly referred to as ‘boat migration’ across the Mediterranean to Europe in search of economic opportunities (Eziakonwa, 2019; Armitano, 2017). Sadly, while these narratives are supported by little empirical evidence, they feed into programmatic actions and policies designed to address the challenges faced by young people on the continent.

A growing body of research from various contexts has challenged some of these widely held assumptions, recognizing young African women and men as hardworking, productive, creative and resilient (Yeboah et al., 2020; Ligtvoet, 2018). Across the continent, many young men and women are working hard by making the most out of the limited opportunities engage in survival strategies and mechanisms, including finding employment in the unattractive and less modernized agricultural sector as well as in the fringes of the formal and informal economy, **where livelihoods are characterized by insecurity and limited financial reward (Chigunta, 2017; Dolan and Rajak, 2016; Yeboah, 2017; Yeboah et al., 2017; Yeboah et al., 2020; Geza et al., 2022). Bad governance, corruption, economic crisis and lack of effective policy strategies to drive structural transformation have meant that growing sections of African youth continue to suffer from unemployment, under-employment, temporality, precarity, inequalities in accessing socio-economic resources, poor health outcomes, fewer opportunities to transition from school to work, and skills mismatch with labour market demands (Sumberg et al., 2021; Lorenceau et al., 2021; Yeboah, 2021; Evans and Kelikume, 2019). Others face limited prospects and opportunities to advance their career path, aspirations, and life ambitions in the most advantageous ways. There remains a gap between the aspirations of young people and the realities of African labour markets.**

Fundamentally, the career aspirations of many African youth fit uneasily with the projected labour demands in many African economies, making it almost impossible for many to transition from school to work successfully. For example, according to a 2017 report by the Institute for Statistical, Social and Economic Research quoted by Mubarik (2017), only 10% of educated youth in Ghana find employment that meets their aspirations after graduation in the first year, and on average, it can take up to a decade for large numbers of young people to find employment after school. There are mounting concerns that unemployment among the youthful population will continue to escalate in the coming decades if nothing is done considering the continent’s youth demographic, un- and underemployment rates, and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Yeboah and Flynn, 2021; Oosterom and Yeboah, 2022; ILO, 2022).

While it may be premature to completely account for the full impacts of COVID-19 on young people at this stage, growing research has shown that, in addition to its health impacts, the COVID-19 pandemic has had severe socio-economic ramifications, including increasing unemployment, disruption to businesses, loss of income and assets, and depletion of wealth (Oyekale, 2022; Longdon, 2022; Costa et al., 2022). According to the 2022 International Labour Organisation global employment trends for youth, the COVID-19 crisis aggravated young people’s diverse labour market difficulties. Young people aged 15 and 24 years were deemed to have encountered a higher percentage loss in employment compared to older youth (aged 25 years and above). The report further notes that many young men and women working in the informal economy lost substantial income because of lockdowns and business closures. In contrast, others dropped out of the labour market or could not successfully enter the labour market owing to difficulties associated with searching for and securing jobs. This is attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and its inspired legislations of lockdowns, restrictions on movement and social distancing measures imposed by governments across the continent and elsewhere. Besides, the sharp decreases in family income and a move to online learning platforms by educational institutions rendered training and education highly challenging to many young men and

women. As a result, the number of young people who are not considered to be in employment, education, or training (NEET) witnessed a rise in 2020. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, over one-fifth of young people worldwide were classed as NEET, and two out of every three were young women.

As the pandemic spread, the prevalence of NEET status, labour market inactivity, and informal work amongst young people increased even more than youth unemployment, which was also rising in Africa and the world at large (ILO, 2022). COVID-19 and travel restrictions also meant that young men and women who planned to utilise migration as a process of livelihood building and transitions had to temporarily put this dream on hold (Anas et al., 2023). Sadly, many African economies have less well-structured and functioning social protection mechanisms that young people can access to protect their lives and livelihoods and better cope with the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis. While some countries initiated ad hoc social protection measures (eg. the Covid-19 alleviation fund in the case of Ghana), many young men and women struggled to access support schemes because of their limited social and political connections.

Despite the numerous challenges, including those presented by COVID-19, existing literature suggests that young men and women in Africa maintain a positive outlook toward their future and actively seek opportunities to improve their lives (Lorceau et al., 2021; Yeboah et al., 2021). Few researchers have drawn attention to how young men and women recognized and exploited various opportunities during COVID-19. For example, Tetteh et al. (2023) found that young women entrepreneurs in the beauty industry of Ghana managed to identify opportunities by capitalizing on social media, and their creativity allowed them to remain operational and sustain their businesses during COVID-19. Many young men and women in diverse African contexts have been reported to remain resolute and often rely on their agency and social networks that are spread across spatial boundaries to adapt and respond to social and economic uncertainties in a rapidly changing global and local environment (Yeboah, 2017; Chowa et al., 2022). Therefore, a crisis such as COVID-19 provides a vital window to learn about the creative responses, resilience, and adaptability strategies of young men and women, as well as explore alter-

native policy solutions to enable them to pursue their aspirations.

Rationale for Studying Youth Aspirations and Resilience in Ghana

Ghana presents an interesting case to examine young people's aspirations, resilience, and adaptability in the context of crises such as those posed by COVID-19. Over the years, Ghana has enjoyed sustained economic growth and improved human development (Dzigbede and Pathak, 2020). However, the recent economic turmoil experienced in the country, which is a direct result of the global economic difficulties posed by COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions on movement, has led to several socio-economic hardships for the general population, including the youth. With the current youth population of nearly 12 million youth, there is the potential for the country to reap a demographic dividend, especially in the context where policies and programmes are implemented to harness the resources of the youth (Kwanye et al., 2021; Amporfufu et al., 2014; Chikozho et al., 2020; Amporfufu et al., 2014).

Despite the implementation of several youth-specific employment programmes by the government and private sector, recent evidence from the Ghana Population and Housing Census revealed that an estimated 19.7% of Ghanaian youth aged 15- 35 years are unemployed. In addition, more than half of youths who get employed are subjected to conditions of under-employment and less dignified jobs (GSS, 2021; Schotte et al., 2023; Danquah et al., 2020). Several young men and women are faced with difficulties in not being able to further their education, and other socio-economic challenges affect their transition to respectable adulthood (Yeboah, 2021; Jumpa et al., 2020). An aspiration gap is caused by a lack of alignment between policies and programmes and the futures that young people imagine for themselves (Yeboah et al., 2017). Even more crucially, aspirations and ambitions are dynamic and change over time in response to changes in context. Ghanaian youth have also been identified as being able to navigate challenging times by adopting different adaptation and coping strategies. Many draw on their social networks as a way to navigate the social and economic difficulties they face (Yeboah, 2017). Therefore, examining the aspirations, ambi-

tions, barriers, and young men and women's perspectives on dignified and fulfilling employment and the implications of the COVID-19 crisis on their lives is important. This provides a window to offer valuable policy suggestions to promote youth employment in Ghana in a post-COVID-19 era.

This report synthesizes research findings conducted in Ghana as part of a multi-country research programme on young women and men's aspirations and resilience: Prospects for Livelihoods, Employment and Accountability before, during and beyond COVID-19. PASGR is implementing the research with funding support from the Mastercard Foundation. The research aims to explore young women and men's aspirations and resilience in Africa during COVID-19 to understand the implications of the crisis for the lives and livelihoods of young women and men now and in the future. The findings provide important insights into the aspirations of young men and women and how these are shaped by contextual factors (including gender norms), the challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19, and the implications of these for policies and programmes aimed at promoting youth employment and aspirations in Ghana.

Research questions

The research report focuses on the following specific research questions.

1. What are young men's and women's understanding of youthhood?
2. What are young women's and men's aspirations about their future?
3. What are the barriers to young men's and women's aspirations about their futures?
4. What are the perspectives of young men and women on dignified and fulfilling employment?
5. How has the COVID-19 pandemic shaped (or not) young women's and men's aspirations about their future?
6. What challenges/opportunities have youthhood presented during the COVID-19 pandemic?
7. What adaptability and resilience strategies do young men and women employ to pursue their aspirations, especially amid militating policy, pandemic, and other challenging environments?

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research adopted the concurrent mixed method research design, involving the simultaneous collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The mixed methods approach is premised on the assumption that combining both quantitative and qualitative methods provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach. The use of mixed method design in this research allowed for triangulation, convergence, complementarity, and data validity (Creswell & Clark, 2011). The quantitative component of the research gathered data from nationally representative young men and women (aged 15-35 years) in both rural and urban Ghana, focusing on their aspirations (economic, sociocultural, civic and migration) and barriers to realising aspirations) indicators for measuring dignified and fulfilling employment, the impact of COVID-19 on youth, and the resilience and adaptability strategies employed by young men and women in the face of the COVID-19 crisis in Ghana. The qualitative component provided an opportunity to explore and validate the quantitative results and to examine issues, including how local contextual factors shape young men's and women's aspirations, challenges, and opportunities, as well as adaptation and resilience strategies in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Two important activities shaped the research design process. First, a political economy analysis was conducted through a desk review to understand the context of national policy, regulations, and key actors working on youth empowerment and development. The analysis provided an avenue to understand the key social, economic, cultural, policy and political factors that shape youth aspirations and employment opportunities, and it offered a scope and direction for the research. Moreover, the political economy analysis allowed the research to identify a wide range of government and social actors interested in and can support the uptake of the research findings.

Second, Utafiti Sera Stakeholder Convening was organized, bringing together a wide range of stakeholders. The convening provided a platform and space for knowledge exchange and a shared understanding of the Youth Aspirations and Re-

silience Research project. It helped identify the existing institutional and programmatic gaps and provoked discussions, enabling the identification of gaps in our research design and contextualization of the research to suit the local context better. The participants provided substantial input to the research protocol, survey instruments, and qualitative tools used to gather the data for this study.

Population, Sample Technique and Sample Size

The study population consisted of all young men and women, who were defined as persons between the ages of 15 and 35 years in Ghana, the official definition of youth (Ghana National Youth Policy, 2022). According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2021), the current youth population is estimated at 11,782,614. Table 1 provides a regional distribution of the youth population by sex.

Table 1: Regional Distribution of Ghanaian Youth (Age Group 15-35) by gender

Region	Male	Female	Total
Western	417,553	402,644	820197
Central	519,798	552,748	1,072,546
Greater Accra	1,076,901	1,144,820	2,221,721
Volta	283,233	305,468	588,701
Eastern	516,481	543,706	1,060,187
Ashanti	1,043,220	1,084,244	2,127,464
Western North	171,276	169,766	341,042
Ahafo	104,760	106,257	211,017
Bono	233,398	237,488	470,886
Bono East	228,801	230,765	459,566
Oti	133,952	130,868	264820
Northern	405,598	437,987	843,585
Savannah	123,367	124,381	24,7748
North East	114,950	123,476	238,426
Upper East	235,659	240,656	476,315
Upper West	168,879	169,514	338,393
TOTAL	5777826	6,004,788	11,782,614

Source: Authors' calculation of PHC Data, GSS (2021)

Based on this population, we estimate the sample size as follows

We used the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where: N = population,

n = sample size and

e = sampling error. In this study, we set the margin of error to 0.025.

Using e=0.025

$$n = \frac{11,782,614}{1 + 11782614(0.000625)}$$

$$n = \frac{11,782,614}{7,364.13375}$$

n=1,600

However, we added 10% of 1600 to it to cater for potential non-response.

10% of 1600=160, Therefore, n=1600+160=1,760

To obtain a fair representation of both rural and urban youth in different locations of Ghana, a multi-stage sampling procedure was used to distribute the sample size across geographical regions. The first stage involved categorizing all the administrative regions of Ghana into three zones:

- (a) Northern,
- (b) Middle belt and
- (c) Southern zones.

Six administrative regions (two each from the zones) were chosen from regions with probability proportional to the region's youth population. The selected regions per zone are as follows: Northern Zone (Upper West and Northern Regions), (Middle Zone (Bono East and Ashanti Region) and Southern Zone (Greater Accra and Western Region). Further, we estimate the sample size for each region using a proportional distribution based on the total sample youth population of each region, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample Distribution for each region by sex

Region	Male		Female		Total	
	Population	Sample	Population	Sample	Population	Sample
Western	417,553	108	402,644	104	820,197	212
Gt. Accra	1,076,901	278	1,144,820	296	2,221,721	574
Ashanti	1,043,220	269	1,084,244	280	2,127,464	549
Bono East	228,801	59	230,765	60	459,566	119
Northern	405,598	105	437,987	113	843,585	218
Upper West	168,879	44	169,514	44	338,393	88
TOTAL	3,340,952	863	3,469,974	897	6,810,926	1,760

Source: Calculated from PHC Data, GSS (2021, NB: Expected sample = 1760

We were particularly interested in capturing the perspective of both rural and urban young men and women. Therefore, in each region, we randomly selected two districts that had an urban and rural status, respectively. According to GSS (2014), a rural area in Ghana is defined as an area with a population of less than 5000, whereas an urban area has a population of more than 5000. The districts and communities selected for this research, as displayed in Appendix 1, reflect the definition of both rural and urban areas in Ghana.

From each of the Metropolitan/Municipal/District Assemblies, two (2) urban and two (2) rural communities were then selected. At the district level, 12 MMDAs and 24 study communities were selected for the study. Since each of these study communities has already been divided into Electoral Areas (EAs), two (2) EAs were selected from each community. In total, 48 EAs are selected.

We randomly selected two districts from each of the six selected study regions. The selected zones, regions, districts and communities of study for each of the six regions is displayed in Annex 1. The urban and rural communities selected for the survey reflect the conventional definition of urban and rural areas as defined by the Ghana Statistical Service. To select respondents from the EAs, listing all youth was done at the household level to determine the number of young men and women (aged 15-35) in the EA. This population was used to determine the sampling interval (calculated by dividing the total youth population in the EA by the sample size calculated for the EA). The team randomly decided on the start point, and with the sampling interval, every fifth person on the list was elected through a systematic sampling approach. This probability sampling ensured all young men

and women had an equal chance of being selected as respondents. To determine the sample required from each EA, the sample for the regions was divided proportionally for their respective districts. Second, the results were used for proportional sampling for each community. Third, the result from the second stage was divided proportionally to obtain the samples which were drawn from each of the EAs. The listing allowed us to proportionately sample young men and women in the EA as respondents.

For the qualitative component, the maximum variation purposive sampling strategy was used to sample a range of participants who were deemed as information-rich-case. A total of 184 participants were engaged during the qualitative component. The participants sampled for the qualitative aspect of the research included young men and women, PWDs (youth) in both rural and urban areas, and key policy actors playing different roles in promoting youth employment, participation, and development in Ghana. The key informants comprised officials from the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, National Youth Authority, and Youth Employment Agency offices distributed across the study districts, as well as officials of NGOs/CSOs, development partners, and private sector organisations with interest on youth and employment issues. The selection of key informants enabled us to explore the policy and regulatory environment and develop an understanding of the perspective of key actors regarding young men and women's aspirations, resilience, and adaptability, as well as the provisions to promote youth employment in Ghana.

Data Collection Methods

Three main data collection methods were used in gathering data for this study. They include a well-structured survey questionnaire, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. We pre-tested the survey questionnaire and qualitative interview guides to determine their appropriateness, format, and wording, appropriateness of verbal translation of questions to illiterate respondents, the readiness of trained data collectors for the task, and to allow for tool revision. The survey questionnaire was administered to 1760 young men and women distributed across the six selected regions through a face-to-face interview approach between October and November 2022. However, following data cleaning, 1639 questionnaires were deemed as valid. The questionnaire covered the socio-demographic characteristics of the youth, young men and women's aspirations (economic, socio-cultural, migration, and civic aspirations); barriers to realizing aspirations, the impact of COVID-19 on youth aspirations, resilience, and adaptability. The survey questionnaire was entered into the SurveyCTO toolbox deployed on tablets to facilitate quality and efficient data collection.

In addition to the survey, we conducted focus group discussions with young men and women in the selected regions. In each region, we conducted 3 separate focus group discussions (young men only, young women only, and PWDs only) that were comprised of 6–12 participants. Thus, we conducted a total of 18 FGDs across the six regions in Ghana. We also conducted 30 semi-structured interviews with 15 young men and 15 women across the selected project sites. The interviews and focus group discussions provided room to explore in more detail how local contextual factors, norms and values interact to shape young men's and women's aspirations, the impact of COVID-19 on youth aspirations, and the adaptability and resilience strategies of young men and women. The focus group discussions and interviews were also used to elicit detailed information on young men and women's understanding of youthhood, what it means to be a proper young man or woman, opportunities and challenges youthhood presented during COVID-19, the capacities of young men and women to pursue their aspirations, as well as the barriers, risks and vulnerabilities encountered in the pursuits of aspirations, and the resilience and

adaptation strategies that young men and women employ to pursue their ambitions, desires and life choices in the face militating policy, pandemic, and other challenging environments.

Finally, we also conducted 10 key informant interviews with policymakers, development professionals and key actors whose work revolves around youth participation, employment, gender, and development. These interviews were used to explore provisions, regulations, and policies and how existing policies and regulations align with (or not) the aspirations and ideas of young women and men about the future. The key informant interviews also collected information on the roles that various policy actors, including state and non-state actors, play to support the fulfilment of young men's and women's aspirations. Given that these key informants work daily with young men and women, we also explored their perspective on what it means to be a proper young man or woman, youth aspirations, everyday uncertainties young men and women face in their lives, the opportunities and challenges presented by COVID-19 and the resilience and adaptability of young men and women in Ghana. With the permission of all participants, the interviews were audio-recorded. Field notes were also taken during the interviews and focus group discussions.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data were extracted from the SurveyCTO server as an Excel file. This was then transformed into SPSS software (version 26) and Stata software for analysis. This enabled us to efficiently clean, manage, code, and generate results for analysis. Following data cleaning, 1639 out of the 1760 responses were deemed valid, which has been used for the data analysis. Both descriptive (percentages, frequencies, mean difference and cross-tabulations) and inferential statistics (regression) have been used to analyze the data. We perform an independent t-test on various variables of interest to show the differences in viewpoint of rural/urban youth, young men, and young women. Tables and graphs were used to present quantitative data using Microsoft Excel.

The thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was employed to analyse the qualitative data gathered through interviews and focus group discussions. This approach is mainly inductive, being geared to uncover patterns, categories

and themes of analysis as they emerge from the data collected rather than deciding on these prior to data collection and analysis. The first step involved verbatim transcription of all the interview files and field notes. Following the transcription, we read through the text and compared it several times with the audio recordings to ensure the accuracy of the text. This process also ensured familiarization of the data. A coding frame containing codes and sub-codes was developed inductively from the text. The codes were developed mainly from the participants' responses as they emerged from the interview transcripts. This approach enabled us to cover various expressions, viewpoints, and opinions of young men and women as they emerged from the text. The transcribed text and codes were then uploaded to the NVivo software version 20, which enabled us to code the text. The coding process involved assigning words to phrases, quotations, and chunks of the textual data, which helped to sort, reduce, and distill the content of the interviews.

The coding process was iterative in that it involved reading and re-reading the interview transcripts, revising, reorganising codes and relating the data to questions that were asked during fieldwork. The use of NVivo version 20 software enabled the research team to sort, group and link clusters of codes from the focus group discussions and interviews to form themes relating to key issues of interest. The NVivo version 20 software offered efficient management and retrieval of information. Themes were grouped in line with the research questions to aid further analysis and report writing. The write-up for the qualitative data started with a descriptive summary or report of the themes generated. This involved reading through all the quotes and texts under each theme to identify three main issues: 1) all consensus or pattern in all quotes under a particular theme, 2) differences in viewpoint across the group based on attributes of the participants and 3) identification of one or two quotes under a theme that offer a unique response across the group.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Ethics Committee for Humanities, University of Ghana, Legon (ECH 276/21-22). Fundamental ethical principles, including informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, were applied during the research. Permission was obtained from all participants, including the young men and women, as well as key informants, before collecting data. They were informed about the purpose of the research and how the data would be managed. Participants were given assurances that their participation in the research was voluntary and were free to opt-out at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Also, before the start of the data collection, young men and women were assured that the information they communicated would be kept confidential and that their names would not be associated with any part of the data. We also obtained the consent of all participants to audio-record the interviews and take photographs.

Additional safeguarding measures were put in place to ensure the safety of participants below 18 years. For such participants, their own consent addition to the informed consent of their parents or guardian was sought before collection. The survey and interviews with participants below 18 years was conducted in an open space where a parent or authorized guardian.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section presents the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the field. The analysis is structured to cover the socio-demographic characteristics of the youth, young men and women's understanding of youthhood, their aspirations, barriers to realizing aspirations, youth perspective on dignified and fulfilling employment, the impact of COVID-19 on youth aspirations, and the resilience and adaptability strategies employed by young men and women in the face of militating environment including COVID-19 crisis.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Youth

The socio-demographic characteristics of the young men and women covered in this survey included gender, age, marital status, religious affiliation, area of residence, educational attainment and number of children born to the youth. Table 3 provides the gender and age distribution of the young men and women who participated in the study. Out of 1639 youth responding to the survey, there were more young women (52.4%) than young men (47.6%). This reflects the national trend where young women slightly outnumber young men, as indicated by the population and housing census.

Table 3: Sex and Age of Respondents

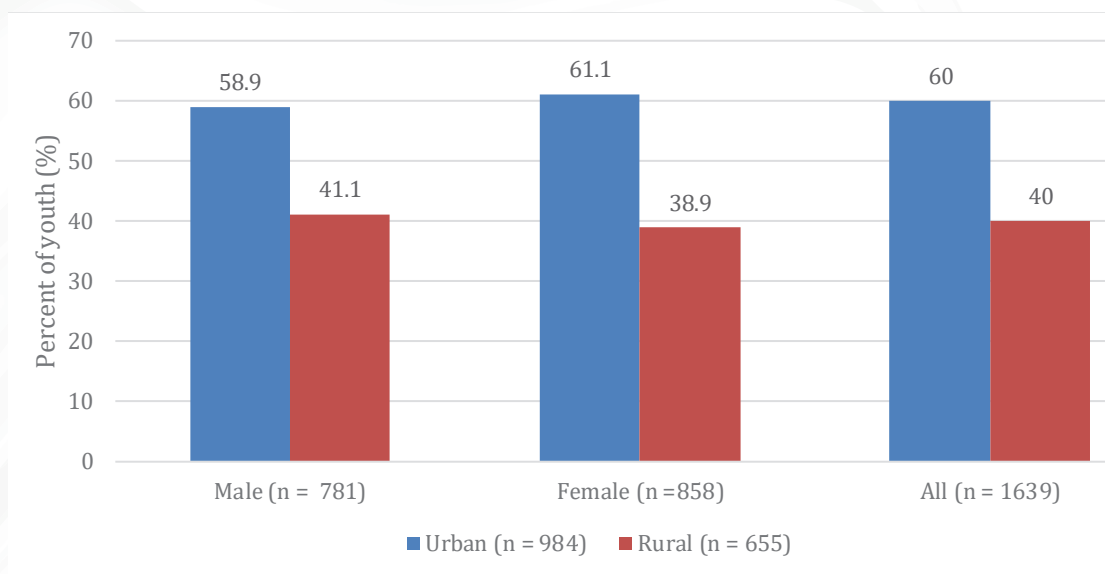
	Gender		Age in years			
	Freq., n	Percent, %	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Male	781	47.6	23.1	5.6	15	35
Female	858	52.4	22.9	5.6	15	35
All	1639	100	23.0	5.6	15	35

Source: Field data, 2022

Place of Residence by Gender

The survey covered more urban youth (60.0%) than rural youth (40.0%). Figure 1 shows that the urban sample of young women is slightly higher (61.1%) than urban young men (58.9%). Consequently, by gender, there were more urban young men (58.9%) than rural young men (38.9%), whilst the same pattern could be observed among the female sample, with urban young women (61.1%) outnumbering their rural counterparts (38.9%).

Figure 1: Area of residence by gender



Source: Field data, 2022

Level of Education by Gender and Place

The educational attainment of the youth surveyed is relatively low. Table 4 indicates that, overall, the majority (43.4%) of the youth surveyed had secondary education as their highest level. However, there were more young men (45.1%) than young women (42.0%) whose highest level of education was at the secondary level, whereas the population with secondary education was higher among urban youth (47.2%) than the rural youth (37.9%). A good number of young men (36.1%) and young women (40.1%) reported having primary education. Only a few of the young men and women sampled in both the urban and rural areas reported having diplomas, first degrees and master's degrees (See Table 4).

Table 4: Highest level of education by gender and residence

Highest level of education	Male		Female		Total	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Primary	282	36.1	344	40.1	626	38.2
Secondary	352	45.1	360	42	712	43.4
Diploma	37	4.7	43	5	80	4.9
First Degree/Bachelors	72	9.2	57	6.6	129	7.9
Post-graduate	4	0.5	2	0.2	6	0.4
Certification	4	0.5	12	1.4	16	1
No formal education	30	3.8	40	4.7	70	4.3
Total	781	100	858	100	1,639	100

	Urban			Rural		Total	
	Freq.	Percent		Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Highest level of education							
Primary	327	33.2		299	45.6	626	38.2
Secondary	464	47.2		248	37.9	712	43.4
Diploma	55	5.6		25	3.8	80	4.9
First Degree/Bachelors	91	9.2		38	5.8	129	7.9
Post-graduate	5	0.5		1	0.2	6	0.4
Certification	10	1		6	0.9	16	1
No formal education	32	3.3		38	5.8	70	4.3
Total	984	100		655	100	1,639	100

Source: Field data, 2022

Young men and women currently schooling.

Data analysis shows that only 26% of the young women and men were currently in school at the time of the fieldwork, which suggests that a more significant share (74.0%) of the sample was not in school. This included those who have either completed a particular level or never had access to formal education. The data shows that more young men (28.3%) than young women (23.9%) are currently in school, which also reflects the situation in rural and urban areas. Compared to young women in urban (27.1%) and rural areas (18.9%), there are slightly more young men in urban areas (29.1%) and rural areas (27.1%) who are currently in school. This perhaps reflects the gender discrimination in education, where much priority is given to young men rather than young women's education (Tanye, 2008).

Table 5: Young men and women currently schooling

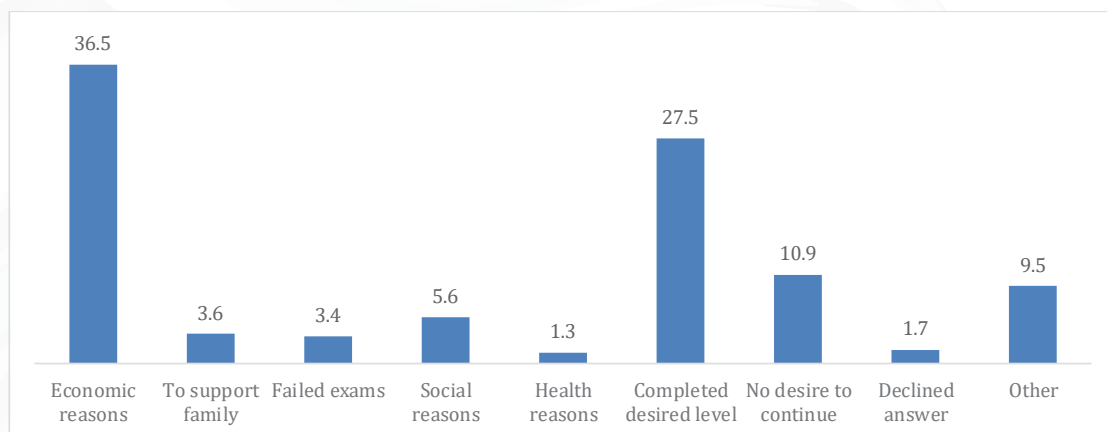
		Male			Female			All		
		Urban	Rural	All	Urban	Rural	Total	Urban	Rural	All
Yes	N	134	87	221	142	63	205	276	150	426
	%	29.1	27.1	28.3	27.1	18.9	23.9	28	22.9	26
No	N	326	234	560	382	271	653	708	505	1213
	%	70.9	72.9	71.7	72.9	81.1	76.1	72	77.1	74
All	N	460	321	781	524	334	858	984	655	1639
	%									

Source: Field data, 2022

Reasons for not currently Schooling

Figure 2 indicates that the majority (74.0%) of the youth sampled were not in school at the time of field research. Among the reasons cited for not being in school, nearly a third (27.5%) reported completing the desired level. However, over a third (36.5%) cited economic reasons for not attending school. This is even though basic school (from primary to secondary is free in terms of school fees). This finding highlights the need to address the cash cost.

Figure 2: Reason for not currently in school (n =1213)



Source: Field data, 2022

Marital status of Ghanaian young women and men

The marriage rate among young women and men in Ghana is low. Among the young men and women surveyed, the vast majority (69.4%) are never married, but the proportion of those who said they are never married is slightly higher for young men (75.2%) than for young women (64.2%) indicative of higher marriage rate among young women than men. From Table 6, only 18.9% of all the youth surveyed were married as of the study, while an overwhelming majority (69.4%) reported having never married. However, there are gender differences in marital status, with more young women (22.4%) reporting being married than young men (15.1%).

Table 6: Distribution of young women and men by Marital status and gender

Marital status	Male		Female		Total	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Married	118	15.1	192	22.4	310	18.9
Living together but not married	70	9	102	11.9	172	10.5
Separated	3	0.4	5	0.6	8	0.5
Widowed	1	0.1	1	0.1	2	0.1
Divorced	2	0.3	4	0.5	6	0.4
Never married	587	75.2	551	64.2	1,138	69.4
Declined to respond	0	0	3	0.3	3	0.2
Total	781	100	858	100	1,639	100

Source: Field data, 2022

Children born to Ghanaian young women and men

This variable seeks to measure the number of children under the direct care of young women and men. This helps to understand the economic burden on young Ghanaians to appreciate their concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic. Results from the study indicate that only 32.0% of all young women and men surveyed had at least a child, while the remaining majority (68.0%) had no children. The data shows that more young women (39.5%) than young men (23.7%) had children, with the maximum number being eight among young women and five among young men. The mean number of children born to

young Ghanaians was 1.6, although the mean number of children born was slightly higher among young women (1.7) than young men (1.5) with a standard deviation of 1.1 (see Table 7).

Table 7: Children born to the youth by gender

	Male		Female		Total	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Panel A: Have children?						
Yes	185	23.7	339	39.5	524	32
No	596	76.3	519	60.5	1,115	68
Total	781	100	858	100	1,639	100
Panel B: Number of children						
Mean	1.5		1.7		1.6	
Std. Dev.	1.1		1.1		1.1	
Min.	0		0		0	
Max.	5		8		8	
Obs.	185		339		524	

Source: Field data, 2022

Occupation of Ghanaian young women and men

Regarding employment, Table 8 indicates that a little over half (31.4%) of all young men and women, representing the majority, were unemployed at the time of the field research. However, there are gender differences, with more young women (38.6%) than young men (32.8%) reporting unemployment. Among those employed, many young men (32.8%) and women (17.5%) were self-employed. Moreover, more young women (23.1%) than men (13.3%) are engaged in trading activities. Only a small proportion of young men (11.3%) and women (5.5%) are in farming or agribusiness.

Table 8: Main occupation by gender

	Male		Female		Total	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Farming/Agribusiness	88	11.3	47	5.5	135	8.2
Trading	104	13.3	198	23.1	302	18.4
Civil Service / Public Service	45	5.8	46	5.4	91	5.6
National Service Person	2	0.3	7	0.8	9	0.5
Other- formal employee	10	1.3	11	1.3	21	1.3
Other – informal employee	22	2.8	25	2.9	47	2.9
Other – self-employed	192	24.6	150	17.5	342	20.9
Other – apprentice	9	1.2	4	0.5	13	0.7
Other – Unemployed	256	32.8	331	38.6	515	31.4
Others	53	6.6	39	4.4	164	10.1
Total	781	100	858	100	1,639	100

Source: Field data, 2022

Young Men and Women's Understanding of Youthhood

Youthhood is an important period in every young person's life. It is recognized as a period of self-discovery, where young people figure out their passions, interests, preferences, strengths, and weaknesses, encounter different life experiences and develop and strengthen relationships. This section presents the findings on Ghanaian young men and women's understanding of youthhood and who a proper young man or woman is. The analysis in this section draws specifically on the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions carried out with young men and women in Ghana's rural and urban contexts. Three themes emerged from the interviews regarding how young men and women defined youthhood. These include i) age-based definitions, ii) youthhood as a stage in life for the development of reproductive features, iii) youthhood as deviant but responsible, and iv) youthhood as characterized by strength.

Age-based Definitions of Youthhood

Across all interviews and focus group discussions, the youth participants linked the notion of youthhood to age. This view dominated the responses of the young men and women as well as rural and urban youth and disabled youth. Interviewees expressed that so long as an individual falls within a certain age category, they can be considered youth. There was a consensus that youthhood is a period between 15 years and 40 years. Some interviewees indicated:

"I consider myself as a youth because I'm more than 20 years, and more than 18 years, I believe from 18 years that's the legal age. So, from 18 years, that's when you can make your own life's decisions and stuff, so I consider myself to be a youth from 18+. And since I'm in that age group I think I'm a youth." (IDI, Male Participants, Bono region).

"if the person is 15 years to about 30 years, they qualify as a youth but if you are less than 18 years, you are not" (Disabled Youth Participant Female, Northern Region).

Youth-hood as a period for the development of physical features

Some young men and women who participated in the interviews and focus group discussions also understood youthhood as when an individual develops physical features or experiences biological changes in the body. Interviewees expressed that for young men, youthhood is characterized by the growth of beards, broad chest, physical stature, and confidence.

"The guys usually grow beards and have broader chests and they are usually physically strong especially when working. They are also confident" (FGD, Female participants, Upper West region).

"the individual begins to develop facial hair and experiences some signs of sexual development and the likes... these things can tell you that this is a youth" (FGD, Disabled male participant, Northern region).

In contrast, for young women, this period is characterized by the development of the breast and the reproductive system and general changes in the female body.

Youthhood as deviant but responsible

The young men and women who participated in the interviews and focus group discussion also linked youthhood to deviant behaviour. This was common for both the rural and urban youth. Across all interviews, participants expressed that youthhood is characterized by certain behaviors that are usually against social norms, such as changes in one's lifestyle and behaviors. Interviewees provided examples of behaviors such as alcoholism, smoking, drug abuse, and gambling, among others, which they deemed are more associated with youthhood. They noted that most of the youth engage in such behaviors although societal norms and values frown on them. In a related way, others suggested that youthhood is characterized by failure to perform household tasks such as washing dishes or fetching water as a sign to inform adult relations that young people are mature.

“At youthhood stage, the guys feel like they are matured and involve themselves in a whole lot of activities like taking in tramadol and the females also engage in prostitution” (FGD, Female PWD, Ashanti region).

There are certain house chores that he will feel reluctant to do. He won't agree to wash dishes and other chores so the mom will then realize that her child is now a youth” (Male FG participant, Bono East region)

“At youthhood, people usually smoke a lot. They become rascals who always move about. Grown people do not engage in such conduct” (Female Focus group participant, Upper West Region)

Contrary to this, some of the young women interviewed understood youthhood as one's ability to handle certain responsibilities or undertake certain actions. There is an expectation of society for young people to behave well by performing assigned responsibilities from adult relations.

“At youthhood, you become responsible for your actions and there are certain things that are expected from you in terms of maturity, experience and attitudes. Society expects you to behave differently from how you used to behave in a manner that shows maturity” (FGD participant, female, Ashanti region).

Youthhood as characterized by strength.

Another important theme generated from the interviews and focus group discussions regarding young peoples' understanding of youthhood as characterized by strength. This was more common to be related to the young men than the young women. The interviewees expressed that youthhood, especially for young men, is all about being energetic, curious and industrious. They opined that in youthhood, one is expected to be self-sufficient and be able to fend for him/herself.

“Youthhood is characterized by strength, and the desire to explore. You are eager to do anything you are assigned to. This is different from the old people and how they do their things. (IDI, male, Accra, region).

“What I know is that at this stage the person is able to fend for himself/herself and does not

solely depend on their parents. The person is able to engage in activities that can generate something to buy his/her needs. You take the burden or responsible off your parent and you are able to do things that benefit you” (FGD, PWD participant, Male, Northern region).

The aspirations of young men and women

The aspirations of young men and women should serve as a guidepost for policies and programmes seeking to promote youth employment and other interests of young people in Ghana and Africa. This section presents the findings on young men's and women's aspirations for their future. The analysis focuses on the youth's economic, civic, migration, and socio-cultural aspirations.

Employment aspirations

One of the core objectives of this research is to explore young women's and men's aspirations for their future. Three main themes emerged from the survey and qualitative data on the employment aspirations of the youth. They include i) establishing self-employed businesses, ii) securing employment and or combining employment with business, and iii) accumulating wealth. These are presented below.

Establish self-employed businesses.

The young men and women who participated in the survey were asked, “Looking into the future, would you like to venture into employment or business investment?”. The results show that most youth want to venture into business (60.2%). This is true for young women and young men, even though there is no statistically significant difference between young men (60.3%) and young women (60.1%).

Table 9: Employment aspirations of the young men and women

Future venture	Male		Female		Total	
	Freq., n	Percent	Freq., n	Percent,	Freq., n	Percent,
Employment	97	12.4	105	12.2	202	12.3
Business	471	60.3	518	60.1	987	60.2
Both	213	27.3	237	27.6	450	27.5
Total	781	100	858	100	1,639	100

Source: Field Data, 2022

Similarly, a key theme generated from the interviews is that some Ghanaian young men and women aspire to establish themselves as entrepreneurs or owners of businesses, which aligns perfectly well with the survey results. This was more common for the young men and women interviewed in the urban and rural areas of the Western Region, Upper West Region, and Ashanti Region. Many young men and women consider owning businesses a key to fulfilling their economic aspirations of accumulating wealth to support their families and impact society. However, gender differences emerged in the type of businesses the youth would like to establish. Young men spoke more about establishing businesses along the agricultural value chain (e.g., livestock production, agricultural plantation), fuel stations, and trade in spare parts and construction materials. Some young men interviewed, for instance, noted:

I want to be an entrepreneur. I want to be my own boss. I want to have a poultry farm, radio station, and a fuel station” (FGDs Male participant, PWDs, Upper Western region).

Another young man interviewed in Accra who was undergoing training as an apprentice (construction work) suggested that he would want to complete his training, establish himself as a construction worker (mason), and open a shop dealing in construction materials. He would want to use his knowledge and skills to also provide training to other youth who want to learn and establish themselves as construction workers. During the focus group discussion, he said:

“For me my aspirations are to learn from my master and go back to my hometown so that others too can come and learn from me. Because I don’t have any other work to do, and I no longer attend school aside the skill

(construction work as mason) I am learning I don’t do anything. That is my “mind” even if I don’t go back to my hometown and I remain here I pray that I will open my own “shop” so that others can come and benefit from me” (Male FGD Participant, Greater Accra).

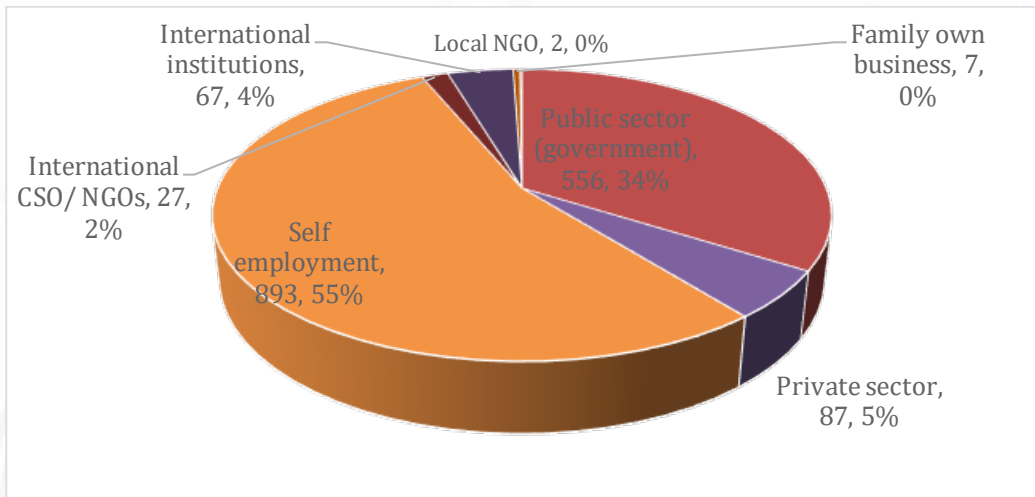
The females dreamed of establishing multiple businesses that are traditionally open to women in society. The businesses mentioned by the young women include beauticians, seamstresses, and trade in agricultural and household appliance items. A female participant interviewed in an urban area in Kumasi, Ashanti region, narrated that she would want to establish herself as a beautician and inspire young women and men around her so they could be self-confident in life:

“I aspire to be a beautician, so that others will look up to me and be confident in themselves and their bodies. Most of the young people feel insecure about their skin and other parts of their bodies” (Female, FGD Participant, Ashanti Region).

The qualitative findings on young men and women’s interest in establishing themselves as entrepreneurs or owners of businesses align well with the survey results on who the youth would want to work for in the future. Figure 10 shows that an overwhelming majority (893) representing (55%) of all the youth surveyed reported that they would like to be self-employed (See Figure 3). This is true for both young men and women. It is striking that the proportion of youth who would like to work with international institutions, local and international NGOs and the private sector is extremely low (less than 10%). A little over a third (n=556, 34%) reported that they would want to work in the public sector. The implication for policy

is that the youth will need to be provided with an enabling environment through addressing macroeconomic challenges in the Ghanaian economy and support services in the form of entrepreneurial training and initial capital to get them started.

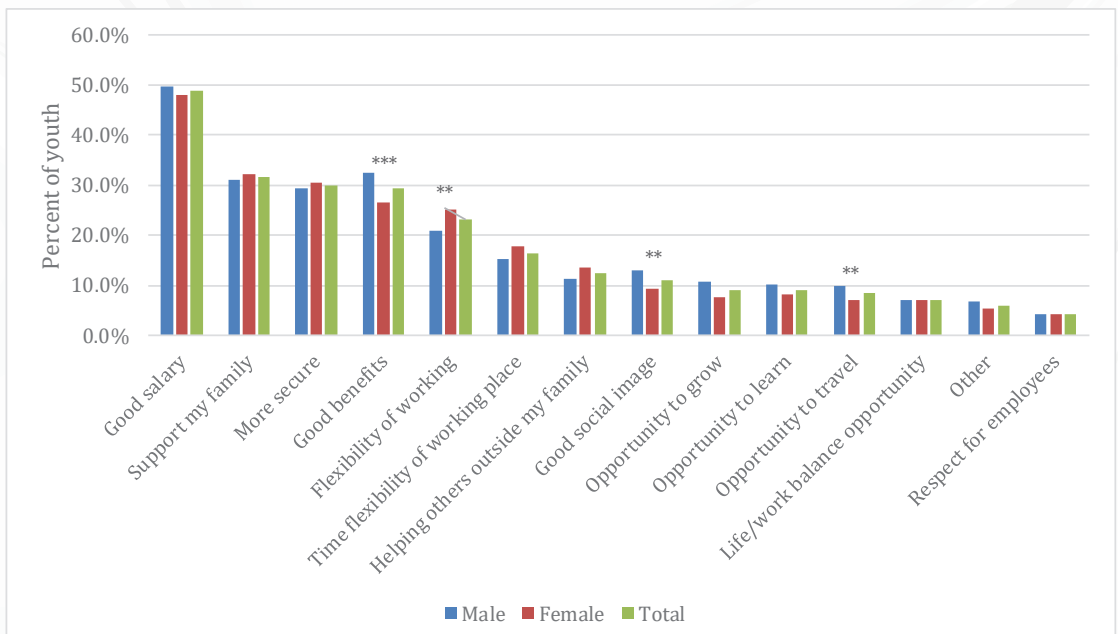
Figure 3: The employer the youth would like to work for in the future



Source: Field data, 2022

When asked about the reason for wanting to work for a particular employer, good salary stands tallest among all the other variables for both young men and women, though more young men than women selected “good salary”, as observable in Figure 4, and this consistent with their definitions of dignified job, choice of job and success. Other important reasons for choosing to work with a particular employer include good benefits, good social image, opportunity to travel, and flexibility of work (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Why the choice to work with that employer?

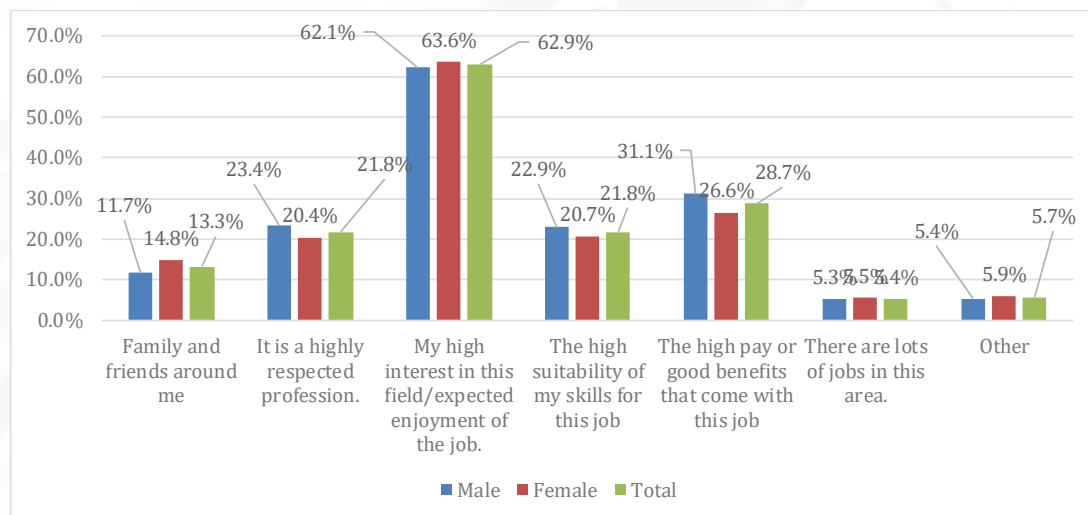


** and *** denote statistical significance of difference at 5% and 1% respectively

Source: Field data, 2022

The youth were also asked about the factors that will influence the job they would like to do as part of their economic aspirations.

Figure 5: Factors influencing the future choice of the preferred job of young men and women



Source: Field data, 2022

Figure 5 shows that interest in the field or expected job satisfaction is a marker of what would influence the choice of job that the Ghanaian youth would do in the future. Indeed, a greater proportion of the youth (62.9%) surveyed stated that their interest will determine their future choice. However, there are more young women (63.6%) than young men (62.1%) who offer such perspectives. Moreover, a good number of the young men and women also emphasized good pay or benefits (m=31.1%, f=26.6%), highly respected profession (m=23.4%, f=20.4%), and the high suitability of their skills for the job (m=22.9%, f=20.4%) as key factors that would influence the kind of job they would like to do in the future. This finding suggests that young men and women in Ghana may likely not sign up for any government intervention or policy that does not resonate with their interests. Therefore, policies seeking to promote youth employment should consider eliciting the perspective of the youth in order to ensure that their aspirations are factored into programme design and implementation.

Secure Employment and or Combine employment with business

The second important theme of the economic aspirations of the youth relates to the desire to

secure employment and/or combine employment with business. Table 9 shows that 12.3% of the youth surveyed would like to secure employment, while a third (27.5%) reported wanting to combine employment with business. In terms of gender, nearly the same percentage of young women and young men (27.6% and 27.3%, respectively) would want to combine employment with business in the future for financial security. A major theme generated from the qualitative study relates to the emphasis on securing professional employment as part of economic aspirations. As part of discussing their aspirations, many of the young men and women interviewees, including persons with disability, placed high importance on securing professional or salaried employment mostly based in urban centres. They were more concerned with securing jobs that allowed them to make wealth. The occupational imaginaries mentioned by the youth include computer scientist, politician, engineer, banker, nurse, medical doctor among others. The young men and women interviewed indicated that these jobs are well-paid, prestigious, command respect, and provides good income and financial stability, as indicated in the following quotes:

I want to be a medical doctor. It is a prestigious job. It has been my dream since childhood. Medical doctor job is well paid. It will give me good money so that I can take care of

myself (25-year-old Female PWD participant, Ashanti Region)

I aspire to be an engineer in the future. Engineering is a good profession. I know many engineers in this country receive good salaries. I don't want to struggle in my life. Engineer work will help me to make good money to help cater for my needs and my family" (23-year-old Male, FGD Participant, Western Region).

This finding highlights the need for the government to create jobs through a structural transformation process that can expand the economy through job creation in the formal sector.

Wealth Accumulation

It is important to note that the youth, including those who want to establish themselves as entrepreneurs or secure professional employment, all place a high degree of importance on wealth (money accumulation) as part of their economic aspirations. In fact, some youth, especially the young men who participated in the focus group discussions, repeatedly emphasized the issue of wealth accumulation in their future aspirations. This was particularly the case for the young men in the urban areas of Ghana's northern and Ashanti regions. Many stressed that they want to accumulate much wealth (money) not necessarily because of their own needs but to ensure that they provide and care for their parents and other external family relations. For instance, a 19-year-old young man interviewed in the Tamale indicated that he aspires to make wealth through farm work to cater for his family. During the discussion, he stressed:

"We look up to what our parents have done and left behind for us and we will continue from there, we look to ensure that we provide them with the necessary care until their demise and to also grow to their age, and with this we need money to be able to do. So, the aspiration as a farmer is to make money from the farming" (19-year-old young man, Northern Region).

Another young man who participated in the focus group discussion in the Ashanti region stressed that for his part and many youths, their aspirations revolve around accumulating much wealth (money) and not necessarily education, which has

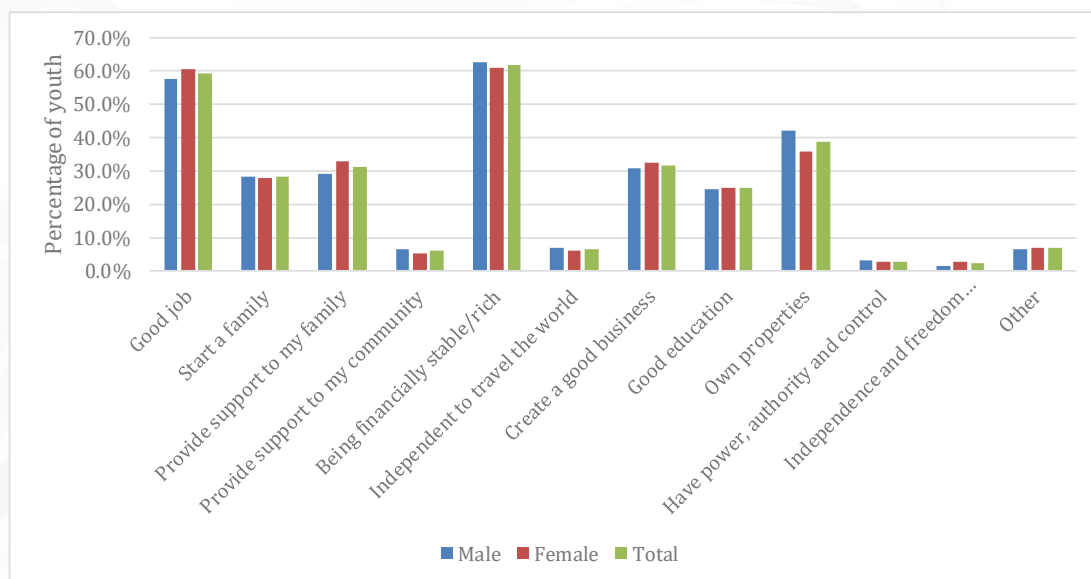
been touted as the key to success in policy circles. During the discussion, he professed:

"Okay. I also think that to speak in my own opinion and generally for the youth, our main aspiration, number one aspiration as youth is money (Larg'ent). Because right now, we all can testify to the fact that no parents will give birth and then would not take their kids to school because they have created some mentality, they have shaped our thinking growing up to understand that education is the key. But I believe that education is not the only key. Education is actually a key. There are other keys. So, the reason why we as a country, we are where we are now. We are suffering because economically, the economy is in shambles and this is because of this mentality, because we think that going to school will make you succeed" (Male FGD Participant, Ashanti Region).

Success from the perspective of the youth

This section presents the results of what the youth see as success in life. Results from this study demonstrate that many young men and women in Ghana define success as "being financially stable/rich" and "getting a good job" (see Figure 6). The emphasis on getting a job is striking in the sense that many of the youth envisaged establishing their own business. It may be that Ghanaian youth now see prospects in establishing their own ventures as a way to attain good jobs. This may be due to the growing frustration of many young men and women who continue to grapple with the difficulties of being unable to secure formal employment after school. Some disparities were observed in the data. While more than half of young women and men surveyed define success in terms of financial status, it is evident that more young men (62.7%) than young women (61.0%) favour this indicator as a measure of success. Nevertheless, far more of the young women (60.7%) favour "good job" than the young men (57.5%). However, the difference is not statistically significant. This means there is no gender difference in the definition of success regarding "good job" and "financial stability" among Ghanaian young men and women.

Figure 6: What the youth consider to be success in life for themselves



Source: Field data, 2022

The findings from the qualitative study resonate well with the quantitative results on how the youth perceived success in life. For many of the young men and women who participated in the focus group discussions and interviews, success means accumulating wealth (money) and owning properties. This was consistent for young men and women in rural and urban areas. For example, a 27-year man interviewed in one community in the Ashanti region stressed money three times in his opening statement when asked what he sees or defines success as follows:

“okay, so with my understanding of good life, I see good life to be money, money, money. That is because when you have money, it doesn't matter whether you are successful or not, you are respected everywhere you go. Because life is good for you. You can be successful. But without money, you lack some recognition. You go somewhere, you are a successful person, but people don't mind you, because the money isn't there. But when you are living a good life, you have established everything, you have your money, you can do anything you want. It's like you can even hold the law in your pocket, so with that you are enjoying a good life” (Male Participant, Ashanti region).

Other participants shared their perspectives as follows:

“There are a lot of successful people in this current society, unlike before when there were a few of successful people in the society but now they are abundant, in this current society a person who has money; that is “physical cash” is considered a successful person but unlike before when a successful person was measured by the number of children or animals they have and other properties now it is about money, “cash”” (FGD Participant, PWD, Northern region).

“Being a successful person means getting a job, getting all the things needed in life, having money to cater for yourself and your family” (Female FG Participant, Ashanti region).

“living a good life, having some luxurious cars, some flashy houses, and other stuff and a family to settle with. That's a good life” (Male participant, Ashanti region).

Beyond financial resources, some youth defined success in relation to the non-material dimensions of life. For some young men and women, success goes beyond riches or wealth to include the non-monetary elements of life, including enjoyment of peace, absence of conflict or war, good marriage, righteous life, socialising, and being comfortable and popular in society. Some interviewees, for instance, narrated:

“In one word, I will say Peace. Peace in anything. Peace whatsoever in terms of finance, terms of human relation whatever, peace. I think it’s part of what we term as good life” (FGD, Male participant, Ashanti region).

“... success is not money. It is about having good human relation with others. If you have a good personal relationship with your immediate surrounding you don’t worry much about trouble or anything that can make you thing so much (Male FGD Participant, Ashanti region).

“What he [referring to a participant in a discussion] has said is true... but there is a successful person and there is a rich person. The reason I say that is this perhaps God has kept our [all of us seated here] daily bread in your hands so if you give us it will multiple but if you think that giving us is too much then God will take it away from you” (FGD, PWD, Northern region).

Further analysis of the quantitative data shows that marital status influences the definition of success as “good job” and as “being financially stable or rich”. Table 10 shows that the mean differences in counts between married and unmarried youth are statistically significant at 5% significance level. Unmarried women and young men define “success” in terms of good jobs and financial stability. Also, unmarried Ghanaian youth are more likely to define “success” in terms of their ability to “provide support to family” and “create good business” and “good education” than their married counterparts. Table 10 shows that these are statistically significant at a 1% significance level. By gender, the definition of “success” to mean ownership of properties is more common among young men (42.1%) than young women (36.0%). This is significant at 5%. Interestingly, the data shows that, Ghanaian young men and women are not much interested or define success as having “power, authority and control” to travel independently to other parts of the world and gaining independence and freedom from parents as they are popularly perceived to be (See Table 10).

Table 10: What the youth consider to be a success for themselves by gender and marital status

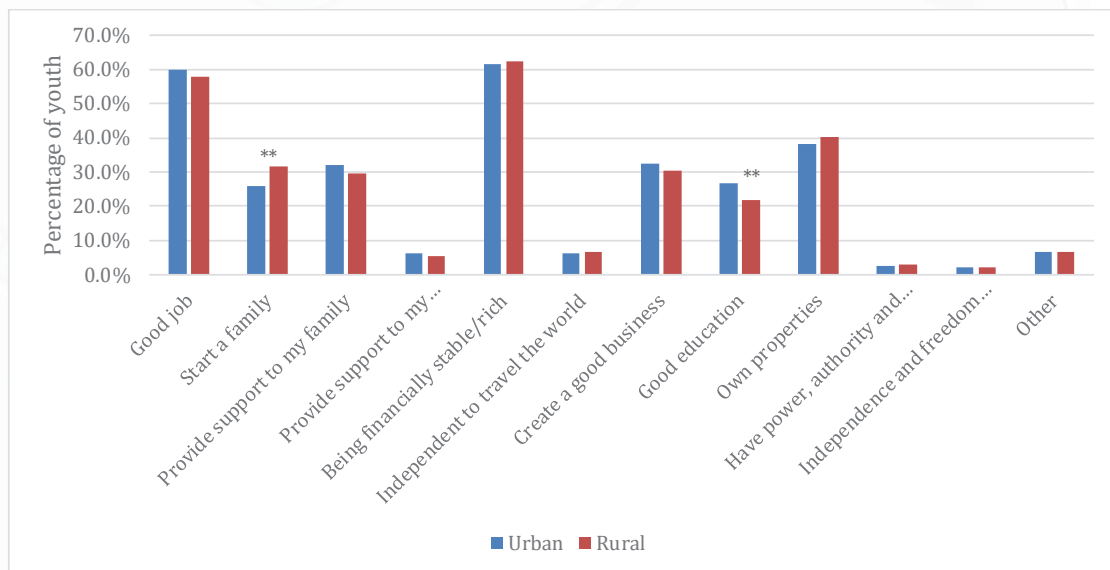
	Total (%)	Sex of respondent			Marital status		
		Male (%)	Female (%)	Diff t-test	Unmarried (%)	Married (%)	Diff t-test
Good job	59.2	57.5	60.7	-3.2	60.9	55.0	5.9**
Start a family	28.1	28.3	27.9	0.4	29.1	25.5	3.6
Provide support to my family	31.1	29.1	33.0	-3.9*	26.4	42.5	-16.2***
Provide support to my community	5.9	6.5	5.4	1.2	6.5	4.6	1.9
Being financially stable/rich	61.8	62.7	61.0	1.7	60.2	65.8	5.6**
Independent to travel the world	6.4	6.9	5.9	1.0	6.9	5.2	1.7
Create a good business	31.7	30.7	32.5	1.8	29.3	37.3	-8.0***
Good education	24.8	24.6	24.9	0.3	29.7	12.9	16.8***
Own properties	38.9	42.1	36.0	6.1**	38.5	39.8	-1.3
Have power, authority and control	2.9	3.2	2.6	0.6	2.9	2.7	0.2
Independence and freedom from parents	2.2	1.7	2.7	1.0	2.3	1.9	0.4
Other	6.7	6.5	6.9	0.3	6.8	6.4	0.4
Observations, n	1,639	781	858		1,157	482	

Notes: multiple responses apply in this case; therefore, the percentages may sum above 100. ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 5% and 1% respectively.

Source: Field data, 2022

Moreover, a greater share of Ghanaian youth in rural and urban areas consider success to be having a good job (rural=57.9%, urban=60.1%) and being financially stable (rural=62.4%, urban=61.4%). However, the observed difference is not statistically significant. However, while the frequency is relatively low, there is a statistically significant difference between young rural men and women and their urban counterparts who define success as starting a family and having a good education (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Definition of success by place of residence



Notes: ** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 5%.

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 11 presents what the youth consider the topmost indicator of personal success. The results show that most (27.2%) of the youth indicated “good job” as their topmost indicator. Some disparities were observed in the data with regard to gender, place of residence, and marital status. The data show that more young women (4.8%) than men (2.4%) defined their topmost success factor as “start family”. This was significant at a 5% significance level. This reflects the gendered roles of women. Concerning marital status, the study shows that, among married men, the topmost indicator of success is the ability to support their families. The difference observed between married and unmarried youth is significant at a 1% significance level. Good education is one of the topmost indicators of success. However, disparities between rural and urban youth and marital status were observed between the youth surveyed. At the 1% level, it is significantly observed that urban (14.2%) youth value education as the topmost indicator of success compared to rural youth (9.9%). Also, good education is the topmost success indicator, and it is more expressed among unmarried youth (16.5%) than married ones (3.4%).

There is also a gendered dimension with regard to the choice of ownership of property as a topmost success factor. More young women (8.1%) than men (5.2%) reported property ownership as a topmost success factor. The study also shows that at 5% level of confidence, more rural youth (8.2%) chose “own property” than urban youth (5.5%). The data show that the only significant factor affecting the choice of “independence and freedom from parents” is residence. The data showed that urban youth (0.8%) desire to break away from their parents, unlike their counterparts in rural areas (refer to Table 10).

Table 11: Topmost indicator of personal success among the youth

	Sex of youth			Residence of youth			Marital status of youth		
	Total Percent	Male	Female	Urban Percent	Rural Percent	Diff. t-test	Unmarried Percent	Married Percent	Diff. t-test
		Percent	Percent						
Good job	27.2	26.1	28.1	26.7	27.8	-1.1	26.9	27.8	-0.9
Start a family	3.7	2.4	4.8	3.6	3.8	-0.2	3.1	5	-1.9*
Provide support to my family	7.6	7.2	7.9	7.4	7.8	-0.3	5.1	13.5	-8.4***
Provide support to my community	0.9	0.6	1.2	1.1	0.6	0.5	1	0.6	0.4
Being financially stable/rich	23.3	25	21.8	22.4	24.7	-2.3	23.1	23.9	-0.8
Independent to travel the world	1.9	2.2	1.6	1.9	1.8	0.1	2.2	1.2	0.9
Create a good business	12	11.8	12.1	12.8	10.7	2.1	11.1	13.9	-2.7
Good education	12.5	11.5	13.4	14.2	9.9	4.3***	16.4	3.1	13.3***
Own properties	6.6	8.1	5.2	5.5	8.2	-2.7**	6.9	5.8	1.1
Have power, authority and control	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.5	1.4	0.1*	0.9	0.8	0.1
Independence and freedom from parents	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.8	0	0.8**	0.3	0.8	0.5
Other	3.1	3.7	2.6	3	3.2	-0.2	2.9	3.5	-0.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100		100	100	
Observations	1,639	781	858	984	655		1,157	482	

Source: Field data, 2022

How Close Ghanaian youth are to achieving Success.

Table 12 shows the relationship between the top success factors and closeness to achieving success. The results indicate that, for “good job”, a majority (33.0%) of the youth reported to be “somehow close” to achieving this. This was followed by 26.7% of the respondents who are “quite far” from achieving it. In terms of “being financially stable/rich”, the result shows that a little over a third (36.7%), which represent the majority, are “somehow close” while 31.4% of them reported that they are “quite far” from it. Only 15.0% of all the young men and women surveyed regard success as being able to “provide support to my community”. Out of this, a majority (46.7%) are “somehow close”, followed by 33.3% who are “quite far”. Sadly, the level of closeness to achieving a “good education” is quite worrying. Out of the 205 young men and women, far less than a half (38.1%) are “somehow close”, and this was followed by nearly a third (28.3%) of the young men and women

who reported that they are quite far from achieving this. The same trend is observed in ownership of properties and gaining independence from parents (See Table 12).

With regards to starting a family, a majority (38.3%) of the respondents are “somehow close”, followed by 30.0% of the youth who were “very close”. The same pattern can be observed among those who can support their families and “create a good business”. A majority (40.3%) of young men and women reported being “somehow close”, followed by 24.9% of those who said that they are “very close” to providing for their families. Similarly, only a little over a third of the respondents reported being “somehow close” ((35.2%) and very close” (34.7%)” to creating good businesses. Regarding being independent to travel the world, 31.0% of all the youth surveyed showed their levels of closeness. Out of this, an equal percent (35.5%) was “somehow close” and “very close” to achieving it.

Table 12: Closeness to achieving success by first ranked factor of success

Top factor of success		Closeness to achieving success					Total
		Very far	Quite far	Somehow close	Very close	Have already achieved it	
Good job	n	80	119	147	95	4	445
	%	17.98	26.74	33.03	21.35	0.9	100
Start a family	n	9	9	23	18	1	60
	%	15	15	38.33	30	1.67	100
Provide support to my family	n	18	25	50	30	1	124
	%	14.52	20.16	40.32	24.19	0.81	100
Provide support to my community	n	0	5	7	3	0	15
	%	0	33.33	46.67	20	0	100
Being financially stable/rich	n	64	120	140	55	3	382
	%	16.75	31.41	36.65	14.4	0.79	100
Independent to travel the world	n	3	6	11	11	0	31
	%	9.68	19.35	35.48	35.48	0	100

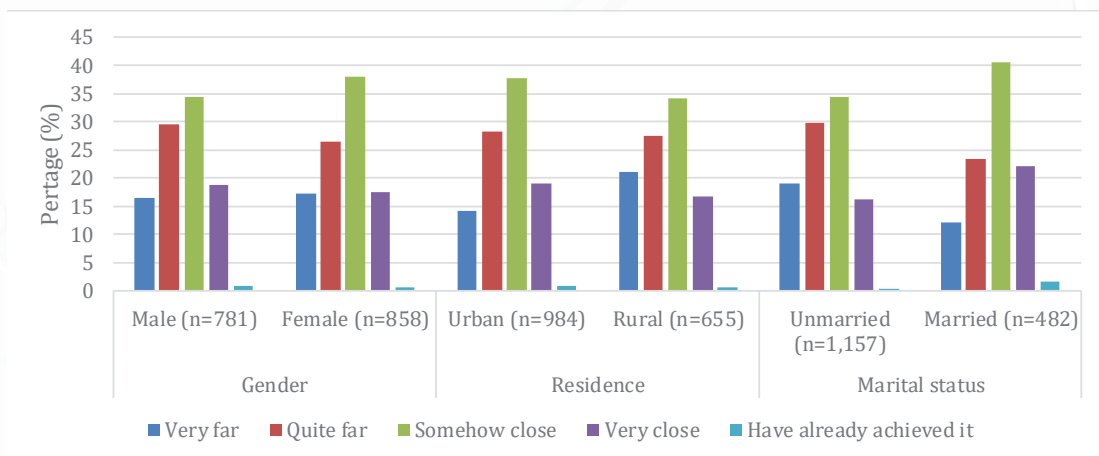
Create a good business	n	29	68	69	30	0	196
	%	14.8	34.69	35.2	15.31	0	100
Good education	n	34	58	78	34	1	205
	%	16.59	28.29	38.05	16.59	0.49	100
Own properties	n	19	31	50	7	1	108
	%	17.59	28.7	46.3	6.48	0.93	100
Have power, authority and control	N	5	2	5	1	1	14
	%	35.71	14.29	35.71	7.14	7.14	100
Independence and freedom from parents	N	0	2	3	3	0	8
	%	0	25	37.5	37.5	0	100
Others	N	17	14	11	9	0	51
	%	33.33	27.45	21.57	17.65	0	100
All	N	278	459	594	296	12	1,639
	%	16.96	28	36.24	18.06	0.73	100

Source: Field data, 2022

However, the data show that an equal majority (35.7%) of the youth are “somehow close” to and “very far” from “having power, authority and control”. This reflects the low number of youth (0.9%) (refer to Figure 6) who see having power, authority, and control as the topmost success factor. Sadly, none of the youth reported to have reached a level where they are able to provide support to their communities, gain independence to travel the world, create good business, and gain independence and freedom from parents. The only topmost success marker already achieved by 3 (0.8%) of the youth was “being financially stable/rich”. This finding highlights the need to promote secure, remunerative, and decent employment for youth.

Figure 8 shows the extent to which the youth are close to achieving success by gender, residence, and marital status. In terms of gender, the results show that a little over a third of young men (34.4%) and women (37.9%), representing the majority, reported that they are somehow close to achieving success. Similarly, the majority of rural (34.2%) and urban (37.6%) youth and the married and unmarried youth also reported that they are somehow close to achieving success in life. Irrespective of gender, place, and marital status, only a small minority of the youth reported “have already achieved success in life”.

Figure 8: Closeness to achieving success by gender, residence and marital status



Source: Field data, 2022

Barriers to Realizing Aspired Jobs

Table 13 presents the results that might affect their realization of their aspired jobs in the future. Two main factors were identified as a barrier to youth realizing their aspirations. They include i) limited financial capital and ii) limited political and social connections.

Table 13: Important constraints to realizing aspired jobs

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
Lack of money/ starting Capital	70.8	68.5	72.8	-4.3*	70.7	70.8	-0.1
Death of parents	4.0	4.1	3.9	0.3	4.0	4.0	0.0
Separation of parents	1.6	1.8	1.4	0.4	1.9	1.1	0.9
Parents did not think it was important	1.8	1.4	2.2	-0.8	1.7	2.0	-0.3
Frequent illness (myself)	4.8	5.9	3.9	2.0*	4.5	5.3	-0.9
Frequent illness of a family member	1.1	1.2	1.1	0.1	1.0	1.2	-0.2
Obligatory military service	0.5	0.9	0.1	0.8**	0.4	0.6	-0.2
Domestic obligation	3.5	2.9	4.0	-1.0	3.0	4.3	-1.3
Conflict (militancy/ insurgency)	0.4	0.1	0.7	-0.6*	0.4	0.5	-0.1
Lack of adequate skills and education	6.9	7.3	6.5	0.8	7.2	6.4	0.8
Pregnancy	2.3	0.6	3.7	-3.1***	1.5	3.4	-1.8**
Lack of perseverance, motivation or self-confidence	2.1	1.8	2.3	-0.5	1.8	2.4	-0.6

Not smart enough	1.4	1.5	1.3	0.3	1.3	1.5	-0.2
Lack of connections or acquaintances	9.0	10.5	7.7	2.8**	7.3	11.6	-4.3***
Not knowing where to go to achieve this	3.3	3.2	3.4	-0.2	3.1	3.7	-0.6
No difficulty	13.6	13.7	13.5	0.2	14.2	12.7	1.5
Other (Specify)	7.1	8.5	5.9	2.5**	7.1	7.2	-0.1
Observations	1,639	781	858		984	655	

Source: Field data, 2022 Poverty and financial constraints

Limited financial capital

Among the youth responding to the survey, a greater share of both the young women (72.8%) and young men (68.5%) reported that lack of money/starting capital is the major barrier to realizing their aspired jobs, and the difference between the young women and men is statistically significant at 1%. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of both the rural and urban youth also mentioned lack of money/starting capital is the major hurdle that can affect the realization of their aspired jobs. These findings are not surprising given that many of both young men and women in both rural and urban areas envisage establishing businesses in the future. And one key resource needed to get established is financial capital.

Similarly, the qualitative findings show that many youths consider poverty or financial constraint as major barrier to realizing their economic aspirations. This is true for both young men and women in urban and rural areas. The identification of financial constraints as the key barrier perhaps reflects the sense that many of the youth are looking into establishing their own businesses in the future. The young men and women who participated in the interviews and focus group discussions unanimously agreed that financial capital is the major constraint inhibiting today's youth from realizing the dream of establishing their own businesses or pursuing further education. Some interviewees noted:

“The peculiar problem of the youth is start-up capital. We have business plans, but the start-up capital is a major challenge. if you want to start up a business and you don't have capital your aspiration cannot materialise. Also, education, if you want to become a lawyer and you are not educated you cannot achieve the lawyer dream”.

Limited social connections as a constraint

Another important theme generated from the qualitative interviews on barriers to achieving economic aspirations relates to limited political and social connections. Some of the youth interviewed spoke of politics and lack of social connections by explaining that it is now difficult for any young man or woman to secure employment or benefit from government programmes that offer financial support due to limited political or social networks. Some also indicated that politics at workplace hinder young people from being promoted as seen below:

“Politics can also hinder you from pursuing your aspiration. I have been in the workplace for so many years and am supposed to get a promotion, but they will bring someone from somewhere with little or no experience to occupy that position because he or she knows someone in government. So, if you don't have any influential person to push for you will remain where you are.”

The finding on finance as a major barrier to realizing aspirations is consistent with growing body of research in Ghana and elsewhere that have shown how lack of financial capital has been a major challenge faced by young people seeking to establish themselves or move towards the attainment of economic aspirations (Yeboah, 2021; Yeboah 2017)

Socio-cultural aspirations of the youth

The research elicited data on the socio-cultural aspirations of youth. This covers aspirations on marriage, relationship with families, making contributions to communities and make decision without seeking guidance from the spiritual institutions. Table 14 presents the results on socio-cultural aspirations of the youth in all these domains.

Table 14: Socio-cultural aspirations of the youth

	Gender				Residence		
	Total	Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
Is marriage part of your plan if not already married?							
Yes (%)	84.0	82.5	85.4	-2.9	85.5	81.4	4.1**
No (%)	16.0	17.5	14.6	2.9	14.5	18.6	-4.1**
Frequency	1,329	663	666		828	501	
How do you envisage your marriage in the future (%)							
I would like to get married to whoever I love	73.7	70.7	76.6	-5.9***	74.7	72.1	2.6
My family will select a partner for me	3.9	3.5	4.2	-0.8	4.1	3.4	0.7
I do not care about the economic background of my future partner	5.5	4.6	6.3	-1.8	4.5	7.1	-2.6*
I do not care about social status	1.7	2.6	0.9	1.7***	1.8	1.5	0.4
I do not care about race, religion, tribe, language to choose my partner	5.0	8.0	2.1	5.9***	4.4	6.1	-1.8
Other	10.2	10.6	9.8	0.8	10.5	9.8	0.7
Frequency	1,116	547	569		708	408	
How do you foresee your relationship with your family in the future? (%)							
I would like to be closer to my family	53.5	53.6	53.4	0.2	53.0	54.2	-1.2
I prefer being distanced from my family	28.6	27.5	29.6	-2.1	27.5	30.2	-2.7
I have an obligation to support my family	17.6	18.3	17.0	1.3	19.2	15.3	3.9**
Other Specify	0.2	0.5	0.0	0.5**	0.2	0.3	-0.1
Frequency	1,639	781	858		984	655	
How do you foresee your relationship with your community							
My community means a lot to me	18.2	18.7	17.8	0.9	17.3	19.7	-2.4
I would like to contribute to my community	62.1	65.4	59.0	6.4***	63.0	60.6	2.4

I do not envisage any responsibility to my community	18.8	15.1	22.1	-7.0***	19.1	18.3	0.8
Other Specify	0.9	0.8	1.1	-0.3	0.6	1.4	-0.8
Frequency	1,639	781	858	984	655	984	

To what extent does this apply to you: I am very religious and I will not make decision without seeking guidance from the spiritual institutions

Highly applicable	18.2	16.1	20.2	-4.1**	18.2	18.3	-0.1
Applicable to me	24.6	22.8	26.2	-3.4	23.7	26.0	-2.3
Neutral	13.0	15.2	11.0	4.2**	12.5	13.7	-1.2
Not applicable to me	44.2	45.8	42.7	3.1	45.6	42.0	3.6
Frequency	1,639	781	858		984	655	

Note: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively

Source: Field data, 2022

Marital aspirations

The results indicate that the majority (84%) of the youth affirmed their plans to marry in the future. Out of the total 1630 youth surveyed, slightly more young women (85.4%) than young men (82.5%) aspired to marry in the future. It is also evident that marriage feature in the future aspirations of greater share of the urban youth (85.5%) and rural youth (81.4%). The difference between the marital aspirations of the rural and urban youth is statistically significant at 5% significant level.

The qualitative evidence further reveals that marriage feature prominently in the future aspirations of the youth. Some of the young men and women including the PWDs who participated in the focus group discussions and interviews emphasized that they would want to marry in the future. This finding was more related to the youth in Upper West Region, Upper West Region, Western Region, Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions of Ghana. Their aspirations of wanting to marry is rooted in the desire to have children in the future. Interestingly the youth affirmed the widely held societal norms and values that it is marriage that legitimizes an individual to have children. A young woman who participated in the focus group discussions in the Upper West Region for instance narrated:

My aspiration is to get money and marry a life partner. You know in our community it is when you are married that you can have children. If you have children before marriage some people will look at you with some eye that you

are a bad girl. So, I want to marry so that I can give birth to my own children (Young woman, 23years, Upper West Region)

Another young man interviewed in the Western region also mentioned:

“I want to get married in the future. It is something I really want to do. Because I am a Christian, I would not want to give birth before I marry. My Christian doctrines frown on that. So I would want to marry and have four children. Two boys and two girls” (FGD male participant, Western).

In terms of how the youth envisaged their marriages in the future, the results show that most of the youth (73.7%) would like to get married to whoever they love. While it is commonly believed that marriage thrives on economic stability, a few (5.5%) of youth surveyed reported that they do not care about the economic background of their future partners. Likewise, a very small proportion of (1.7%) and (5%) claim they do not care about the social status and the race, religion, tribe, or language of their partners, respectively. While both young men and women envisage getting married to whoever they love, the proportion is slightly higher for the young women (76.6%) than the young men (70.7%). However, the difference is not statistically significant. Although the frequency is still relatively low, more young women (4.2%) than young men (3.5%) are more likely to have their families select partners for them. Again, a few of the young women (6.3%) and young men

(4.6%) do not care about the economic background of their future partners. Regarding place of residence, the results show that while rural and urban youth would prefer to get married to whoever they love, the proportion is slightly higher for urban youth (74.7%) than rural youth (72.1%).

Youth aspire to be close to their families.

Regarding how youth foresee their relationship with their families in the future, analysis of the data indicates that more than half of the youth (53.5%) would like to be closer to their families. At the same time, 17.6% suggested that they have an obligation to support their families in the future. When broken down by gender, nearly equal proportions of young men (53.6%) and young women (53.4%) would want to be closer to their families in the future. Interestingly, a slightly higher proportion of young women (29.6%) than young (27.5%) would prefer being distanced from their families. Conversely, more young men (18.3%) see the need to support their families in the future than their young women counterparts (17%) do. The results further indicate that a slightly higher proportion of rural youth (54.2%) would like to be closer to their families in the future than urban youth (53%). Likewise, rural youth (30.2%) are more likely to distance themselves from their families than urban youth (27.5%). Obligation to support families in the future was reported more by urban youth (19.2%) than rural youth (15.3%), and this is statistically significant at 5%.

Aspirations to contribute to communities.

As part of their socio-cultural aspirations, an overwhelming majority (62.1%) of the youth responding to the survey reported that they would like to contribute to their communities. While some youths (18.2%) are enthusiastic and suggest that their communities meant a lot to them, others (18.8%) do not envisage any responsibility to their communities in the future. There is some gender difference, with relatively more young men (65.4%) reporting that they would like to contribute to their communities in the future than their young women (54%) counterparts. And this is statistically significant at 1%. Regarding place or residence, slightly more urban youth (63%) than rural

youth (60.6%) show a greater desire to contribute to their communities in the future. While rural youth consider their communities to mean a lot more than urban youth, there is no statistical difference between these two categories of youths. It is statistically significant that urban youth (18.3%) do not envisage any responsibility to their communities compared to rural youth (18.3%).

Data gathered from the focus group discussions further highlight that some Ghana youth are keen to contribute to the progress of their families, society, and nation. This is particularly true in young women. During a focus group discussion, a young woman said:

“I want to be an evangelist and a pastor in the future. I want to preach the word of God to help save many people. I want to help my society to grow and improve the moral standards of the youth in my community and country (26-year female PWDs, Western Region)

Another young woman also emphasized:

“For me I want to be a marriage counsellor. I want to help provide people with knowledge on how they can live together as marriage couples. It is good to help people in society, so my plan is to a marriage counsellor and also help the poor and needy (24years, Female FGD participants, Ashanti Region)

Unwillingness to make decisions without guidance from spiritual institutions

Among the youth responding to the survey, nearly half (44.2%), representing the majority, reported their unwillingness to make decisions without seeking guidance from spiritual institutions. And the proportion is slightly higher for young men (45.8%) than young women (42.7%), although this difference is not statistically significant. Among those who answered in the affirmative that they would like to seek guidance from spiritual institutions in making decisions, more young women (26.2%) than young men (22.8%) indicated that this applies to them. Moreover, 20.2% of the young women and 16.1% of the young men suggested that it is highly applicable that they would not make decisions without seeking guidance from spiritual institutions. And the difference is statistically significant at 5%.

Among the rural and urban youth who responded in the affirmative, nearly equal proportion of the urban and rural youth reported that this is highly applicable (urban= 18.2%, rural=18.3%) and applicable (urban=23.7%, rural=26.0%), respectively.

Education and training aspirations

This section focuses on the educational and training aspirations of Ghanaian young men and women.

Table 15: Educational aspirations of the youth

	Gender				Residence		
	Total	Male	Female	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
Areas of interest for future education and training (%)							
Formal education	40.6	38.5	42.5	-4.0*	42.9	37.3	5.6**
Technical and vocational	27.1	24.8	29.1	-4.3*	26.8	27.5	-0.7
Technology and Information	5.3	8.1	2.7	5.4***	5.7	4.6	1.1
Traditional apprenticeship	7.0	5.3	8.6	-3.4***	6.0	8.6	-2.6**
Agro-based training	3.8	5.4	2.3	3.1***	3.0	5.0	-2.1**
Other	2.2	2.9	1.5	1.4**	2.6	1.5	1.1
None	14.0	15.0	13.2	1.8	13.0	15.6	-2.6
Frequency	1,639	781	858		984	655	
Highest level of education desired by those who prefer formal education (%)							
Primary	0.3	0.7	0.0	0.7	0.5	0.0	0.5
JSS/JHS	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.1	0.7	0.4	0.3
SSS/SHS	6.2	5.7	6.6	-0.9	4.7	8.6	-3.9**
Diploma	9.6	8.3	10.7	-2.4	10.0	9.0	0.9
First Degree	32.4	29.6	34.8	-5.2	32.0	33.2	-1.2
Masters	32.3	37.2	28.2	9.0**	31.8	33.2	-1.4
PhD	18.6	17.9	19.2	-1.3	20.4	15.6	4.8
Frequency	666	301	365		422	244	

Note: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 15 presents the results on the educational aspirations of the youth. Most (40.6%) of the youth are interested in attaining formal education and training. Moreover, nearly a third (27.1%) also highlighted their interest in attaining technical and vocational skills in the future. Technology and information training and traditional apprenticeship recorded 5.3% and 7%, respectively, while a few youth surveyed (3.8%) suggested agro-based training. In a sense, this highlights the limited interest of the youth in pursuing agro-based livelihoods in the future. While the frequency is relatively low, some youth (14%) indicated no interest in future education and training.

Gender differences emerged in the educational aspirations of the youth. While both young men and women suggested formal education as a key priority area in their aspirations, more young women (42.5%) than young men (38.5%) are more likely to seek formal education. Again, more young women (29.1%) are likely to seek technical and vocational skills in the future than young men (24.8%). Fur-

thermore, more young women (8.6%) than young women (5.3%) are likely to seek traditional apprenticeship. However, regarding technology and information training and agro-based training, slightly more young men (8.1%, 5.4%) than women (2.7% and 2.3%) would like to seek training, respectively.

Between rural and urban dwellers, urban youth showed higher interest in attaining formal education in the future than rural youth, which is statistically significant at 5%. The results show that a slightly higher proportion of urban youth have greater interest in pursuing technical and vocational training (27.5%) than rural youth (26.8%). Interest in technology and information training is reported more by urban youth (5.7%) than rural youth (4.6%). Rural youth (8.6%) are more interested in training in traditional apprenticeship than urban youth (6%).

Of those who desired formal education in the future, 32.4% and 32.3% had already attained first and master's degrees, respectively. More young women (34.8%) than young men (29.6%) are interested in pursuing first degrees. The results also reveal that it is statistically significant at 5% that more young men (37.2%) than young women (28.2%) would like to attain a master's degree. However, a slightly higher proportion of young women (19.2%) would like to pursue a PhD Degree than their male counterparts (17.9%). In terms of analysis by place, the survey results show that many rural and urban youth would like to pursue a first degree (urban=32%, rural=33.2%) and master's degree (urban=31.8%, rural=33.2%) respectively.

Civic Responsibility Aspiration

This section focuses on young men's and women's civic aspirations for the future.

Table 16: Statement that best defines youth's civic aspiration in the near future

	Gender				Residence		
	Total	Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
I would like to take on a leadership position in national or local politics	12.0	15.0	9.2	5.8***	11.4	12.8	-1.4
I would like to be a responsible citizen fulfilling my obligations and country	56.4	56.5	56.3	0.2	58.0	53.9	4.1*
As an accountable citizen, I would like live within the moral and legal frameworks taking responsibility for my actions	18.8	15.5	21.8	-6.3***	18.0	20.0	-2.0
I would like to actively participate in national and local development and social activities	9.6	9.7	9.4	0.3	9.6	9.6	-0.1
Other	3.3	3.3	3.3	0.1	3.1	3.7	-0.6

Note: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 16 presents information on the civic aspirations of the youth surveyed. A greater proportion of the youth (56.4%) responding to the survey indicated that they would like to be responsible citizens and fulfil civic obligations. This is true for both young men and young women, with more than half of each young man (56.5%) and young woman (56.3%) affirming the view that they want to be responsible citizens and fulfil civic obligations in the future. Likewise, a greater share of urban and rural youth indicated the same aspiration, but the proportion of urban youth (58%) who affirmed this is slightly higher than that of rural youth (53.9%). While the frequency is relatively low, more young men (15%) than young

women (9.2%) reported that they would like to take on leadership positions in national or local politics, which is statistically significant at 1%.

Moreover, a slightly higher proportion (12.8%) of rural youth would take on leadership positions in national or local politics than urban youth (11.4%). Also, more rural youth (20%) asserted that as accountable citizens, they would like to live within the moral and legal frameworks taking responsibility for their actions than urban youth (18%). Equal percentages (9.6% each) of rural and urban youth confirmed that they would like to participate actively in national and local development and social activities. The results further show a slight difference between young men (9.7%) and young women (9.4%) who would like to participate actively in national and local development and social activities.

Migration Aspiration

Migration, especially among the younger population, remains a topical issue in Africa. Our study explored the aspirations of the youth regarding migration.

Table 17: Migration aspirations of youth

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
Where do you like to live in five years' time?							
Move to a bigger city in my own country	29.5	27.7	31.2	-3.5	26.7	33.7	-7.0***
Return to my village, rural area	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.1	0.6	1.2	-0.6
Stay where I am currently living	14.0	11.4	16.4	5.0***	14.4	13.4	1.0
Other African countries	3.2	4.0	2.6	1.4	3.2	3.4	-0.2
Outside Africa	46.6	50.6	43.0	7.6***	49.2	42.7	6.5**
I do not know	3.7	3.5	4.0	-0.5	3.7	3.8	-0.2
Move to the next better estate within the city am currently living in	2.0	2.1	2.0	0.1	2.2	1.7	0.6
Frequency	1,639	781	858		984	655	
Why would like to travel to the desired areas?							
To find employment	71.4	74.9	67.9	7.0***	68.0	76.4	-8.4***
As tourist	3.3	2.3	4.3	-2.0**	3.5	3.0	0.5
For marriage	3.4	2.0	4.8	-2.9***	3.6	3.1	0.5
To join my family	4.5	4.1	5.0	-0.9	4.7	4.2	0.5
Other	6.3	6.6	6.0	0.6	6.8	5.5	1.3
Education	11.1	10.2	12.0	-1.8	13.4	7.8	5.7***
Frequency	1,348	665	683		806	542	
Do you foresee potential constraint to your move to where you want live in the future?							
Yes	61.5	59.8	63.2	-3.4	61.5	61.6	-0.1
No	38.5	40.2	36.8	3.4	38.5	38.4	0.1
Frequency	1,409	692	717		842	567	
Topmost constraint to realizing migration decision							
Lack of financial resources	67.9	69.6	66.4	3.2	68.0	67.9	0.1

The difficulty of being separated from family	10.4	9.2	11.5	-2.3	10.6	10.0	0.6
Not knowing anyone to help me	13.6	14.5	12.8	1.7	12.5	15.2	-2.7
Other Specify	8.1	6.8	9.3	-2.5	8.9	6.9	2.0
Frequency	867	414	453		518	349	

Note: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Source: Field data, 2022

Data analysis revealed that nearly half of the youth responding to the survey (46.6%) would like to live outside of Africa in the next five years (see Table 17). While many young men and women indicated that they would like to live outside Africa in the next five years, the proportion of those who dreamed of this is slightly higher for the young men (50.6%) than the young women (43%). And this difference is statistically significant at 1%. It is also striking that many rural and urban youth aspire or desire to live outside of Africa in the next five years, and the proportion is higher for urban youth (49.2%) than rural youth (42.7%). The difference is statistically significant at a 5% confidence level. This confirms the view in public discourse concerning the desires of today's youth who leave the shores of Ghana in search of opportunities elsewhere in advanced economies. Again, nearly a third (29.5%) of all the youth responding to the survey reported that they would like to move to a bigger city in Ghana in the next five years. And the proportion is slightly higher for the young women (31.2%) than the young men (27.7%). Unsurprisingly, the proportion of rural youth (33.7%) who aspire to move to a bigger city within Ghana is slightly higher than that of urban youth (26.7%). The difference is statistically significant at 1%.

Unsurprisingly, the need to find employment is dominant in the responses of both young men and women and urban and rural youth who dreamed of pursuing migration in the next five years. The results show that an overwhelming majority of young men (74.9%) and young women (67.9%) reported seeking or finding employment as the key reason for their future migration aspirations. The difference between young men and young women is statistically significant at 1%. Similarly, a greater share of the urban youth (68%) and a higher proportion of the rural youth (76.4%) reported a desire to find employment as the key motivation for their future migration aspirations. And this difference is statistically significant at 1%. This finding reinforces the chronic lack of employment oppor-

tunities for young people in Ghana, which seems to have informed the intentions of the youth to migrate. Education is the second most reported reason why young men and women and rural and urban youth would pursue migration in the next five years. The proportion of young men and women and rural and urban youth who reported travelling as a tourist, to join their families or for marriage purposes is less than 10%.

The theme of migration aspirations was also prominently featured in the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions. The youth we worked with suggested that the current economic hardships and challenges with finding employment are common issues many young men and women face in Ghana. Therefore, many interviewees highlighted their desire to move elsewhere to seek better employment opportunities. However, while both young men and women desire to migrate in the future, the qualitative findings show that this is more common among young men. A 25-year-old young man who had just completed his first degree and was actively looking for a job at the time of the fieldwork revealed that the economic situation of high cost of living and no jobs had made him move out of Ghana in search of better life opportunities elsewhere.

“for me my aspiration is to leave the country. Yes, that’s it. With this kind of economy and living situation we are now facing in Ghana, it is difficult to even find jobs” (Male FGD Participant, Ashanti Region).

Others also recounted their aspirations to move out of Ghana as follows:

For me, I wish to travel outside the country. It’s been my dream since childhood. The last time I went to the passport office, I realized I was not the only person with that dream. I have other plans which I wish to execute here before the travel (Female, 18years).

I am a trained nurse, so I want to be employed

in that profession. I want to travel to UK to go and work as a midwife nurse and also do my degree. I go to the hospital to help the hospital so that that I don't forget what I have been taught. I also get payment in the form of allowance for my upkeep (Female, 22years)

Strikingly, a young man who participated in one of the focus group discussions in a rural community in the Ashanti region reported that he is very much aware that many of the youth in his community aspire to leave Ghana. During the discussions, there were divergent views about what possibly could account for the desires of many youths wanting to migrate outside of Ghana. While some participants in the group discussion attributed this to the COVID-19 pandemic, the young man held a different view, suggesting that poor governance has fueled the desires of many youths to leave Ghana. During the discussion, he professed:

“I think it's true. For me, most of the youth will really want to travel. Like, a lot of us will want to go. ... I don't side with the fact that it is being attributed to COVID-19. Because COVID was a global pandemic. You go to US, UK schools and then they have opened up a new structure welcoming student. So, why can't we do as a nation? So possibly for us our issue is that we all want to run away because of poor governance. Our leaders have failed us a lot. There are no opportunities for the youth. So, for me it is poor governance and not necessarily really COVID-19” (Male FGD Participant, Ashanti Region).

Data collected through the survey shows that many young men (59.8%) and women (63.2%) foresee potential constraints to moving to where they envisage living. A similar trend can be observed also for the rural (61.5%) and urban youth (59.8%). The most reported barrier for both young men (69.6%) and women (66.4%), as well as the urban (68%) and rural youth (67.9%) is financial resources needed to pursue future migration aspirations. A few of the young men and women, as well as rural and urban youth, potentially have difficulty being separated from their families and not knowing anyone to offer help to them as key constraints to realizing their migration aspirations (see table 17)

Youth perspective on dignified and fulfilling job

Understanding what the youth consider dignified and fulfilling jobs will help formulate comprehensive employment policies that can offer opportunities for them to gain dignified and fulfilling jobs that meet young people's expectations. This section presents the findings on young men's and women's perspectives of dignified and fulfilling jobs. Results from the quantitative survey indicate that the top three indicators of a dignified and fulfilling job are appropriate pay, job security and respect.

Table 18: Youth's definition of a dignified and fulfilling job

		Total	Male	Female	Diff.
A	A job where employers respect young people	41.6	43.4	40.0	3.4
B	A job that will not expose you to risk or harm	25.3	26.1	24.5	1.6
C	Where youth are appropriately paid	56.7	57.1	56.3	0.8
D	A job that society does not frown on	23.9	23.0	24.6	-1.5
E	A secured job	49.8	51.1	48.7	2.4
F	A job where mothers can work conveniently	8.7	4.6	12.5	7.8***
G	A job where you are not treated based on your gender	12.0	9.2	14.5	-5.2***
H	A job that respects your ethnicity and religion	14.8	14.5	15.2	-0.7
I	A job where disadvantaged people can work confidently	5.0	5.1	4.9	0.2
J	Other Definitions (Specify)	3.5	3.8	3.2	0.6
	Total	1,639	781	858	

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 18 shows that the most common indicator of dignified and fulfilling jobs among women and young men is jobs in which the youth are paid appropriately. This accounted for more than half of the responses (56.7%) of the total youth surveyed. However, there is a slight difference between young men (57.1%) and young women (56.3%) who reported appropriate pay as a marker of a dignified and fulfilling job, although this difference is not statistically significant. Moreover, a good number of the youth surveyed (49.8%) of the youth surveyed also reported that dignified and fulfilling work is that which is secured. While more young men (51.1%) than young women (48.7%) saw a dignified and fulfilling job as a secured job, this difference is not statistically significant. An appreciable number of the youth (41.6%) of all the youth surveyed as “a job where employer respect young people”, with no statistically significant difference in the counts of young women and young men (See Table 18). While the frequency is relatively low, at one per cent significant level, there are observed a statistically significant difference between the young women and men who reported “a job where you are not treated based on your gender” (f=14.5%, m=9.2%), and a “a job where mothers can work conveniently” (f=12.5%, m=4.6%) as a marker of dignified and fulfilling work

Data gathered from the interviews and focus group discussions further highlight the emphasis on appropriate pay and job security as a key markers of dignified and fulfilling work. While the young men and women did not use the term appropriate pay or respect in their discussions of dignified and fulfilling work, they suggested jobs or employment that provide them with enough money or allow them to accumulate much-needed wealth (money) and are equally respected. A female participant interviewed in rural northern Ghana, for instance, said:

For me based on the explanation you have given, dignified and fulfilling work is one that gives you good money to cater for yourself. It is when you are working, and the work gives you good money to cater for yourself and family (Young Female, IDI, Northern region)

Another young man interviewed in an urban community in the Bono East region also stressed:

For me it is about a job where you get enough money and also the people that you work give you all the respect you deserve whether you are young or old, male or female (Young male, IDI Bono East region)

Some interviewees, especially young men and women in rural areas, placed high importance on jobs that offer protection for individuals as fulfilling and dignified. Some narrated that in addition to good pay and respect, any job that provides social protection, where there is adequate provision to cater for risks or accidents in case they happen, could be classified as dignified and fulfilling, as seen below in the account of one young man interviewed:

I want to add that when we talk about dignified and fulfilling work, we also need to include work that can provide you with protection for your life. If you are working and you injure on the job, or is there protection to cover for your life? Life is not all about money. First of all, your health and life is important and there is a need to protect your life from all forms of risks (Young male, FGD, Western Region)

In contrast, some young men and women interviewed in urban areas, especially in Greater Accra and Ashanti Regions, spoke about jobs that offer opportunities for representation and equal treatment of all workers no matter the gender or class, as well as have their voices heard in decision-making at the workplace as what they would consider as dignified and fulfilling.

Furthermore, a few of the youth also perceived dignified and fulfilling work from the perspective of jobs that one is passionate about and can allow one to contribute to societal growth. Others also emphasized jobs that challenge one to do better to bring out one's potential. That dignified and fulfilling work is that which allows an individual to exhibit a strong sense of passion and to make an important contribution to society by allowing the individual to make use of his or her knowledge and skills learnt:

When we are talking about dignified work, I see it as any work that you have passion for, have the skill for, and are educated for that work. And any work that you do, and at the end of the day, it does not harm or hurt anybody or the society at large, for me, I see it as a dignified work.

Impact of COVID-19 on Youth Aspirations

This section presents the results of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the aspirations of young men and women in Ghana. Table 19 summarizes the results on the impact of COVID-19 on the youth surveyed.

Table 19: Impact of COVID-19 on youth aspirations for the future and business

	Gender				Residence		
	Total	Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
COVID-19 has impacted any aspect of aspirations (%)	39.8	39.6	40.1	-0.5	39	41.1	-2.1
Frequency (n)	1,639	781	858		984	655	
Aspects of aspirations affected by COVID-19 (%)							
Economic aspect- employment/business	61.1	61.2	61	0.2	59.6	63.2	-3.6
Socio-cultural aspects- family, marriage, etc.	16.1	13.9	18	-4.1	15.9	16.4	-0.5
Education and training	45.6	45	46.2	-1.2	49	40.9	8.1**
Civic responsibility	4.4	3.9	4.9	-1.0	4.2	4.8	-0.6
Migration intentions	10.3	11.3	9.3	2.0	10.4	10	0.4
Frequency (n)	653	309	344		384	269	
Impact of COVID-19 businesses (%)							

I have closed my business completely	11.8	9.1	14.1	-5.0*	11.6	11.9	-0.3
I lost income significantly	45.5	44.8	46.1	-1.3	43.4	48.6	-5.2
I lost opportunities and customers	39.4	37.3	41.2	-3.9	39.3	39.4	-0.1
My business options were reduced	23.3	23.8	22.9	0.9	25.8	19.7	6.1
My business was at its best-making more money	3	2.8	3.2	-0.4	3.1	2.8	0.3
My business options expanded	2.2	0.8	3.5	-2.7**	2.8	1.4	1.4
I diversified my businesses-doing a different business	2.8	2.8	2.8	0.0	3.8	1.4	2.4*
No effect at all	35.8	36.9	34.9	2.0	36.2	35.3	0.9
Other	1.7	2	1.4	0.6	2.5	0.5	2*
Frequency (n)	536	252	284		318	218	

Source: Field data, 2022

Table 20 reports the results of a logistic regression which explores gendered variation of the effect of COVID-19 on youth aspiration. The results in column 1 are for whether COVID has impacted any aspect of aspirations for the future. Those in Columns 2–6 are for the different aspects of aspirations impacted by COVID-19.

Table 20: Logistic regression of the drivers of COVID-19's impact on youth aspirations for the future

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Any aspect of aspiration for the future	Economic aspects	Socio-Cultural	Education & training	Civic responsibility	Migration intentions
Respondent is a female	1.040 (0.377)	0.851 (-0.821)	1.377 (1.392)	1.340 (1.439)	1.604 (1.081)	0.883 (-0.459)
Currently employed/running a business	1.453*** (3.261)	4.908*** (7.740)	3.435*** (4.389)	0.217*** (-7.110)	3.923*** (2.633)	1.181 (0.549)
Educational level (Ref: No formal education)						
Primary	1.183 (0.629)	0.444 (-1.183)	10.100** (2.201)	3.328 (1.495)	0.088*** (-2.653)	0.542 (-0.971)
Secondary	1.023 (0.086)	0.363 (-1.462)	8.534** (2.023)	4.992** (1.987)	0.074*** (-2.768)	0.509 (-1.040)
Diploma	0.994 (-0.018)	0.071*** (-3.406)	5.138 (1.395)	42.142*** (4.191)	0.176 (-1.516)	1.115 (0.141)
First Degree/Bachelors	1.595	0.123***	10.884**	16.441***	0.128*	0.498

	(1.489)	(-2.819)	(2.155)	(3.255)	(-1.836)	(-0.909)
Post-graduate	7.118*	0.156	19.766*	8.354	2.015	9.842**
	(1.733)	(-1.492)	(1.876)	(1.596)	(0.469)	(2.013)
Certification	1.979	2.466		1.214		1.737
	(1.196)	(0.672)		(0.151)		(0.546)
Resident in a rural area	1.068	1.050	1.053	0.773	1.081	0.921
	(0.617)	(0.245)	(0.227)	(-1.252)	(0.186)	(-0.298)
Aged 25-35 years	1.347**	3.576***	0.489***	0.187***	0.196***	0.615
	(2.311)	(5.122)	(-2.632)	(-6.728)	(-3.219)	(-1.469)
Married/ Cohabiting	1.166	1.877***	2.613***	0.407***	2.388*	1.151
	(1.184)	(2.589)	(3.679)	(-3.719)	(1.877)	(0.429)

Religion (reference: other)

Christianity	0.572	0.104**	0.662	6.188**	0.059***	0.279**
	(-1.429)	(-2.095)	(-0.578)	(2.210)	(-3.779)	(-2.044)
Islam	0.565	0.085**	0.453	5.382**	0.037***	0.188**
	(-1.423)	(-2.239)	(-1.053)	(1.983)	(-3.698)	(-2.418)
Log-likelihood	-1074.65	-328.036	-260.983	-310.705	-99.782	-207.108
LR χ^2	54.7***	216.7***	50.79***	278***	34.96***	17.81
Pseudo R ²	0.025	0.248	0.089	0.309	0.149	0.041
Number of observations	1639	653	644	653	623	653

The coefficients are odd ratios; z statistics in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The dependent variables are binary responses equal to 1 if a respondent indicated that COVID-19 has affected the different aspects of aspirations for the future. The reference categories are male (for female); No (for currently in employment or running own business); no formal education (for educational level); urban (for residence in a rural area); Aged 15-24 years (for aged 25-35 years); unmarried (for married/cohabitating); and other (for religion).

Economic impacts

Overall, the results show that out of the sample of 1639 youth responding to the survey, a good proportion (39.8%) mentioned that COVID-19 has impacted their aspirations. Nearly the same proportion of young men (39.6%) and young women (40.1%) reported that covid-19 has impacted their future aspirations. An equal proportion of

rural (41.1%) and urban youth (39%) also reported the impact of COVID-19 on their aspirations. When asked about the aspect of aspirations that COVID-19 has impacted, it is evident that a greater share of both young men (61.2%) and young women (61%) said that it is their economic aspect (employment/business) that has been affected. A significant proportion of young men (45%) and women (46.2%) also mentioned that COVID-19 affected their education and training aspirations.

In the same vein, a greater share of rural (63.2%) and urban (59.2%) youth reported that COVID-19 has affected the economic aspect (employment and business) of their aspirations. It is also evident that COVID-19 has affected the education and training aspirations of a good number of urban (49%) and rural (40.9%) youth, and the difference between the impact on urban and rural youth is statistically significant at a 5% confidence level. Regarding the aspect of business/employment that COVID-19 has impacted, an analysis of

the data shows that both young men (44.8%) and young women (46.1%) reported losing income significantly. Other young men and women also reported that COVID-19 made them lose opportunities and customers (m=37.3%, f=41.2%) and reduce business options (m=23.8%, f=22.9%). In terms of rural and urban dynamics, both rural and urban youth businesses/employment were affected by covid-19. Many rural and urban youth reported that COVID-19 made them lose income significantly (urban=43.4%, rural=48.6%), lost opportunities and customers (urban=39.3%, rural=39.4%) as well as had their business options reduced (urban=25.8%, rural=19.7%)

The results show that the odds of COVID-19 impacting any aspect of youth aspiration are higher for young women than men, especially for socio-cultural, education and training, and civic responsibility aspirations. However, relative to young men, COVID-19's impact on young women's aspirations is not statistically significant, implying that young men's and women's aspirations are affected alike. This shows no statistical evidence of gender-differentiated impacts of COVID-19 on youth aspirations.

However, it is found that irrespective of gender, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly affected the aspirations of the youth who are currently in employment or operating their own businesses. The results show that, compared to the unemployed youth, those engaged in any economic activity are significantly associated with a 45.3% increase in the odds of their aspirations being impacted by the pandemic. Specifically, their economic aspirations – regarding employment and business – are the worst impacted by the pandemic, with about 390.8% higher odds of being impacted than the unemployed youth. This finding aligns with reality because the containment measures imposed by the government (including lockdown; closure of borders, markets, schools, and places of worship; and bans on large gatherings) following the outbreak of the coronavirus in Ghana resulted in business closures job losses, and reduced income and profitability as economic activities slowed or came to a standstill.

Similarly, the theme of COVID-19 and its impact on business closure and loss of business capital and savings was featured prominently in the interviews and focus group discussions. Many of the young men and women who participated in

the focus group discussions and interviews noted that the COVID-19 crisis led to many young people running their businesses being unemployed. This was common for both young men and women who were self-employed or had established their own businesses mostly in the informal economy. Young men and women reported losing their accumulated savings and business capital, and their businesses completely stopped. While some young men and women recovered, others noted that they could not do so, leading to untold financial hardships. The hardship meant that young women and men who were owners of businesses resorted to their business capital and savings for upkeep, and raising the capital again became difficult. A young man interviewed in the northern region, for instance, stated:

"I spent all the capital I accumulated from my business during the Covid era. Now my business also collapses because sales had gone down. If that money had been there, I would have purchased a small container and expanded my business. In fact, I lost everything about my business" (IDI, male respondent, Northern region).

Another young man who participated in one of the focus group discussions in a community in Accra narrated:

"The challenges were "too much" just as the young men are breadwinners some young women too have businesses, they operate but because of the covid19 we all couldn't do our work so between us and them the challenges were similar" (Male FDG participant, Greater Accra)

Others noted as follows:

"Most businesses and shops were closed, and people could not run their businesses. I had this small shop where I sell provisions [groceries]. I had to close it down because there were no sales. I Could not do anything (FGD Participant, Young woman, Upper West).

"In the aspect of business, because of COVID, those we purchase from, as a businessman, they could not travel to go and get the products we needed at the time, and even when they were able to purchase the things, they were

not as voluminous as normally would be the case. So because of that our businesses suffered somehow. And if you wanted to go to Kumasi to get the products, you had to find ways and means to get them. So that affected our businesses slightly during the COVID, because as it was said that we were not in normal times, you could not do things your way or as you were used to.” (IDI, male respondent, Greater Accra region)

Relatedly, the issue of the COVID-19 crisis and its impacts on the already dire unemployment situation among young people emerged strongly from the qualitative study. For some young men and women, especially those who were employed in the private sector, there was a consensus among the interviewees that the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in some youth being laid off from work. In contrast, those who were not employed could not secure job opportunities due to COVID-19-inspired legislation, such as lockdowns and restrictions on movement. Both young men and women had their fair share of the impact of the pandemic on their inability to secure jobs or employment.

“The economic downturn caused by the pandemic has led to a significant increase in youth unemployment, which has affected young people’s job prospects and their ability to secure stable employment in the future. I can tell you that many young people have been laid off by their employers, especially in the private sector. It is not easy because when you don’t have a job you can’t survive (IDI, female respondent, Ashanti region).

Another young man who participated in the focus group discussion noted:

The value of business capital has reduced. During the COVID, low market activities and restrictions made young businesswomen and men use their capital for upkeep. After COVID ended, the capital was exhausted, making it difficult for business owners to bounce back.” (FGD participant, PWD, Upper West Region)

For some youth, especially those in rural areas who are farmers, COVID-19 has resulted in shortages in the supply of farm inputs needed to facilitate agricultural production. They mentioned the shortage of fertilizers due to the closure of borders

and movement restrictions. This affected the possibility of having a good harvest and reap the associated income. Young men and women farmers, especially in the Bono and Northern regions, were quick to note that COVID-19 and the associated lockdowns and restrictions on travel had meant that input dealers who typically bring farm input to their localities for sale could not do so. Likewise, there were also reported cases of young farmers being unable to sell their harvested produce. This was attributed mainly to the fact that market women and aggregators who visit their communities to purchase farm produce during harvesting season could also not do. As a result, farmers, including the young farmers, reported perceived low yields and incomes during the pandemic period. A young female farmer had this to say during the interview:

“the covid-19 affected the supply of fertilizer for farming and so production was low hence we are unable to afford enough food to eat to our satisfaction” (IDI, female respondent, Dugyen, Northern Region).

Another young man who participated in one of the FGDs narrated:

“It has affected the farming a little there was a difficulty bringing in fertilizer to the community... the covid19 affected the supply of fertilizer for farming and so production was low hence we are unable to afford enough food to eat to our satisfaction” (FGD Participants, PWD, Northern).

In contrast, young men working as artisans in urban areas also reported that business was slow because they could not obtain the needed materials. This also affected their productivity, income, and provision for their families. A young artisan interviewed in Accra, for instance, noted:

“As a carpenter, the only thing is there were shortage in “materials”, that I needed for my work. At that time, you may need something, and you will go to buy and will not get it because the “store” owner will just lock up and leave. This meant I could not work to get money to care for my family (Male FGD participant, Greater Accra).

Some interviewees noted that young men rather than young women suffered the economic burden of COVID-19 owing to gender norms and soci-

etal construction of young men as breadwinners of their families. The construction of the young men as breadwinners of their families places responsibility on them to cater to their families' socio-economic needs. However, the lockdown and business closure meant many young men could not work to make money to fulfil their responsibilities. This, according to some interviewees, resulted in psychological stress for some young men. This is how a young man who participated in one of the focus group discussions puts it:

“a lot of men were traumatized because the dependent male is not allowed to go and work. Creating psychological problem and stress” (Male FGD participant, Ashanti region).

A young woman who also participated in one of the focus groups also reiterated:

“Young men suffered more because, since they were tagged as the energetic one in the family, they were the ones working to feed home. Unfortunately, the pandemic hit the country and they were forced to closed down their businesses and since most of the men are the breadwinners of their families, they spent all their monies on their family's basic needs. While we were still under lockdown, they were really struggling to make ends meet” (female FGD participant, Ashanti region).

Others further emphasized the point that young men suffered more from the impacts of COVID-19 as follows:

“I would say the men suffered the most. For example, men are noted to take care of the homes, for a 22-year man in a typical home, he takes care of his parents, and siblings including his sisters. You know when women are not taken care of at homes, they may resort to promiscuous behaviors. So, I would say, the men suffered the most.” (IDI, female respondent, Bono region)

“Hmmm[sighs]..... I would say, the young men suffered the most. As a young man, you may have a partner/girlfriend, the onus lies on you, to take care of her, especially during these hard times. You may even lose your partner since you are unable to work and take care of her. I lost mine; It was terrible to be a young man.” (IDI, male respondent, Upper West region)

“Yes, you know in our cultural setting, men are to fend for their families, but since during that period, there were restrictions, and most young men suffered, they could not work to make money to cater for themselves” (IDI, female respondent, Ashanti region)

Impact of COVID-19 on other aspirations of young people

COVID-19 follows the impact on economic aspirations impacts their civic responsibility aspirations (292.3%), and socio-cultural aspirations (243.5%). However, the odds of COVID-19 affecting education and training aspirations are 78.3% lower for the youth employed or operating their own business than their counterparts who are not currently economically engaged. This can be attributed to the fact that, relative to unemployed youth, those who are economically active have lower educational and training aspirations as they are more likely to be preoccupied with their work or businesses. All these odd ratios are statistically significant at a 1% level, indicating that the dampening effects of COVID-19 on the economic, socio-cultural and civic responsibility aspects of aspirations are significantly higher for the employed youth than the unemployed youth. Albeit statistically insignificant, the migration intentions of the employed youth were also affected by the pandemic (18.1%) more than the unemployed youth.

Furthermore, the results reveal that, relative to those with no formal education, the youth who have any formal education (except diploma holders) have higher odds of being impacted by COVID-19 in terms of their aspirations for the future. The overall impact of COVID-19 is largest and statistically significant for the youth with post-graduate education. However, at the disaggregated level, it is found that the socio-cultural aspirations of those with primary, secondary, first degree/bachelor's and post-graduate education are significantly affected by the pandemic more than those without formal education. Concerning educational and training aspirations, the odds of being impacted by COVID-19 are highest for the youth with diploma education (4114.2%), followed by those with first degree/bachelor (1544.1%) and secondary (399.2%). These results reflect the significant disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education sector and, particularly, the educational prospects of young people follow-

ing almost a year-long school closure with limited access to educational content through alternative means (i.e., online platforms, TV, and radio). In contrast, reaching any level of formal education is associated with lower odds of COVID-19 impacting their economic, civic responsibility and migration aspirations than without formal education.

In addition, the results show no significant differences in the impact of COVID-19 on the aspirations of young people in rural areas and those resident in urban localities. However, the aspirations of older youth (aged 25-35 years) who are most likely to be employed or running their own business are shown to be significantly more impacted by the pandemic and its restrictive measures than the younger youth (aged 15-24 years). In contrast, the latter's socio-cultural, educational and civic aspirations are shown to be more significantly affected by COVID-19 than those of the former. Moreover, among the youth who are either married or cohabitating, the results show that their economic/business, socio-cultural and civic responsibility aspirations are significantly associated with higher odds of being impacted by the pandemic than the unmarried youth. These may be because the employment or businesses of most married youth may have been significantly impacted by the COVID-related measures in business closures, lost income/profitability, and reduced patronage (customers). The resultant hardships may have strained marriages and social relations significantly, dampening their socio-cultural and civic responsibility aspirations. The educational aspirations of the unmarried youth are, however, significantly associated with being more impacted by the pandemic than their married counterparts. This is possibly because most unmarried youth were in school and had reduced access to education due to the pandemic-induced school closures.

Finally, compared to another religious category, Christian and Islamic youth are shown to be associated with lower odds of being impacted by COVID-19 across all aspects of aspirations, except education and training. Noticeably, their economic, civic responsibility and migration aspirations are significantly less impacted by the pandemic, probably because of their faith-based optimism amidst the COVID-19 crisis. However, their educational and training aspirations were significantly more impaired by the pandemic than non-Christian and non-Muslim youth.

In effect, the quantitative results of the COVID-19 pandemic had heterogeneous impacts on different aspects of youth aspirations in Ghana. It was found that the pandemic significantly impaired the economic aspirations of the economically active youth aged 25-35 years who are married or cohabitating. The odds of sociocultural aspirations being dampened by the pandemic are also significantly high for youth who are employed/running their businesses, have formal education, and are married or cohabitating. The educational and training aspirations of the youth who obtained or at any post-primary level of education and are affiliated with the major religions in Ghana are found to be significantly injured by the COVID-19 crisis. The deleterious impacts of the pandemic on aspirations related to civic responsibility are found to be significant among the youth who are working and married/cohabitating. The migration intentions of the youth remain largely unscathed by the pandemic, except among the youth who obtained or are at the post-graduate level of education.

Impact of COVID-19 on Young peoples' Education and Training

Findings from the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions further point to the impact of COVID-19 on the educational pursuit of young men and women. For the young women and men who were in school, the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated closure of schools and lockdown had a heavy toll on their learning and academic performance and increased the length of time they were supposed to have spent in school. For example, some young men and women reported how COVID-19 and its inspired legislation of lockdown and school closures resulted in delays in the duration in which they were supposed to complete their education.

“As I mentioned earlier, I attained my degree in four years instead of two years top up due to the pandemic.” (IDI, male respondent, Upper West region)

Another young woman shared her ordeal regarding the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on her education as follows:

We all faced challenges. The pandemic brought fear, slowed down businesses, and delayed academics. During the lockdown, I was pursuing my top up degree at University

of Cape Coast, which took four years instead of two years. It was boring and incurred extra cost, taking into consideration my transportation from whom to tamale classes for the extra two years.

A participant in one of the focus group discussions noted:

Again, there are some examinations that we had to skip, and so some students who are supposed to be moving to class five are not allowed to do so, which delays our education. We the students they adopted the online form of teaching but because we couldn't afford it, we couldn't join and that has affected us” (FGD Participant, PWD, Northern Region)

Others were quick to point out that the closure of schools meant that they had to stay at home for extended periods, making them forget what they had learnt at school. This was common for both young men and women in rural and urban areas. They bemoaned how they had forgotten everything they had learnt in school prior to COVID-19 and school closure, which meant that they struggled to get back into the mood of learning and catching up with their academics to the extent that one young woman interviewed reported that she could not adjust very well with her studies, and this made her fail her examination following reopening of schools. Other youth also narrated:

“I think the covid disrupted my learning because as we stayed at home for a long time, I could not study at home and made me forget a lot of the things we learnt.” (IDI, male respondent, Western region).

Others, especially university students, reported that COVID-19 made higher educational institutions resort to online learning platforms. However, some young men and women could not easily follow this. Our analysis of the interview shows that this situation was more common for young men and women who resided in rural areas where access to digital infrastructure and internet connectivity is poor. The poor connectivity meant rural young men and women could not follow or join online teaching and learning sessions. Some youth reported that the government introduced e-learning platforms and delivery of lessons via national televisions for basic and secondary school students. This was done to allow students to continue

to engage with learning. However, some interviewees noted that young men and women, especially those in rural areas, could not follow these lessons due to internet connectivity challenges and lack of televisions in their homes. A young man who was interviewed, for instance, said:

“During the pandemic, most of our schools closed, and people were not benefiting from it again. At a point in time, the government introduced E- Learning as a mode of intervention but due to network barriers, not everyone could benefit from it as they would have if schools were in session.” (IDI, Male respondent, Kparesaga, Upper West region).

During the pandemic, it affected my academics because while my colleagues subscribed to the TV education programme my parents could not afford to do the subscription for me. And they didn't allow me to use their mobile phone too. So it affected my academics. When school resumed I forgot a lot of the things that we were taught. Their parents didn't give me money as they used to give me, they always cook but money for my other needs didn't get because my mum's provision shop was closed and after months the goods expired (FGD, Young woman, Northern Region)

Submission of assignments was a major challenge faced by rural young men and women whose schools managed to revert to online teaching and learning. Some rural youth across the country narrated the educational challenges they faced because of poor or no internet connectivity as follows:

“Network issues was a major challenge and although I did not experience it much, some friends of mine said otherwise. The submission of assignments as well as the checking of results became complicated at some point due to the aforesaid challenge.” (IDI, female respondent, Difa, Northern region)

“Yeah, it [covid] posed some challenges academically just as I said, because sometimes you can't do all the work on your own, you need people around, you need friends, to actually help, assist you in assignment and stuff and since we were not able to visit our friends; even though we had phones to communicate and stuff, It's not as effective

as you actually being with the person and the person pointing out mistakes, the person teaching you or you offering services to the person. Over the phone, there are things that you can't really explain, so I think that one was the challenge.” (IDI, male respondent, Old Longoro, Bono East region)

“There was a school break, and it affected my education because I was a student and wasn't working. My parents' work was affected, and it was difficult for them to give me money for my upkeep as they used to.” (IDI, female respondent, Adakope, Western region)

Some youth interviewed in the urban areas of Accra, Kumasi and Tamale who were in school noted that it is not only rural young men and women who could not follow the online learning introduced by universities during the COVID-19. They explained that while internet connectivity is not much of a problem in urban areas, switching from face-to-face learning to online was completely new and daunting. It was not easy for youth in these urban areas to quickly adjust and follow what one young woman described as ‘the new normal’ [online learning]. They had become accustomed to a face-to-face approach to learning. Others noted that they were not technology savvy, making them struggle to follow online teaching and learning.

Some young men and women interviewed also noted that they had plans to pursue apprenticeship (skill training) but had to give up those plans, especially in the context of the uncertainties brought by COVID-19. The uncertainties brought by COVID-19 had meant that young men and women could not pursue such ambitions. This is how a young man interviewed in Accra puts it:

“when it (COVID-19) came, there was a lockdown, and your thought before starting the skill learning [apprenticeship] is say by two or three years I am supposed to have completed or by three months I would have learnt a lot of things but it happened that covid-19 came and “cancelled” everything and you are not able to learn anything. That alone is what distracted our future “plans” and we are not happy about that” (FGD male participant, Greater Accra Region)

Another dimension of the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on education among the youth is

that the lockdown and school closure made some youth drop out of school. This was particularly the case for some young women. Some interviewees noted that some young women were forced to engage in transactional sexual relationships to make money to cater for themselves. However, some became pregnant during the lockdown and had to stay home to deliver and nurse their babies. And therefore, could not return to school following the reopening of schools. One young woman interviewed in a community in the Western region shared her ordeal:

“I become dumb because I wasn't going to school and some of my colleagues got pregnant”. They were suffering so they entered into relationships to get money for their upkeep but unfortunately, they got pregnant, and this made them drop out of school. On top of my mind, I can count three of my colleagues who became pregnant (IDI, female respondent, Akuradu, Bono East region)

One young woman indicated to have experienced the positive impact of COVID-19 on education. During the interview, she recounted:

The impact on my academics was positive than negative. I realized that because of the covid the final examination was done in batches which I had the opportunity to see some of the question which my colleagues from the other regions wrote which gave me the advantage to prepare in advance. During the lockdown I was part of the team that cooked for the masses which I was paid. There was also sharing of money because of the Covid. I made a tailor to sew me nose mask which I sold (Female, 22years)

Impact of covid-19 on young people's social lives

Data collected through the interviews and focus group discussions further show that COVID-19 has hugely impacted the social lives of the youth. Two key themes emerged on the social impact of COVID-19 on the lives of young men and women. These include i) inability to socialize and ii) disruption of social relationships.

Disruption to Socialization

There was a consensus among young men and women prior to COVID-19 that they used to engage in socialization where they could meet up with their friends outside of their homes to chat and have fun. However, COVID-19 and its associated lockdown and restrictions on movement and gathering meant that the youth had to change this lifestyle, which was quite challenging. Many reported missing occasions to meet up with their friends in public spaces. Nevertheless, they were also concerned about their own life, having learnt that they should stay away from large public gatherings to minimize the risk of being infected by the COVID-19 virus. A 21-year-old man who was pursuing his bachelor's degree in one of the universities in Ghana shared his experience as follows:

My life has changed. Our lives have changed before during and after the pandemic. Before the pandemic, socialization was high and there were lots of business activities. During the pandemic, social distancing changed our lifestyle and cost of living. We could not meet up with our friends to have a conversation and have some drinks. There was fear and panic, which wasn't good for us. After the COVID, there has been a change, and we are still in the process. People are getting to socialize more than they used to.

Some youth, especially young women, reported that the COVID-19 pandemic robbed them of some important markers of their identity as youth. They enjoyed meeting up in public (e.g., night-clubs) spaces with their friends in their 'nice' dresses during events such as weddings. They could not do so because of COVID-19 as follows:

"It has affected the way we socialize as students because we still have to be mindful of the social distance practices and that is not comfortable" (FGD, Young woman, Ashanti Region)

"Very boring because it restricted us from doing something that we used to. For instance, going to clubs to have fun. It was not easy. You know if you are used to doing something and all of a sudden you can't do it again it is not easy. I enjoyed going to the club where I meet my friends and people to socialize but the pandemic came and we could not do so (FGD,

Young woman, Ashanti Region).

Some explained that their identity as young women is expressed in the dresses they wear, and the admiration from young men was affected. COVID-19-inspired legislation for wearing nose masks and restrictions on movement meant that young women could express their identity through dressing and hairstyles.

Disruption to (romantic) relationships

Some of the youth interviewed also spoke of the disruption to their relationships. The restrictions on movement, lockdown, business closure and inability to secure jobs made it challenging for young people to earn income to fulfil their socially ascribed roles of providing for relations. This finding was more common among young men. There was a consensus that the inability to provide for relations led to the disruption of relationships. A 22-year-old young man interviewed, for instance, noted that the hardships brought by COVID-19 meant that he could not provide for his girlfriend's needs, which led to the disruption of their relationship. During the interview, he shared his ordeal:

Hmmm. I would say, the young men suffered the most. As a young man, you may have a partner/girlfriend, the onus lies on you, to take care of her, especially during these hard times. You may even lose your partner since you cannot work and care for her. I lost mine; It was terrible to be a young man. Young women had the most opportunities. As I have told you, I lost my girlfriend during that period. She had asked me to fill her gas, but I could not provide for her since I was not working. Young women had the chance to entertain other suitors during that period (Male, 22years)

Impact of Covid -19 on migration aspirations

Another theme generated from the qualitative study is that COVID-19 made some youth give up on their aspirations of pursuing migration. This theme manifested in two ways. First, some young men and women in rural areas who participated in the study expressed their frustrations of not being able to embark on migrating from their improv-

erished communities to urban areas of Ghana to search for employment opportunities and income. This was common for young men and women, especially those we worked with in northern Ghana. They noted that the onset of the virus and the way it was talked about in the media brought fear and panic, and many lamented that they had not been through such a period of fear ever in their lives. Again, the restrictions on movement and advice on the need to stay at home made them rethink their aspirations of moving to urban cities:

When the coronavirus came it was a time of panic because people were dying. I had planned to go to Accra and find some work to do. Some of my friends were already there and we even talk on phone and they told me to come. But when it came all those plans I stopped them because I was afraid that I would get the virus when I travel. The way they talk about it on the radio, it was scary when it came at first (Young man, Northern region)

Second, some youth, especially those in urban areas of Accra and Kumasi, reported that they had plans to migrate to Europe to seek greener pastures. This finding is more common among young men than young women. Young male interviewees noted that the economic hardships in Ghana were becoming unbearable, and therefore, they had planned to move out of Ghana. However, this plan got aborted because of the onset of the COVID-19 virus and associated legislation of lockdown, border closure and movement restrictions.

“Growing up, I have always wanted to travel outside the country to seek greener pastures. But this dream faded away when I was bombarded with misfortune tales by this covid-19. My preparation was far advanced. I got this connection man who was processing my document for me to travel. We went far but just when we were about to apply for my visa the pandemic came and they closed the borders, and this was a major blow for me personally. I could not understand why I had to go through this. For now, I have given up but may be later in life I will try it again” (IDI, male respondent, Western region).

Opportunities presented by COVID-19 for young men and women.

Despite the identified challenges brought by COVID-19 on young men’s and women’s lives, the qualitative findings also allude to some opportunities brought by the pandemic, which the youth exploited or capitalised to build their livelihoods and sustain themselves. Five themes were generated from the interviews and focus group discussions regarding the opportunities presented by COVID-19 to young people. These include i) opportunities to create new businesses and earn income, ii) opportunities to develop new skills in different areas, iii) transfer and promotion at workplaces, iv) Consciousness about personal hygiene, v) discovery of talents and skills, vi) Learning of Importance Lessons. These are elaborated further below.

Opportunities to create new businesses and earn income.

An obvious and immediate consequence of COVID-19 is the opportunity for some young women and men to create new businesses. There was a consensus among many young men and women who participated in our focus group discussions and interviews that COVID-19 opened new business opportunities for young people to create their own small enterprises and trade. The reported businesses include the making and sale of personal protective equipment (facial masks, hand sanitizers, sanitary towels) and delivery service. This was common for both young men and women, especially those in urban areas. However, the scale of these businesses was essentially small in nature. One young man who participated in one of the focus group discussions in an urban area in Takoradi, for instance, noted that shortly after the onset of COVID-19 and associated restrictions, he discussed with his friend who had a motorbike to start a delivery service given that most people were afraid of moving outside to shop or procure items that they needed. They quickly developed a social media presence (Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, TikTok) to market their new delivery business. According to this young man, his friend and himself started the business without capital. Venturing into this business has allowed him and his colleagues to earn income to cater for

themselves. He was enthusiastic during the fieldwork that they could expand their business niche to other regions in the post-COVID era given that the online trading and delivery service has expanded rapidly throughout the country largely due to the covid-19 pandemic. During the focus group discussion, he said:

“Covid-19 has made me see that no matter how hard a situation is there is an opportunity, for instance, covid has made me and friend do something that without covid-19 we won’t have ventured into the business of delivery service and I made money” (Male FGD Participant, Western Region).

Others, while recognizing the challenges posed by COVID-19, spoke of the opportunities the youth exploited during the pandemic as follows:

Although the pandemic-related economic slowdown has increased unemployment, it has also given young people more opportunity to launch their own enterprises and come up with original ways to generate cash.” (IDI, male respondent, Bono East region).

“The economic downturn caused by the pandemic has led to an increase in unemployment, but it has also led to an increase in opportunities for young people to start their own businesses and be creative in finding new income sources.” (IDI, female respondent, Western region).

“Further, those who were creative enough to sew nose masks for sale also had opportunities. There were a lot of young people who had no prior experience but since the masks were moving fast, they decided to venture into the preparation and sale of nose mask and made money.” (IDI, male respondent, Ashanti region).

Opportunity to develop new skills in different fields.

Another essential theme generated from the interviews and focus group discussion on the opportunities brought by the COVID-19 crisis is that it paved the way for some young people to learn new skills essential for their lives. This was particularly the case for young women in urban areas. Some reported learning how to make locally manufac-

tured hats, bags, necklaces, and soft drinks [locally called *sobolo*], as well as the skill of livestock rearing and crop production. A young woman interviewed in one community in the northern region spoke of how she took advantage of the school closure period to learn the vocation of making locally manufactured bags, hats and purses for sale:

“I had the opportunity to learn the skill of making beaded bags and purses. I took advantage of the opportunity to learn this skill from one woman when I returned from school. Schools were closed, and I thought it was wise to learn something new. Now, I can make beaded bags, hats, and purses for sale (IDI, female, Northern region).

Others also narrated:

“During that period, especially during the lockdown, I took the opportunity to visit one woman who worked at Soil Research Institute and also had a poultry farm. I went there to learn the rudiments of the business. I learned how to mix their feed and other important lessons for my future business, so if I want to venture into poultry production, it will not be difficult.” (IDI, female respondent, Ashanti region).

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Transfer and promotion at workplaces

Another theme generated from the qualitative study on the opportunities presented by COVID-19 is that some youth working in public institutions (e.g. health and security) got transferred from their working stations to other offices. In most cases, the transfer came with a promotion to the next level. This was more related to the urban youth, especially those in Accra. A 33-year-old young man interviewed in Ashaiman, Accra, who was working with Ghana Fire Service indicated

that in addition to opening his own small business to sell hand sanitisers and nose masks during the COVID-19, he was moved from a district office where he was stationed to the regional office. This transfer came with additional responsibilities because the number of officers on duty was reduced during COVID-19. According to him, COVID-19 was a blessing in disguise in that the pandemic brought him good fortune, and having been transferred and entrusted with additional responsibilities meant that his employers promoted him. The promotion came with additional income, which he never anticipated. During the interview, he said:

I had a business opportunity, I sold hand sanitizers and nose masks. Regarding my work with fire service, I had the opportunity to be given additional responsibilities because the number of officers on duty was reduced.

“I had the opportunity to be moved from the safety office to the regional operations office because of the covid and made sure that people adhere to the covid protocols. I was promoted and I got additional income” (IDI, male, Greater Accra region).

Discovery of talents and skills

Data collected through the focus group discussions revealed that the COVID-19 pandemic allowed both young men and women to discover their hidden talents. We discovered that the pandemic brought lockdowns and restrictions on movement in its wake. For some youth, this was a daunting moment. However, at the same, there were advertised events on social media for young people to engage in various competitions and pitch an idea. Such competitions were designed to allow the youth to discover their special skills, abilities and competencies. The young took advantage of such opportunities, and the process recognized their unique singing, music and dance talents. A 25-year female who participated in one of the focus group discussions, for instance, said:

“Many of the youth identified their talents. Most of the youth didn’t realize they could dance and sing, while the singing and dancing challenges were put on the media they tried and some of the people got that is what they were good at” (Female FGD Participant, Ashanti Region).

Another young woman interviewed stressed:

I saw an advertisement on dancing competition in the media during the covid-19. My friends told me that they know I can dance, so I should join the competition. I was not so keen but I finally joined when my friends convinced me. Through this competition I got to know that I have this talent of dancing.

Consciousness about personal hygiene

Another theme from the focus group data is that COVID-19 paved the way for the youth to gain consciousness on the need to maintain personal hygiene. This was true for both young men and women as well as urban and rural youth. Some youth interviewees spoke of being somewhat careless about everyday hygiene practices. They narrated that while covid-19 has opened their eyes to the need to practice personal hygiene practices such as avoiding contact with surfaces, regular hand wash and sanitizer, this should be a regular lifestyle they cherish greatly. Some participants noted:

“The pandemic has taught us how to be more hygienic and neater. It has also taught us to learn a lot of new things” (Female FGD Participant, Upper West Region).

“I also see that we should take health and personal hygiene seriously and so we will be healthy” (Male FGD Participant, Ashanti Region)

Learning of Important Lessons

Furthermore, some interviewees expressed the view that COVID-19 has allowed them to learn important lessons, especially on the need to always be prepared for potential shocks and eventualities. This theme came up during the FGDs in the Upper West, Western and Ashanti Region. Among the lessons learnt is the need to utilise time to prepare adequately for unforeseen life events and circumstances.

“I realized that, I have to be conscious of my time, because when COVID was coming, we didn’t know the exact date it would land. So I have to know that, today or when I will sleep and wake up, then something else might

come up. So, what am I doing? Or what kind of preparation have I made for myself? Have I saved something for the future or for the next day? Maybe we the youth, when we get money we feel like spending it all in a day. But if I have some in stock, when the COVID or another pandemic is coming, I have something in stock so I can use it for other activities or to purchase something important” (FGD male Participant, Ashanti Region).

“COVID was an impromptu event, and it has opened the eyes of the youth to prepare ahead in case of any unforeseen circumstances or situation” (FGD, Female participant, Upper West Region).

It is clear from the two quotations above that both the female and the male focus groups acknowledged that the pandemic exposed the ill-preparedness of the youth against shocks. They also acknowledged that the pandemic has taught them practical lessons to prepare for shocks. Specifically, in the male FGD in the Ashanti Region, it was mentioned that the pandemic has taught them how to save money so they can withstand shocks in case of any eventualities.

Resilience

Perseverance and Commitment

Table 21 reports respondents’ average rating of eight statements about perseverance and commitment. Each item is self-rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” (1) to “strongly agree” (5), with higher scores denoting greater resilience in terms of perseverance and commitment. The results show that, in general, the Ghanaian youth are persevering and committed. This is because most of them tend to agree with all the eight statements, with the average rating ranging between 3.5 (for the statement “I can make a decision even when I do not have facts”) to 4.3 (each for “I believe I can achieve my goals, even if they are difficult” or “I believe by trying hard, things can be different”). While the male youth seem more persevering and committed (as shown in marginally average scores on most statements) than female youth, the results show no statistically significant gendered differences.

Similarly, the urban youth are not statistically significantly different from the rural youth in their

perseverance and commitment ratings. The composite score for perseverance and commitment index from factor analysis (which is normalized to range between 0 and 1) is 0.8 across gender and PLACE. While this also implies a higher level of perseverance and commitment among the youth, no statistical evidence is found for significant differences across gender and area of residence.

Table 21: Perseverance and Commitment

	Gender				Residence		
	Total	Male	Female	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
I believe I can achieve my goals, even if they are difficult	4.3	4.3	4.3	0.00	4.3	4.3	0.0
I believe by trying hard, things can be different	4.3	4.3	4.3	0.00	4.3	4.3	0.00
When I start doing something, I try to finish	4.2	4.2	4.1	0.10	4.2	4.1	0.01
I know that sometimes I must make myself do things that I do not like	3.9	3.9	4.0	-0.10	3.9	3.9	0.00
Challenging times are an opportunity for me to learn and grow as a person	4.2	4.2	4.3	-0.10	4.2	4.2	0.00
I can make a decision even when I do not have facts	3.5	3.5	3.5	0.00	3.4	3.5	-0.10
I am not afraid of challenges	3.9	4.0	3.9	0.10	4.0	3.9	0.10
I put in my best no matter what the outcome	4.2	4.3	4.2	0.10	4.2	4.2	0.00
Factor score of perseverance/commitment (0-1)	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.0.0	0.8	0.8	0.00
Observations	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Source: Field data, 2022

Positive self-image and optimism

A positive self-image, which entails a positive but realistic attitude, good view, or mental picture of oneself, constitutes an important component of resilience in the face of adversity. This is because positive self-image and optimism can boost one's physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual ability to withstand, adapt and recover from adverse happenings (including the COVID-19 pandemic). Table 22 reports the average self-rated scores of the extent to which the young men and women surveyed agree on statements about positive self-image and optimism by gender and residence. With a mean rating of at least 4 (out of 5 (strongly agree)) across all statements, the results suggest that the youth in Ghana have a high perceived positive self-image and optimism as they mostly tend to agree with all six statements. They largely agree to accept themselves, be optimistic about the future, recover quickly from ill health,

feel in harmony with themselves, feel proud about their accomplishments, and like themselves¹. The results show no statistically significant gendered differences except for the perceived ability to recover from ordinary illness/injuries. However, significant differences are found among those in urban and rural areas, with the urban youth having relatively higher perceived positive image/optimism than the rural youth, especially being in harmony with themselves, recovering from an ordinary poor health condition and being proud about their accomplishments. The overall factor index affirms these findings for positive self-image/optimism, which has an average score of 0.78 (out of 1) and is significantly different across places of reality.

¹ Reverse scoring, so lower values correspond to higher agreeability with the reverse statement "I like myself"

Table 22: Positive self-image and optimism

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	Diff.	Urban	Rural	Diff.
I dislike myself	2.1	2.1	2.1	0.0	2.1	2.2	-0.10
I accept myself	4.3	4.3	4.3	0.0	4.3	4.3	0.00
I feel in harmony with myself	4.1	4.1	4.2	-0.1	4.2	4.1	0.1*
I am optimistic about my future	4.3	4.3	4.3	0.0	4.3	4.3	0.00
I usually recover quickly after ordinary illness or injuries	4.1	4.1	4.0	0.1**	4.1	4.0	0.1**
I feel proud about things I have accomplished in life	4.1	4.0	4.1	-0.1	4.1	4.0	0.1*
Factor index for positive thinking and optimism	0.78	0.78	0.77	0.01	0.78	0.76	0.02***
Observation	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: † reverse scoring, with lower values representing better positive self-image. The asterisk *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively

Source: Field data, 2022

Relationship regulation

With a mean score of about 4 (out of 5), the results in Table 23 also show high perceived resilience among the youth in terms of relationship regulation. This is demonstrated by most youth agreeing with constituent statements. The statement “I think others find me easy to work with” scored the highest (4.13), followed by “I allow others to help me when I need it” (4.08). The lowest mean rating is 3.50 for “I have good friends whom I can trust”. In general, while the primary indicators are generally not significantly different across gender and place of residence, the overall factor index (of 0.74) suggests relatively high perceived relationship regulation, with significant gendered differences.

Table 23: Relationship regulation

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
I allow others to help me when I need it	4.08	4.10	4.07	0.03	4.05	4.12	-0.07
In difficult times I have at least one close person I can turn to for help	3.93	3.94	3.93	0.01	3.93	3.94	-0.01
My family understands how I feel	3.87	3.89	3.86	0.03	3.86	3.89	-0.03
I think others find me easy to work with	4.13	4.16	4.10	0.06	4.10	4.17	-0.06*
I have good friends whom I can trust	3.50	3.65	3.37	0.28***	3.47	3.55	-0.09
Factor index for relationship regulation	0.74	0.74	0.73	0.02**	0.73	0.74	-0.01
Observations	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Source: Field data, 2022

Humor and Positive Thinking

Good humor and positive thinking can induce positive emotions and bolster resilience against a crisis. Table 24 reports the results for humor and positive thinking dimension of youth resilience. Most youth agree to see the funny side of things, with an average score of 4.08 (out of 5). This is followed by being able to laugh at oneself and find humor in difficult situations. The results show significant gender differences, with the female youth having significantly higher score on humor and positive thinking than the male youth. However, there are no significant differences in the perceived level of humor and positive thinking among the youth in urban areas and those in rural areas.

Table 24: Humor and Positive Thinking

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
I can see the funny side of things	4.08	4.06	4.09	-0.03	4.07	4.08	-0.01
I can find humor in difficult situations	3.89	3.85	3.93	-0.08*	3.91	3.87	0.04
I can laugh at myself	3.90	3.83	3.96	-0.13**	3.91	3.87	0.04
Factor index for humor/ positive thinking (0-1)	0.74	0.73	0.75	-0.02**	0.74	0.74	0.00
Observations	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively

Source: Field data, 2022

Emotional Regulation

Emotional regulation involves the ability to regulate an emotional response to adverse situations. Individuals with high emotional regulatory abilities are more resilient because they can better cope with, adapt to and recover from stressful circumstances. Reported in Table 25 are the self-reported average scores on some statements about individuals' emotional regulation. The results show that most Ghanaian youth have high emotional regulation as they tend to agree with the statements largely. The average score is about 4 (agree) for each statement about emotional regulation and 0.75 (out of 1) for the overall factor index. While these indicate high resilience in emotional regulation, the results broadly show no statistically significant differences across gender and place of residence. The only exceptions are significantly higher scores for male youth than their female counterparts on the statements "I am able to handle unpleasant emotions..." and "I am able to recover emotionally from losses and setbacks".

Table 25: Emotional Regulation

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
I am able to handle unpleasant emotions like sadness, fear, and anger	4.00	4.05	3.96	0.09**	4.01	4.00	0.1
I stay calm in difficult circumstances	4.00	3.99	4.01	-0.01	4.03	3.96	0.06
Â can handle my frustration	3.93	3.96	3.90	0.06	3.96	3.89	0.06
I am able to manage my worries	4.03	4.05	4.02	0.03	4.05	4.00	0.05
I am able to recover emotionally from losses and setbacks	3.97	4.02	3.92	0.10**	3.97	3.96	0.01
Factor score for emotional regulation (0-1)	0.75	0.75	0.74	0.01	0.75	0.74	0.01
Observations	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Source: Field data, 2022

Spirituality/Faith

As reported in Table 26, the results indicate high resilience in the domain of spirituality /faith as the majority of youth tend to agree more with most statements about spirituality/faith. The average score for each statement is about 4 (out of 5), with an overall factor score of 0.8 (out of 1). The results show significant gendered differences in this resilience domain, with the female youth tending to hold more spiritual beliefs and having higher scores than the male youth. However, there are no statistically significant differences among the youth in urban and rural areas.

Table 26: Spirituality/Faith

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
My religious or moral beliefs give me strength and courage for my life	4.14	4.07	4.19	-0.12***	4.11	4.18	-0.07*
Good or bad, I believe that most things happen for a reason	4.24	4.22	4.25	-0.04	4.24	4.24	0.00
I find strength in a higher meaning when I face problems	4.13	4.09	4.18	-0.09**	4.14	4.13	0.01
My personal belief gets me through hard times	4.15	4.11	4.18	-0.07**	4.14	4.16	-0.02

I believe my life has meaning and purpose	4.31	4.31	4.32	-0.01	4.29	4.34	-0.04
Learning lessons from life can bring out the best in me	4.26	4.24	4.27	-0.02	4.26	4.25	0.02
Factor index of spirituality/faith (0–1)	0.80	0.80	0.81	-0.01**	0.80	0.81	0.00
Observations	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Source: Field data, 2022

Personal confidence and responsibility

Similar to the previous domains, the results in Table 27 indicate that Ghanaian youth have high personal confidence and responsibility. With an average score of about 4, they mostly agree with all the statements about their confidence and responsibility. While differences in the agreement of male and female youth with most statements are not statistically significant, the males tend to agree more with accepting responsibility for what they do with their lives and being confident that they can solve problems in life (than their female counterparts). The youth in urban areas are found to have higher personal confidence and responsibility than those in rural areas. Overall, the composite factor index for this resilience domain is high (0.77 out of 1) and significantly differs across the gender and place of residence of Ghanaian youth.

Table 27: Personal confidence and responsibility

	Total	Gender			Residence		
		Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
I think about why I get upset	3.85	3.85	3.86	-0.01	3.86	3.84	0.02
I am able to rely on myself when there is no help	4.09	4.11	4.07	0.03	4.13	4.02	0.11***
I accept responsibility for what I do with my life	4.22	4.25	4.19	0.06*	4.25	4.17	0.09**
I would change myself if the situation requires it	3.99	4.02	3.96	0.07	4.00	3.96	0.04
I am confident that I can solve problems in life	4.11	4.16	4.07	0.09**	4.16	4.04	0.12***
I find strength in my relationships	3.99	4.00	3.98	0.03	4.00	3.97	0.03
Factor index for personal confidence/responsibility	0.77	0.77	0.76	0.01*	0.77	0.76	0.02***
Observations	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.

Source: Field data, 2022

The qualitative findings further provide more insight as to why there are high scores on all statements relating to resilience dimensions. Four main themes emerged from the qualitative data regarding the resilience strategies of young men and women in the face of the pandemic. They include i) having a positive mindset and self-encouragement, ii) being focused, hardworking, and persistent, iii) having hope in new possibilities and total dependence on God.

The young men and women interviewed narrated that the COVID-19 crisis exacerbated the already dire economic challenges faced by the youth. However, one resilient strategy was staying positive and encouraging oneself. Young men and women derived strength from their self-encouragement and had a positive mindset not to give up or quit but rather to continue to press on with the goals they have set for their lives. In one of the focus group discussions, a participant said:

“I had to encourage and strengthen myself to be able to adapt to certain changes, that I least expected” (FGD, male, Ashanti region).

Others reported that they needed to stay focused, be persistent, be committed to tasks, learn to prepare for the future, and develop an interest in savings. The youth reported that they had hopes of new possibilities and improved life chances, and this was their resilience strategy in the face of the crisis and the difficulties they encountered. Others mentioned hope of new possibilities, and with God on their side, they may recover from the devastating impact of Covid-19:

“You need not to give up in life but you should face it because there is a saying that “winners never quit and quitters never win”. With regards to the quote, I always inspire myself to give up my best.” (IDI, male respondent, Northern region).

“One important lesson that readily jumps at you is that the beginning is not as important as the end. You may experience challenges in the beginning of something, but if you are able to persist, the end would be ok. I may be suffering today, but I may not in my 40s.” (IDI, male respondent, Western region).

“I feel times are hard, and that’s only hard work and persistence that can lead us to our goals. So, if its school you want to pursue,

you do it with all you might, if you have to learn a trade, you give it your all so, you can make something for yourself.” (IDI, female respondent, Greater Accra region).

Youth Adaptability

The results in Table 28 capture the extent of adaptability among the Ghanaian youth based on their level of (dis)agreement. The mean score for each adaptability statement is above 4 (out of 5), indicating most youth either agree or strongly agree with the statements. This implies that the Ghanaian youth, irrespective of gender and place of residence, have high perceived adaptability. In other words, these young individuals have a high perceived ability to adjust their thoughts and behaviors to effectively respond to uncertainty, new information, or changed circumstances. This finding is confirmed by the high composite factor score of 0.77 (out of 1). The results show no statistically significant difference across gender and place of residence. Thus, both male and female youth and urban and rural youth are equally highly adaptable.

Table 28: Youth Adaptability

	Gender				Residence		
	Total	Male	Female	Diff	Urban	Rural	Diff
I am able to think through a number of possible options to assist me in a new situation	4.10	4.10	4.10	-0.01	4.10	4.09	0.01
I am able to revise the way I think about a new situation to help me through it	4.06	4.04	4.08	-0.04	4.09	4.01	0.08*
I am able to adjust my thinking or expectations to assist me in a new situation	4.10	4.08	4.13	-0.05	4.11	4.09	0.02
I am able to seek out new information, helpful people or useful resources to eff	4.10	4.11	4.09	0.02	4.09	4.12	-0.02
In uncertain situations, I am able to develop new ways of going about things	4.11	4.12	4.10	0.02	4.13	4.08	0.05
To assist me in a new situation, I am able to change the way I do things if necessary	4.11	4.08	4.14	-0.05	4.13	4.09	0.04
I am able to reduce negative emotions (e.g. fear) to help me deal with uncertainty	4.06	4.08	4.05	0.03	4.08	4.03	0.05
When uncertainty arises, I am able to minimize frustration or irritation so I can deal with it best	4.07	4.07	4.07	0.00	4.07	4.07	0.00
Factor index for youth adaptability	0.77	0.76	0.77	0.00	0.77	0.76	0.01
Observations	1639	781	858		984	655	

Notes: *, ** and *** denote statistical significance of mean difference at 10%, 5% and 1% respectively.
Source: Field data, 2022

The qualitative interviews highlight two key adaptability strategies of the youth studied. The first relates to making use of technology for education and businesses. As noted earlier, during the COVID-19 crisis, the government closed schools for extended periods, forcing schools, especially universities, to move to online learning. Some youth, especially urban youth students, reported that they quickly had to adapt to the new normal of online learning. To overcome the challenges of poor internet connectivity, some youth, especially in urban areas, choose to relocate from their localities to areas where they can get a good internet connection to join online classes. A male participant said:

“So personally, in the beginning of that whole period, I was actually going through a lot because I was at a place where you barely have access to internet. And so, while these online activities were going on, you have to move to a different town, or different location before you can have access to some of these things... and generally, I will say that it helped me in my adaptability” (FGD, male, Ashanti region).

Others, particularly those in rural areas following school closure reported embarking on short-distance migration to the cities to work and earn income. This was particularly the case for some of the rural young men and women in Bono, Upper West and Northern Regions. A participant, for instance, noted:

“Most of the youth here, one of the things we do during difficult times is that we go to the cities to seek for greener pastures in the cities. I remember when COVID-19 came and the lockdown was imposed, it brought many difficulties. After the lockdown, most of the youth went to the city to find something to do. We need to survive so when times are hard you have to adapt (Male FGD Participant, Bono East)”

CONCLUSION

The quantitative results show that many young men and women in Ghana aspire to establish their own business rather than become employees. This perhaps reflects the reality in the country, where it has become increasingly difficult for young people to secure permanent employment, especially in the public sector after graduation. There is growing graduate youth unemployment in the country, which manifests in the inability of young people to secure formal employment following graduation from school. As social actors who are in tune with the reality of not being able to secure formal employment, many of the youth, including the women and men, envisage establishing their own businesses ventures in the future. This finding reiterates recent research on youth livelihoods in many African context where young men and women have underscored that their school certificate takes them nowhere and therefore it is necessary to explore opportunities self-employment opportunities as a fallback position (Osei and Yeboah, 2023). For example, Yeboah and Boafo (2023) found that many young people in rural Ghana aspire to establish self-employed businesses in agriculture and trade in addition to their securing formal employment.

The qualitative findings show that some youth would want to secure professional salaried employment in the future. Many young men and women in urban and rural areas of Ghana regard success as having a good job and being financially rich. This finding highlights the need to expand employment opportunities in the formal sector to promote youth employment. This will require structural transformation and enhancement of the productive sectors of the economy to create jobs and shift labour from low to high-productive sectors. This will likely create avenues for employment in the youth labour force. The research findings also highlight that young people in Ghana see the enjoyment of peace, the absence of conflict or war, good marriage, a righteous life, socializing and being comfortable and popular in society as key markers of success in life. This highlights the non-material dimensions of life that young people envisage to have as part of their futures. Good governance and peaceful co-existence would be fundamental in enabling the youth to realise these non-material elements of life.

Similar to what is widely documented in the research literature, the results from the survey and findings from the qualitative study confirm the point that financial constraint is the major hurdle that young men and women face in realizing their economic aspirations around establishing their own businesses (See also Yeboah, 2021; Chigunta, 2017). This reflects current trends in Ghana, where young men and women who have ideas to start a business are constrained by not having the needed capital but social and political connections to get established. Promoting youth access to financial resources and entrepreneurial and management skills would be key in allowing them to establish and thrive in the coming decades.

The quantitative results further show that the top three indicators of a dignified and fulfilling job for young men and women are appropriate pay, job security and respect. However, further inquiry through qualitative interviews and focus group discussions reveals other important markers of dignified and fulfilling employment. These include jobs that offer protection, opportunities to utilize one's skills, knowledge, and passion, representation, and equal treatment of all workers no matter the gender or class, as well as having a voice in decision-making at the workplace. Achieving this will require a strong youth civil society that can provide avenues for youth engagement in policy processes and youth employment programmes.

Migration features in the aspirations of the youth. Many young men and women surveyed would like to migrate outside of Africa. Their desire to migrate is rooted in limited access to employment opportunities that can help them advance their life aspirations. This has arisen mainly because of severe hardships which has incapacitated them to survive economically. Addressing structural constraints limiting the opportunities for young men and women to build decent and attractive livelihoods would be key in this regard. For young men and women, the possibility of embarking on migration may have the potential to contribute to socio-economic development through access to employment and the sending of remittance, as well as knowledge and skills transfer upon return.

Education and training are also featured in the aspirations of the young men and women studied. While the youth aspire to attain formal education

in the future, more young women than men are more likely to seek formal education. Young men and women recognize the value of formal education and training as a way to transition to the formal labour market, enhance their knowledge, and become respectable adults. Therefore, many would want to take this path in the future. Therefore, there is a need to address the various constraints that limit the possibility for young people to attain higher formal education. In addition to access, the quality of education also needs to be addressed, as emphasized in the sustainable development goals. Moreover, contrary to the claim that today's youth in Ghana are unpatriotic and have little interest in pursuing civic duties, this research highlights that more than half of Ghanaians would like to be responsible citizens and fulfil civic obligations. This is true for both young men and young women, affirming the view that young people in Ghana want to be responsible citizens and fulfil civic obligations in the future.

In terms of the impact of COVID-19 on the aspirations of the youth, findings show that economic and educational aspirations seem to have been most affected. The specific reported impact of COVID-19 on businesses/employment includes losing income significantly. The qualitative findings show that many young men and women, especially in the urban areas, had their businesses closed and lost their business capital and savings. For some young women and men in school, the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated closure of schools and lockdown presented learning difficulties and increased the length of time they were supposed to have spent in school. COVID-19 also led to limited opportunities for socialization and expression of the young people's identity through hairstyles and costumes, as well as disruption to romantic relationships owing to economic hardships, making it challenging to provide for relations. The extra burden will likely be placed on young men more than women. These findings highlight how unexpected crises may have dire consequences on the economic and social lives of young people and anyone else. The finding highlights the need to strengthen protection mechanisms to enable young people to cope with expected shocks and events.

However, the findings also show that some young men and women recognized and capitalized on diverse opportunities during the pandemic.

They moved swiftly to establish new businesses, develop new skills in different fields, *and* discover their talents and skills. Recognizing these opportunities allowed the young men and women to become productive and earn income to sustain their families and themselves. These highlight the adaptability and capacity of youth to respond to changing circumstances, including militating pandemics and economic crises.

In terms of resilience, it is evident from the quantitative results that with an average score of about 4, most respondents tend to agree or strongly agree with each of the statements across all 9 domains of resilience among the youth in Ghana. Based on factor analysis, the composite index for each domain is also considerably high, above 0.7 (out of 1). This suggests that youth perceived themselves to be highly resilient, with significant differences in some resilience domains across gender and place of residence. In particular, the results show that male youth are significantly different from female youth in emotional regulation, humor, positive thinking, and spirituality/faith. Similarly, urban youth are significantly different from rural youth in terms of personal confidence, responsibility, and positive self-image /optimism. No significant differences are found in the remaining resilience domains across gender and place of residence. The findings from the qualitative work include a positive mindset, focus, hard work, persistence, self-encouragement, hope of new possibilities and total dependence on God as the main resilience strategies of young men and women in the face of the pandemic.

Policy messages and recommendations for programming.

These findings have important implications for policies promoting youth employment, aspirations, and transitions in Ghana. In line with the findings, the following recommendations have been put forward for policy and practice revolving around youth employment and development in Ghana.

1. The government should invest in and improve digital infrastructure.

The quantitative results show that only a small proportion of the youth reported to aspire to technology and information education as part of their aspirations. However, the qualitative evidence revealed that the COVID-19 crisis inspired many young men and women to be innovative and creative in their thinking, to start and build small-scale enterprises (selling of masks, hand sanitizer) and online delivery service, taking advantage of increased utilization of digital technology and e-commerce platforms. This allowed many youths to earn income to sustain themselves during the COVID-19 crisis. Moreover, the switch from face-to-face to online learning and the government's introduction of digital learning platforms allowed young men and women in institutions to continue pursuing their education. However, in most cases, poor internet connectivity and limited digital infrastructure, especially in rural areas, could not allow many young men and women to recognize and capitalize on such opportunities. It is therefore recommended that the government improve digital infrastructure, especially in rural areas. Ghana's rural digitalization programme is a step in the right direction, although this needs to be intensified.

2. Government, donors and development partners should enhance young people's skills in the digital economy to capitalize on social media and other platforms to enhance business operations.

The qualitative findings of this study highlight the power of social media and other e-commerce platforms, allowing many young men and women to be creative and productive during crisis situations. It is recommended that donors, development partners and civil society actors who are keen to promote youth employment to provide encouragement and digital skills enhancement (in the form of digital training) to young people keen to establish their own businesses in the future. This will empower and enable young men and women to take advantage of new opportunities in the digital economy and ensure that their energy and creativity are harnessed by expanding digitally enabled industries.

3. The government should provide an enabling environment for young people to pursue entrepreneurial drive.

A key finding is that young men's and women's economic aspirations revolve around the desire to establish small-scale businesses and entrepreneurship. Nonetheless, this entrepreneurial drive cannot be sustained by individual responsibility alone, and a supportive climate furnished by the state is required to sustain them. In this regard, government youth employment interventions would need to consider providing an enabling environment for young men and women who are willing to establish themselves as entrepreneurs to thrive. This would require addressing the structural barriers through enhancing youth access to financial capital, productivity and viability of micro-enterprises, market linkages, macro-economic instability (inflation) and power crisis. Efforts must also be geared toward equipping young men and women with knowledge and skills in business plan preparation and processes of registering a business, financial literacy, and management skills to enable young people to sustain their businesses. While a lot of interventions and efforts are already in place to address this, the reality is that young men, especially women with limited political and social connections, cannot access and benefit from such interventions. Moreover, addressing social injustices and providing youth entrepreneurship support is crucial. This is key because the normative practice with entrepreneurial support programmes has been that young men and women with no immediate business ideas are sidelined from benefits from such support.

4. The Government should improve access to and quality of education

The study's findings also highlight that many young people, especially young women, would want to pursue higher education to realize their aspirations around securing professional or salaried employment. Therefore, there is a need to address access to and quality of education both in the short and long term. Ghana started implementing a free senior high school policy, allowing many young people to access secondary school education. However, issues relating to cash cost

still put higher education out of the reach of many young people, especially in rural areas. Moreover, skills mismatch has been touted as one key challenge for young people's successful transition to the labour market. Therefore, aligning school curricula to the changing demands and expectations of the labour market is key in the post-COVID-19 era. This will require investment in technology and teaching of new and different sets of competency-based and soft skills that are in demand in the formal labour market.

5. The government should pursue broad-based growth, and employment creation policies are needed.

The findings of this study highlight that many young men and women would want secured jobs that are decent and financially rewarding. Therefore, policies must address Ghana's economy's structural conditions to deliver economic transformation. Broad-based growth and employment creation policies through an industrial policy to increase labour-intensive and productive manufacturing and services, investment in infrastructure and social protection systems that assure basic income will be needed in a post-covid-19 reconstruction of Ghana's economies to deliver jobs that meet the ambitions, aspirations and expectations of young men and women for decades to come.

6. The government should strengthen social protection systems.

The findings of this research highlight that COVID-19 affected many young men and women, many of whom reported having lost their businesses, assets, and savings. This finding highlights the need for the government to develop and improve social protection systems (formal and informal social insurance mechanisms) to protect young men and women's assets, businesses and livelihoods from the disruptive effects of unforeseen events such as COVID-19.

7. Donors and international NGOs

Increase the voice and participation of youth in policymaking processes by factoring their aspirations, expectations, ambitions, views, challenges, energies, creativity, skillsets, and productivity in

youth-specific employment and programmes. This will require widespread consultation with youth civil society and the diverse group of young men and women in both rural and urban areas, capacity building for youth society in terms of their advocacy skills to formulate their messages clearly, participate in policymaking and how to use effective communication tools to engage with policy actors.

8. Government facility safe, orderly and regular migration pathways for the youth

Finally, the research findings highlight that many youth would like to migrate outside of Africa as part of their aspirations. However, a lack of regular migration pathways often compels many young people in Ghana and Africa to embark on perilous journeys to Europe via the Mediterranean. Given the enormous benefits of migration and migrant remittances to socio-economic development, the government should establish bilateral agreements and enforce existing policies and regulations to promote safe and regular responsible migration for young people. Awareness of the need for young people to utilize regular migration pathways is also needed. Existing national coordination mechanisms on migration and CSOs could do this.

Recommendations for Future Research

- i. Future research could explore the perspective of young people and other stakeholders on sustainable approaches to support young men and women in fulfilling their aspirations and attaining dignified and fulfilling employment.
- ii. Longitudinal research is also needed to track the youth over time. This will be crucial to understand their challenges, circumstances, where they are with their aspirations, and the additional support that they would need to help them fulfil their material and non-material desires in life.
- iii. Finally, there is also the need to examine the perspective of the youth on how policies and programmes could support and strengthen their resilience and adaptability capacity to withstand future crises.

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6th Floor, I & M Building
2nd Ngong Avenue, Upper Hill
P.O. Box 76418-00508 Nairobi, Kenya

Website: www.pasgr.org

Email: info@pasgr.org

Tel: +254 (0)20 2985000
+254 (0)729 111031
+254 (0)731 000065