

YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN'S ASPIRATIONS AND RESILIENCE: Prospects for Livelihoods, Employment and Accountability

Ghana Country Report



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ACRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
GSS	Ghana Statistical Services
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NABCO	Nation Builders Corps
NEIP	National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme
PASGR	Partnership for African Social Governance and Research
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An important policy and development challenge of the 21st Century has been how to provide decent and sustainable employment for the growing youth population. Despite significant contributions of young men and women as agents, active citizens, consumers, entrepreneurs and productive workers, the prospects of many to realize their full potential has been thwarted in part by a lack of access to productive and decent employment that matches their skills, qualifications, ambitions and aspirations. This report synthesizes the results of a research on job prospects and aspirations of young women and men conducted in Ghana during the pre-COVID-19 period. The report draws on both quantitative and qualitative data collected from young women and men in Ghana. The quantitative data was collected through a survey questionnaire which was administered to 799 participants distributed across rural, peri-urban and urban locations within Ghana. In addition, 16 separate focus group discussions and 13 individual interviews were held.

A key finding of the research is that while around a third (34%) of the young women and men were not in any employment at the time of the research, the top three sectors of employment for those in employment included trading, modern jobs, as well as fashion and design. With respect to the nature of employment nearly half the youth surveyed (48%) were engaged in self-employment while a small proportion found employment in private firms (18%) and international institutions (11%). Gender differences emerged to explain the reason for the small proportion of young people engaged in the private sector. Young men are wary of the pressure associated with private sector while young women complained of harsh treatment and unpredictability in the private sector. It is evident that young women and men in Ghana would like to take up jobs that gives a high level of security and could provide means for daily subsistence over a period of time.

Generally, the aspirations of the young people revolved around three broad themes: employment, being financially secured and self-reliant as well as education and support for family members. In terms of employment, many of the young women and men aspired to secure modern jobs in addition to working in the health sector, fashion and

garment industry. Again, more than a third (38%) aspired to own their companies, whereas another third dreamed of working in the public sector (34%). Working in family business/farm (nine per cent) was not an option for most of the youth. Some believed that working in family business does not pay while majority viewed farmwork/agriculture as tedious with long hours of suffering. Many young people aspired to a future in which they would be financially independent and self-reliant. While their financial or salary expectations were gendered, many linked their financial aspirations to desires of wanting to secure dignified employment. For the young people in Ghana, dignified employment is a job that not only requires some level of skill and ingenuity, but also provides opportunity to make an impact in the lives of people. The youth studied also emphasized the social dimensions of their futures in which they will have good quality education, start their own family and provide support for family members. Desires of a successful future compelled the young people to pursue higher education, start an economic venture, as well as seek employment. Nevertheless, the youth considered lack of awareness of opportunities and networks as well as finance as key barriers to realizing their aspirations. They had high hopes of being successful through hard work, determination and perseverance.

INTRODUCTION

Although governments across the globe particularly in Africa has made youth employment a national development and policy priority, there is a consensus that one of the key development challenges of the 21st century has been how to provide decent and productive employment for more than 40 million additional persons who enter the global labour market annually (Mueller and Thurlow, 2019). The situation is particularly bleak for sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). An International Monetary Fund (IMF) regional Economic Outlook (2015) for SSA estimated that African economies will need to create around 18 million jobs annually to accommodate the growing labour force. Indeed, despite the significant contributions of young women and men as agents, active citizens, consumers, entrepreneurs and productive workers, the prospects of many young women and men to realize their full potential has been frustrated in part due to a lack of access to productive and decent employment that matches their skills, qualifications, ambitions and aspirations (O'Higgins, 2017; Sumberg et al., 2017; Yeboah et al., 2017). Many African young women and men face significant economic and social uncertainty, and their slow or inability to transition into the labour market is likely to have long-lasting implications not only for themselves but also for their families, communities and societies (O'Higgins, 2017).

In addition to unemployment and under-employment, young women and men in Africa who have managed to enter into the labour market face a number of interconnected challenges many of which are structural: intermittent and insecure working arrangements, low-skilled jobs with no prospects for career advancement, working long hours under informal arrangements; working below their potential in low paid temporal, seasonal or casual employment and frequently working under precarious conditions in the informal economy (ILO, 2011). In addition, the disruptions emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic is worsening the unemployment situation globally and Africa in particular (Yeboah and Flynn, 2021). Some estimates suggest that about 20 million jobs both in the formal and informal sectors of Africa may be lost, and the immediate consequence of the pandemic is disproportional for younger demographics (Acland, 2020; Zeufack et al., 2020). Data from the

ILO indicate that nearly 1.6 billion informal economy workers, many of whom are youth and women have been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic especially in Africa, where the income loss was estimated at 9.4 percent because of working hours lost (ILO, 2020b; ILO, 2021).

Ghana typifies this youth unemployment challenge in SSA. It's been noted that as a result of the growing youth population of the country, an additional 300,000 new jobs would need to be created yearly to accommodate the growing unemployed youth population (Dadzie et al 2020; Baah-Boateng, 2015). The irony is that while Ghana has experienced high growth rates in recent times, the creation of new formal sector jobs has not matched the number of new entrants to the labour market (AfDB, 2014). Evidently, labour intensive manufactured exports – the driving force behind economic transformation and employment creation in East Asian countries – is far from taking off in Ghana (Filmer and Fox, 2014; Yeboah, 2017, 2021). Although Ghana created nearly 3 million jobs between 2005 and 2012, of which many were in urban areas, due in part to the growth success recorded, (GSS, 2016; Francis and Honorati, 2016, p.3), a report by the World Bank (2016) suggests that 48% of all Ghanaian young people between the ages 15-24 years do not have jobs. As a result, the youth unemployment rate has remained fairly higher than the national average unemployment (Jumpa et al., 2019). A recent Ghana Statistical Service Report (2021) found that unemployment rate among the youthful population in Ghana stands at 19.7%. Despite several targeted interventions that have been implemented by government and the private sector, unemployment and prospects of young people to secure decent and sustainable employment continue to be key development challenge in Ghana (Lambon-Quayefio et al., 2023; Jumpa et al., 2019; Dadzie et al., 2020). This raises fundamental questions about how policies and programmes could make more effective to respond to job prospects and aspirations of young men and women in the country.

This report synthesizes both quantitative and qualitative evidence on job prospects for African youth through analysis of survey, focus group and interview data collected from young women and

men in Ghana. The report provides the evidence on youth definition of and experience with dignified and fulfilling employment, career aspirations, action taken by youth to advance their career goal, awareness and use of technology and youth recommendations for policy makers to support youth employment in Ghana.

METHODOLOGY

The research employed a mixed method design involving the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data. The data collection took place in 2019 before the advent of COVID-19 in Ghana. Both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected by Hepta Analytics with support from the Mastercard Foundation. It must also be noted that the quantitative results on job prospects and aspirations of young people utilized in this report was extracted from a four-country synthesis report on job prospects and aspirations of young people produced by Hepta Analytics.

Research Questions

The overall aim of this research was to explore young women's and young men's employment prospects for dignified jobs and their aspirations and opportunities for work. The qualitative along with the quantitative study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the youth's sense of their future and what role does work play?
2. How does the youth define dignifying employment?
3. What actions do youth undertake to advance their career goals?
4. What are the challenges faced by employed and non-employed youths?
5. Opinions and attitudes around change, technology, and the future of work?

Sampling

The total sample for the quantitative study was 799 young women and men in rural, peri-urban and urban areas of Ghana participated. Of the 799 young people that participated in the survey, 57.6% were female and 42.3% male, 10% had never gained any form of formal education while 36% have attained above secondary education level. Around a third (34%) of the youth surveyed were employed, with nearly half (48%) falling within the category of working poor who earned less than \$1.9 per day at the time of the field research.

Qualitative data involved focus group discussions and in-depth interviews conducted with young men and women in rural, peri-urban and urban areas. In all a total of sixteen (16) focus group discussions, and thirteen (13) face-to-face interviews were held with diverse category of young women and men including the poor and those from affluent families in rural, peri-urban and urban areas. The in-depth interviews and focus group discussions provided means to help explore and explain more some of the key themes and issues that emerged from the quantitative survey, and this helped with triangulation of the findings. The distribution of the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews by gender and location is shown in Table 1.

Figure 1: Distribution of FGDs by gender

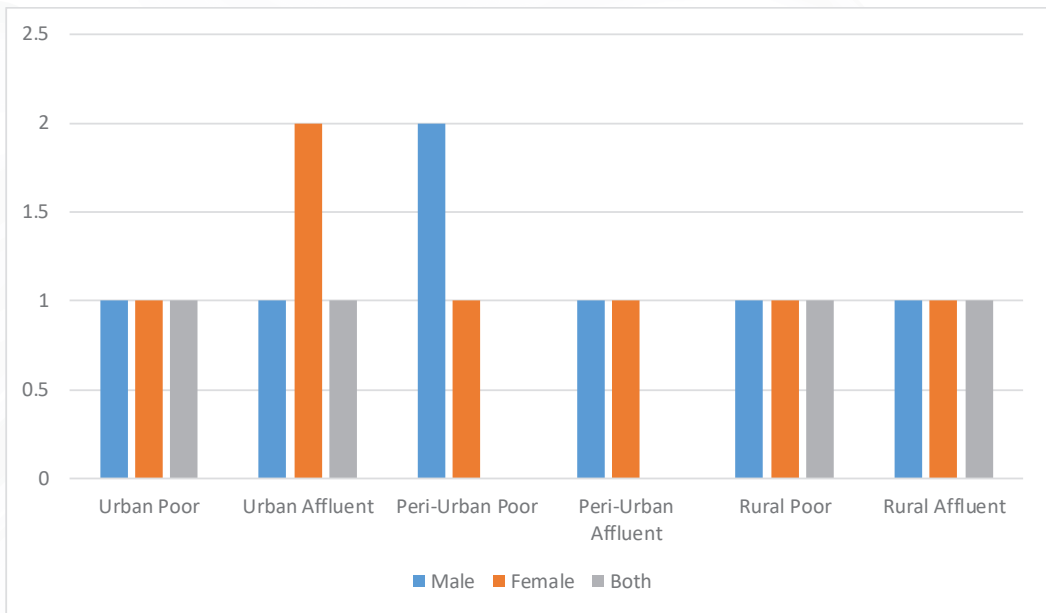
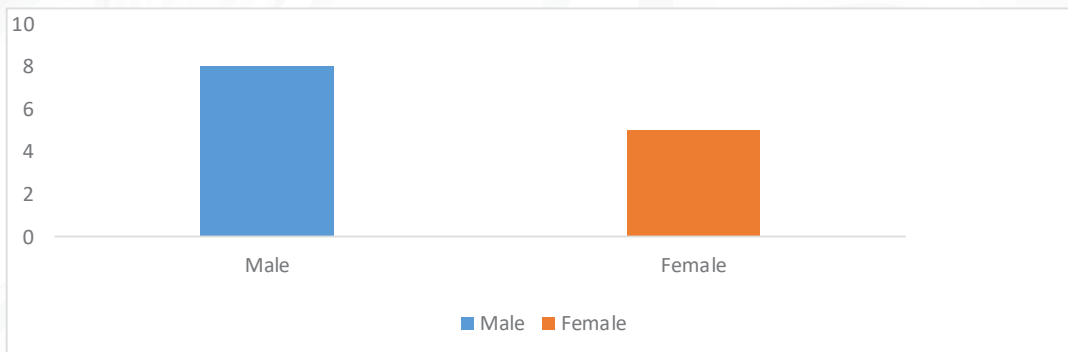


Figure 2: Distribution of in-depth interviews by gender



Conceptual Framework

The concept of youth is fluid and means different things in different context. However, scholars have provided at least four different perspectives focusing on social and age categorization (Honwana, 2012), transition to adulthood (Ansell, 2005), and consumption patterns (Hererra, 2006). Honwana (2014) and Abebe (2020) argue that the definition of youth based on age categorisation does not consider the transition challenges facing African youth and therefore presents conceptual challenges. As Namuggala (2018) puts it, the lines between a child and youth, and youth and adult are blurred. She explains this ambiguity in meaning to the presence of features used to characterize youth in descriptions of childhood and adulthood. Even though youth may have attributes that distinguish them from children, they also lack the attributes that define adulthood (Morrow, 2013). Therefore, being a youth is considered as transitional (Namuggala, 2018).

Youthhood is contextual across different societies in the world. Consistent with Honwana's (2012) argument of aged categorisation, the UN (2018) define youth as individuals between 15-24 years. African Youth Chapter defines youth as those that fall between the 15-35 years (African Union, 2006). Overall, African governments define youth on a broad range of age brackets including those individuals between

the ages of 14 and 35 years. Although the age categorisation of youth fails to take into account social and transitional issues unique to African countries, this study uses the African Youth Chapter which considers youth as individuals between the ages of 15 and 35 years (African Union, 2006). This position is supported by recent rethinking about youth in the global south and how they are impacted by transitional challenges (Cooper et al, 2021).

Young people are not a homogenous group. They vary based on age (15-24; 18-29; 30-35), gender, education, employment and geography. Different categories of young people also face different challenges. These include young people with disabilities, urban youth, rural youth, refugees, young women, out of school young people, out of work young people and young people with families. Thus, an understanding of young people need to capture these different contexts as opposed to focusing on stage and age of the young people (Mac-Ikemenjima, 2019).

Aspirations play an important role in shaping young people's future (Yeboah, 2020). Appadurai (2004) defines aspirations as "capability" to navigate social life and align wants, preferences, choices and calculations with the circumstances into which a person is born." However, capability is not often equal as less privileged individuals are likely to have more constraints in exploring life compared to their privileged counterparts. Ray (2006) on the other hand, defines aspirations as the distance between where individuals are and where they want to go. If the gap is too small, the person will fail to aspire to significant change in their life; if the gap is too large, the person will fail to turn their aspirations into action. This becomes aspiration failure. Since poverty is the biggest external constraint, people who are poor must exert greater effort to achieve the same result as those who are not poor.

Aspirations are also understood as being socially determined: our perception of what is available to us in society is greatly influenced by what others around us think and do (Appadurai, 2004; Ray, 2006). Favara (2017) was able to show that the aspirations of children and adolescents mirror those of their parents and that these are revised over time to adapt to social expectations. Likewise, exposure to people outside of our immediate social network can have a positive impact on aspiration formation. Bernard et al. (2014) discussed

the relevance of role models in the formation of an individual's perception of what is feasible in their environment. Role models must be people with whom we can identify socially and whose stories produce a vicarious experience that generates emotions strong enough to spur a willingness in us to change our status quo.

If people believe they have the ability to bring about meaningful change in their lives through effort (Lybbert and Wydick, 2018; Dalton, Ghosal and Mani, 2016), and that they have the necessary avenues and pathways to change, be it naturally through social circumstances (Ray, 2006; Appadurai, 2004) or by design through policy (Lybbert and Wydick, 2018), then they are likely to accept the opportunities offered to them through policy interventions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis

This section presents an overview of how data was analyzed. To begin with, quantitative data analysis process conducted by Hepta analytics involved coding the data, cleaning the data, aggregation of data to create groups, splitting the data and analysis. The PowerBI tool was used to mine data while Chi square was used to conduct deep dive correlations analysis. Data aggregation into groups was done by grouping demographic categories. The demographic characteristics that were focused on in the analysis included: Gender, Residence (either rural or urban), Age, the Highest Level of Education, Poverty Status, whether they ever attended school and Employment Status (Whether the youth was ever employed).

As noted earlier, there were 799 survey respondents in this analysis with 420 female and 379 male respondents. Two Hundred and Seventy-three (273) respondents were employed at the time the survey was done. The currently employed youths (273) were used in the analysis of the demographics characteristics and the current salary. When working with Dignified and Fulfilling Work, the responses were categorized into 4 pillars: Respect in the workplace, Good salary/income, Honest and reputable by society and Sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment

Some of the demographic characteristics and responses to survey questions were grouped to make it easier to analyze as shown in table 1 below

Table 1: Demographic Categories of Survey Respondents

Age	15-19 years, 20-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-35 years
Highest Level of Education	Primary, Junior High School, Senior High School and Higher Education.
Salary in USD	1-49, 50-99, 100-149, 150-199, 200-500, Above 500
Dignified and Fulfilling Work	Respect in the workplace, good salary/income, Honest and reputable by society, Sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment

The Chi-Square test was used in the analysis because the variables were categorical. The question of association being tested was “Is there an association between a certain demographic characteristic and a specific survey question”. The null hypothesis was “there is no association between a certain demographic characteristic and a specific survey question” and the alternative hypothesis was “there is an association between a certain demographic characteristic and a specific survey question”. The association between responses of dignified work and fulfilling work was also tested

A significance level of 0.1 was used to consider whether the results were statistically significant.

Crosstabs of count and percentage were used to show evidence that certain demographic characteristics influence the responses to the survey questions. The percentage crosstab was used since the distribution of youth based on demographics characteristics was not equal. An example is that the ratio of male to female is not 50:50. Using the percentage gives a clear view, 10 out of 10 youths is 100% but 10 out of 100 is 10%.

2.4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were collected from 16 focus group discussions and 13 individual interviews. The sample was selected with the support of key informants in each community. In both rural and urban areas, the sample included youth who have been successful with their business, youth who have succeeded in their career, youth who are working in a particular trade and youth who have benefited from a particular youth support program to learn more from their experience.

The focus groups were categorized along three homogenous groups (15-17, 18-29 and 30-35). Further categorization of the youth included, employed youth, unemployed youth, boys, girls, in school and out of school youth, education level, socio-economic status (e.g. youth from poor neighborhood, youth from rich neighborhood)

In the individual interviews, there were three main disaggregation of the group, as shown in Table 2 below

Table 2: Disaggregation of Individual Interviews

Group	Category
Categories of Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successful youths • Youth leader • Youth entrepreneurs • Respondents from the quantitative survey (selected based on response - to unpack some of the findings)
Special Categories of vulnerable youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disabled youth • Refugees or displaced youth
Expert Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People implementing youth program in country • NGO youth program implementers • Government official in ministry of youth employment • Private sector- employer of youth

In keeping in line with ethical considerations, written consent was sought from participants. The interviews were recorded with participants' approval without mentioning their names. Participants willing to receive the results of the study in line with the Mastercard Foundation principle to return the knowledge to the community, provided their email contacts.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis entails searching across a data set for repeated patterns (Braun and Clarke 2006). It involves selection of codes and constructing themes. It is the most suitable method as it follows a constructive approach which is useful for a study that aims at social construction of meaning to be explained in such a way that observations seem to emerge. The qualitative data analysis process involved familiarizing ourselves with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally producing the report. The qualitative data were analysed for the following themes: youth definition of and experience with dignified and fulfilling employment, career aspirations, action taken by youth to advance their career goal, awareness and use of technology and youth recommendations for policy makers to support youth employment in Ghana

RESULTS

In line with evidence from the research, five key themes are relevant for the Ghana study, and will form the analytical basis for the presentation of the results and discussions. This includes youth definition of and experience with dignified and fulfilling employment, career aspirations, action taken by youth to advance their career goal, awareness and use of technology and youth recommendations for policy makers to support youth employment in Ghana

Ghana Youth definition of and experience with dignified and fulfilling work

From the survey response, almost half of the respondents (43%) define dignified and fulfilling work as that with a sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment. A good proportion (41 %) of those with the highest level of education and 57% of those with lowest level of education (primary) defined dignified and fulfilling work as that with a sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment. We also observed that more than a half (52%) of the older youth aged 30-35 ranked sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment highly. This is reflected in the qualitative data as stated by one interviewee,

“So, if you take for instance, a lecturer, what the lecturer says in the classroom, what he or she teaches, goes a long way to impact the lives of the people or the students. What he or she would love to do in the long run. If you take someone like the politician, for instance, the politician basically influences policies. So, the kind of policies that will be

adopted is what will determine the progress, or otherwise of the nation that he or she is in. If you take someone who is into technology, in the days of ours as it stands, we can't do away with technology, day in and day out. As we are able to build on technology the more, we are also able to make things simpler and easier. So that's why I deem them as dignifying.”
Disabled Youth Interviewee

Curiously, more than half (74%) of those whose highest level of education was senior high school, defined dignified job as that with good salary/income and almost a half (44%) of the younger people aged 15-29 considered good salary as dignified and fulfilling. The trend was also noted in another category where more unemployed (61%) than employed (39%) youths defined dignified and fulfilling work as good salary/ income while more employed (53%) than unemployed (47%) youths defined dignified work as sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment. This is to suggest that for younger people, and unemployed youth, their most pressing need is getting money. An interviewee observed,

“It means that when that job is done, you'd be able to get your daily bread and everything from it.” Successful male rural youth Interviewee

Because of this, a lot of younger people associate dignified work with stability, security and respect as explained in table 3 below and comments from interviewees

Table 3. Dignified and fulfilling jobs for youth.

Why keep the job		Not satisfied with job		Reason for leaving		Jobs youths do not want
Pay	Respect	Pay	Respect	Pay	Respect (did not treat me well)	
55%	29%	83%	32%	12%	7%	Armed robbery, waste collection, prostitution

“When you work at the bank; you’d be able to get a salary by the end of the month or year. You’d get some profit since you keep the money of people for future use.” Female rural poor

“Dignifying employment, it goes with getting a secure job. Yeah, based on a secured job with comfortable pay and then a job with much security and much respect.” Government youth representative interviewee

Indeed, respect came out strongly across all demographics as the bare minimum expectation for the work they take up. The FGD participants explained,

“When there is respect, things move on smoothly and also motivate you to respect the boss for everything to be fine.” Male Peri-Urban affluent FGD (25-35)

“Because when he or she respects me and then gives me everything I want, maybe through the smiling or how he or she speaks to me, maybe I can end up feeling some love for that person, friendship love, like an employer and an employee” Female Peri-urban poor FGD (15-24)

“What I need is trust and respect. Some people do not respect you because they think you’re needy and they are doing you a favour. He must be someone who respects people and not double tongued, changing agreements of the past.” Male peri-urban affluent FGD (15-24)

“Some kind of, maybe let’s say proper working conditions, welfare, your incentives and all those things. So if my employer provides a good working conditions for me to work, I get my necessary if it’s an equipment or tool I, I am supposed to work with they are available or they are made available. And I am paid or get those kinds of incentives or maybe my wages regularly I believe, yes it will make me bring out my best. So that’s what I will expect from my employer.” Male rural affluent FGD (25-35)

While more than half (55%) of the youth in Ghana responded that they would keep to a job based on the salary it gives, it is important to note that 29% of respondents stated that respect is also a key characteristic of dignified and fulfilling work. Indeed, some young people, through the lens by

which they classify a job to be dignified, have taken bold actions. The survey revealed that 7 percent of the youth vacated their post since they viewed it as not dignifying. A male focus group discussant explained that:

“I left my former job, not because of remuneration. At least GHC3000 (\$526) can do a lot but I resigned from there just because, sometimes it’s not only about the money. One can give off his/her best in a peaceful and respectful environment”. Male rural affluent FGD (25-35)

Aside from the point stated above, high-risk activities such as armed robbery and prostitution were considered undignified and unfulfilling. The youth grouped them under those with no values and illegitimate jobs that attract legal repercussions and come with health risks. Participants opined that:

“The type of activities/employment which are not legal and which society frowns upon. Such as dealing in drugs which disregard the rule of law, gangster and rebellion (An example is of what happened in my country Cote d’Ivoire, and which resulted in loss of lives). And these mentioned are not noble and these don’t benefit society.” Refugee youth Interviewee

“Being an armed robber involves going for the monies and properties of other people and does not make you a respected person as a youth” Female rural poor FGD (15-24)

Another added

“Because, with the prostitution, you’d get and STD and would not have any respect, only negative comments would be said about you all the time. And with the robbery, if you are not lucky, you may be lynched or spend your life in prison, so it is not dignifying.” Female peri-urban affluent FGD (25-35)

And another chimed in

“A job like a bus conductor, if you have a friend who is a bus conductor, you’d usually hear from him after a day’s job telling you how much he stole from his master; and when the master questioned me, “I told him we didn’t have many passengers today”. So, I think that is not dignifying.” Female Peri-urban poor FGD (15-24)

Interestingly, some participants brought out an important angle to the question. They argued that undignified and unfulfilling work could be a result of one's skills not matching the job requirement. One stated that,

“In Africa we have more undignified jobs, the one you must do even if it's below the minimum wage. You are forced to do because of the higher rate of unemployment, you have no option” Depending on your qualifications and things you have attained in the past. For instance, a master's degree holder can't work as a receptionist. It's not dignifying for the kind of qualification.” Male youth leader interviewee

A youth program implementer suggested that employers' practices determine the criteria for dignified and fulfilling work. She explained that,

“Well, it ranges from different people so you can't pinpoint on one sector but where a person or a young person is engaged in any kind of employment and they probably waiting for their next paycheck, their statutory payments are not met conditions of service are not really great in there probably overworked and underpaid so any employment or underpaid job is not dignifying. Also, things in Organizations that are unethical so Organizations that works in unethical issues for example engaging children in hard Labor work and chil-

dren are not supposed be employed so if you are under 15years you are not eligible for employment so that will not be dignified in the sense because anything that will humiliates a person's dignity and so since as a country we ratify the international human rights laws, anything that goes against the right of a person in the workplace is not dignifying and we speak strongly against that.” Youth program implementer interviewee

From both quantitative and qualitative data, it is safe to conclude that Ghanaian youth strongly believe that that dignified and fulfilling work comes with a good salary/income, respect and a sense of satisfaction that is derived from the impact of the work and accomplishments one makes.

The Aspirations of Ghanaian Youths

This section synthesizes the evidence on the aspirations and motivations of the youth that participated in the study in Ghana. As shown in table 4, almost half of the survey respondents dreamed of being rich and a similar population aspired to get a good job. Ghanaian youth believe the only way to achieve these dreams is by creating a business (42%) closely followed by getting higher education (31%)

Table 4. Aspirations of youth in Ghana

Subject	Percentages
Aspirations	
Be rich (%)	42%
Have a good job	41%
Support family	19%
A good education	20%
Start a family	23%
Earn >\$500	21%
Support Community	7%
Means (Pathways)	
Create a business	42%
Get higher education	31%
Find a job	13%

These results were confirmed when most participants in the FGD and interviews mentioned the same thing.

“Okay, my dream in life I want to be okay in my profession, I want to be a human resource manager or a manager in any aspect of business whether CEO that is my dream, but apart from that I want to be a philanthropist but first of all its not whom I’m able to get many resources but even as I’m growing or when I get to some aspect of my life, I want to help people, I want to be a social worker.”
Female youth leader

“I see more Ghanaians / Ghanaian youth becoming entrepreneurs in the next 5 years.”
Government youth group leader interviewee

Youths Aspirations around employment

The analysis of the data revealed that out of the 799 young people surveyed in Ghana, 34 percent were employed at the time of the research while 25 percent of young people who had jobs in the past had lost them (See Table 5). Among those who were employed, trading (26%), Modern jobs (11%), Fashion & Garment (9%) formed the top three sectors of employment. In terms of the nature of employment, almost half of the youth (48%) were self-employed with only 11 percent and 18 percent working for international institutions and private firms respectively. The qualitative interviews provided important gender differences

to explain the low number of young people engaged in the private sector. For the young men, the low number of young people engaged in the private sector could be attributed to structure and nature of work in the sector as seen in the words of one interviewee:

“For private sector I think it’s probably because the few get into the private sector and feel like later it could be demanding and so the standards are higher and young people want freedom...in private sector you have to work very hard it’s demanding because it pays higher and so you have to work harder so that could be one reason but I think the chief reason for people is they see that it’s a place where they would apply for when there are no opportunities available.” Youth program implementer

For the females, the low number of youth employment in the private sector is largely because of unfair treatment compared to when working on your own. A young woman asserted:

“yea, my brother if you will agree with me that, the private sector sometimes is more or less, a family business sector, are you getting it? So, most people won’t rely on them, it’s only in the private sector that you will be given employment this month and the next month you are fired, are you getting it? So, most of the youth don’t want to start from there. So, the private sector, there is that kind of perception, that they can easily fire you at any point in time, are you getting it?” Female youth leader

Table 5. Current Jobs of youth in Ghana

Subject	Percentage
Youth Currently Employed (%)	34%
Precarious (Churn)*	25%
Earning below \$1.9/day (%)	44%
Top 3 sectors Employing the Youths currently and their share	Trading (26%) , Modern jobs (11%), Fashion & Garment (9%), Total share (46%)
Key sectors for the Youths in Self-employment	Trading (29%), Fashion & Garment (16%) , Hotel & Tourism (8%), Construction (8%)
Current key Employers	Self-employed (48%), Private companies (18%), International institution (11%)

The qualitative data provides further insight to suggest that generally young women and men in Ghana would like to take up jobs that gives a high level of security and could provide means for daily subsistence over a period. Quite remarkably many of the young women and men agreed that private sector employment does not match up to this standard. An interviewee for instance stated:

“I think in generating a goal, parents would want a lot of their children to move government jobs because there is a lot of security. You know that no matter what happens at the end of the month, your salary is there. Then there is a certain regard for the government, there is trust. You know that, yes, this business belongs to the government, it will be there, and it won't close a couple of months after. But over time, we have seen the private sector doing quite well, so I actually thought that everyone who wants security wants it. I would rather if

I was in the media think of applying to TV3 instead of going to GBC or maybe working for Ecobank than Ghana Telecom. But I guess also, I know for a fact that GCB for example pays a lot more than the private banks. Maybe for education also, regarding school, there is more stability there than and they pay better than the private banks.” Employer of youth

In terms of aspirations around employment, modern jobs appear to be desirable for many of the youth studied as 15% have this on their list. This is closely followed by 13% wanting to work in the Fashion & Garment industry, and only 11% anticipate working in the health sector. Again, 38 percent aspired to own their company, whereas another 34% mentioned that they would want to work in public sector. Only a small proportion mentioned working in family business/farm (nine percent).

Table 6. Desired future jobs of Youth in Ghana

Subject	Percentage
Future Jobs desired	Modern jobs (15%), Fashion & Garment (13%), Health (11%)
Future salaries desired- % high earners (% high earner currently)	21.28% (7.72%)
Employers desired	Own company (38%), Government (34%), Family business/Farm (9%)
Transformation jobs desirability	Agric* (4%), Hotel & tourism (3%), ICT related (2%)

The qualitative evidence provides an important gender dimension to the aspired jobs or employment. On the one hand the young women tended to gravitate toward the fashion industry because of the prospects it holds. For example, a young woman shared her thoughts during a focus group discussion when talking about fashion design as a desired job:

“I want to be a fashion designer, and by that I would need respect and humility and the obedience to do what is asked of me for the teacher to have passion to teach me, which would help me get a better sustenance. That's what I want to do” Poor peri-urban female FGD (15-24)

On the other hand, there was the impression, particularly among the young men that being a fashion designer does not require high level of skills and ingenuity. A young man stated that:

“I think that, in Ghana, fashion is one of those things that we see as a few of the ‘low-barrier’ entities. Where if you are unable to get into a higher education, you go and learn how to sew, and you can open a shop and people will always come to sew. What we think of fashion generally we are just seeing it something with not much to do. I can see why many people will get into it.” Employer of youth

A youth program implementer also added that:

“I think it’s something that has been part of our culture for a long time and so young women, especially those who are out of school or those who didn’t get the opportunity to continue their education, would usually take it up as a means to reach their goals”.

Explaining the big percentage of youth desiring public sector work, an interviewee noted,

“People prefer government jobs because the government is more secure than the private aspects. You know with the private man, he can decide to say one day I’m shutting down my company, everybody goes home. Okay, so that is why most people would prefer to work in a government institution.” Government youth representative interviewee

It was clear that the youth preferred owing their business as opposed to working in private sector. When prompted about this, a participant said,

“Maybe it could be the payment. Because it not easy to get a job that pays well enough to satisfy yourself and your family unless you have a higher education” Successful rural male youth interviewee

This suggests that government provides security in terms of money and as such is the second most desired job while owing own business is the most desirable job. This can be argued to be as a result of many role models who are successful in their own businesses. A discussant showed this by stating that,

“I wish to be like Kennedy Agyapong. How he has been able to establish businesses and his benevolence too, I wish to be like him to help the needy make progress in life.” Affluent peri-urban female FGD (25-35)

Despite agriculture being the backbone of most sub-Saharan African countries, a number of participants associated agriculture with suffering and low pay. A discussant stated,

“The reason why maybe so far the youth has not acquired agriculture as a job is because, one before we started we talked about dignified employment. Yes. And you see the Society that we live in, no one aspires or

talks about a farmer being one of the dignified people we, we talked about. When we started we mentioned a lawyer, a doctor and a pilot. Looking at that range of people, they wear white-colored dress with tie moving around with their bags and everything looks so good with them. So they will call them a dignified person. But when you see a farmer he is always in his working gear dressed in some way, some part is torn and then in his farm busily with his knees burned down and working. People see it to be stress out. One, you will not be changing clothes. So in terms of dignifying jobs, people will not love to take that.” Rural Affluent Male FGD (15-24)

Agriculture is therefore not viewed as a dignified job in their eyes. This explains the low population percentage (4%) that are interested in it.

Aspirations to be financially independent and self-reliant

The young people surveyed in Ghana also aspired to a future in which they would be financially independent and self-reliant. Results from the quantitative analysis show that 42 percent of youth aspired to be rich. Interestingly, 21 percent hope to earn not less than \$500 every month. This raises the question about how rich they see themselves becoming. Nevertheless, the qualitative evidence provided an important gender difference on the desires or aspirations of the youth around finance and salary/income expectations. On the hand one, the young men believed in starting on a low salary and gradually moving up the ranks. During the face-to-face interview, a young man narrated:

“As a young graduate in Ghana, you don’t need to earn less than ₵1,600 (\$ 280). Perhaps, this should increase to ₵2500 (\$ 439) when you are married”.

This salary expectation, which reflects the views of many of the young men, was seen as adequate to help them live a comfortable life.

On the other hand, the young women aspired to wanting to earn a little more than the usual. The desired salaries level, in their estimation, should be able to cater for basic expenditures such as feeding, transportation, clothing, accommodation and other expenses as evident in the narration by

one young woman below:

“I think earning something like ₵3000 (\$526) would be good to take care of the things in our current system. I will pay the monthly rent while I use a portion to take care of the kids and also save the rest”.

Another factor that shaped how much young people aspire to earn is their location. That is, the geographic location a person finds himself/herself largely influenced how much they desired to make when they finally get that dream job. The urban young men and women who participated in the study were more likely to aspire to high-paid jobs than their rural counterparts. An urban resident stated:

“If I am able to get something like ₵2000 (\$350), I would be glad. I would use some for checkups as an operator, rent, also savings towards my personal job in the future”.

Conversely, the rural young women and men mostly aspired for a job that pays between ₵500 (\$88) and ₵1000 (\$175).

“As for me if I earn Ghc1,000.00 (\$175) a month, I would use a percentage for rent and transportation, keep a percentage to feed until I am being paid for the next month. I will also save some at the bank and use the rest for domestic responsibilities in case my husband is not able to provide for the home”.

Most of the youth who participated in the Ghana study would want to save a fraction of their monies to realize their ultimate goal. The need to save toward the future (set up own business) is quite impressive.

An interviewee noted,

“I’m currently doing some savings to get there.” Affluent peri-urban female FGD (25-35)

It is thus not surprising that close to half of the youth (42%) believed creating a business is a means of attaining their aspiration of being rich, and as such 41% seek to have a good job to support this quest. As the youth program implementer pointed out,

“Young people who are out of the school system have the aspiration of setting up

their own enterprises thus going through the technical and vocational angle and setting up their own enterprises or being employed in big corporations where they can put their skills to work and earn higher.” Youth program implementer interviewee

Good Education, starting and supporting family

The young people in Ghana also placed emphasis on the social dimensions of their futures in which they would have good quality education, start their own family and provide support for family members. The survey results indicate that 20 percent of the young people considered getting quality education as an important part of their aspirations whereas additional 23% and 19% aspired to start their own family and provide support for their families respectively. This was teased out in qualitative data, where participants had this to say,

“In the next 5 years, I should have finished my PHD. In the next 10 years, I should be in academia doing policy and research. And in the next 20 years, I should be in politics.” Urban FGD

“eeeeiii, (laugh), okay in the next five years, currently I am not married, am hoping that within that period, in the next five years, I will have a wife and then possibly, either a child or children, thus one, as I mentioned earlier, am living in my father’s house, hoping that in the next five years I should be able to build my own house, thus two and in the next five years too, currently I’m using a motor bike, am hoping that in the next five years, I should be driving in my own car.” Male respondent from the quantitative survey interviewee

Action taken by Youth to advance their career goal

Pathways to Success

The socially imagined desires or aspirations of wanting to start and support families has boosted the young people’s efforts in exploring pathways such as pursuing higher education, starting an economic venture, seeking a job in an organization among others. For instance, 13% of the youth reported that they want to have a good job to reach

their aspirations of being able to start and support their families. In one of interviews, a participant explained,

“Young people who are out of the school system have the aspiration of setting up their own enterprises thus going through the technical and vocational angle and setting up their own enterprises or being employed in big corporations where they can put their skills to work and earn higher.” Youth program implementer interviewee

Additionally, a third of the youth (31%) reported that getting higher education is one sure pathway to becoming successful. The young people surveyed were not relenting on their efforts to succeed. In the past year prior to the study, as shown in table 7 below, about 26 percent had enrolled in schools to pursue higher education while 16 percent had sought to learn from the experiences of their mentors.

Table 7: Actions Taken (only those who have taken actions in the past one year)

Actions Taken (only those who has taken actions past 1 year)	
Saving money for future	42%
Furthering education	26%
Seek advice from experienced mentor	16%

This was heavily asserted in the participants’ discussions

“I’m currently doing some savings to get there.” Affluent peri-urban female FGD (25-35)

“I am currently pursuing my master’s degree and I am basically focusing on financial development.” Urban FGD

“I sew, I am learning to be a fashion designer, I need the support of my family to have an effective study. If I don’t study under someone, I wouldn’t know how to do the herm, or cut or even sow.” Poor peri-urban female FGD (15-24)

Enabling Factors

Asked about the factors that enable them, several interviewees reiterated that their own drive was their motivation and that their strongest support in career advancement was the parental encouragement. Some participants narrated:

Table 8: Ambition Vs Reality

Ambition Vs Reality	
Currently working poor %	44%
Quite & very far from goal	53%
See themselves living outside their country in 5 yrs.	32%

“I think it is the courage and determination. Even if I don’t have the tools to do the implementation, I am always hopeful and work on it.” Refugee youth interviewee

“Mummy’s support, because she always supports me in what I do, so it makes me push myself forward.” Poor peri-urban female FGD (15-24)

Although they are desirable for a good future, they are not oblivious of the hurdles they need to surmount to get to their desired aspiration.

Challenges in Ghana youth career Advancement

With just 44 percent being currently employed, it comes as no surprise that 53 percent of the youth believed they are quite far or very far from attaining their goals. Because of this, 32 percent of the youth would want to try their luck outside of Ghana (migrate) in the near future as seen in the table 8 and comments below.

“I see myself in a developed country. I want to see myself responsible, in a dream society. In a developed country that will also help me to achieve my goals.” Refugee youth interviewee

Lack of Awareness of opportunities and Networking

Achieving one's goals in life does not come without setbacks and young people studied in Ghana experienced a fair share of these challenges in their bid to realize their aspirations. Most of the youth in Ghana are not aware of all the available job opportunities. This is largely because they do not have the information or the needed networks that will connect them to these jobs. This was applicable to both the young men and women. A major source of information for youth in Ghana is radio and television though admittedly a significant proportion of young people do source for information on the internet. However, many of them are not aware there are youth programs that are made to help advance their goals. A young entrepreneur stated that:

“I know some programs the government has undertaken. I'm aware of NEIP, Accra Digital Hub. These are the programs I know”.

Another respondent claimed he has never known any program to help advance the course of the Ghanaian youth. He stated that:

“I seriously do not know any program. Unless you educate me”.

This lack of awareness of existing interventions and programs will make it harder for young people to encounter desired opportunities around employment to help in realizing their aspirations. Although we live in technologically advanced age, the young people seemed not to be benefitting from technological prospects when it comes to seeking job opportunities and in advancing their career goals. They, thus, do not know the appropriate channels to take to secure themselves a job.

We also observed that urban youth were better informed of existing government youth programs such as NABCO, NEIP, Jobcam and National Youth Employment while their counterparts in rural areas could mention none. Instead, they talked about local voluntary programs that are provided by either church or school.

Financial constraints

Another challenge relates to financial constraints. Having access to requisite resources is pivotal in lending support to the aspirations young people envision for themselves. For instance, one would need financial resources to start a dream business. In the same vein, education becomes another channel to acquire employable skills that could help the youth in reaching goals. In all cases finance will be needed whether to further education to secure professional or dignified or start a new business or support family members. Although 31 percent of Ghanaian youth viewed education as key means to meeting their aspirations, only 20 percent of the youths in Ghana aspired to have a good education, and this was linked or attributed to economic reasons (finance). Thus, 52 percent, stated financial constraints as a reason for not continuing education. The lack of financial constraint also became evident during the focus group discussions and interviews:

“No, I wanted to continue my education but due to some reasons, I had to divert to tiling.” Successful rural male youth interviewee

“The challenges are largely financial my brother. Sometimes in life you need resources to do A and B and then the resources have always been delayed. So most of my challenges have been financial. Ahaa. Because as for the time, I use my time well. But most of my challenges have been the resources aspect.” Male respondent from the quantitative survey interviewee

“Lack of money. I had wanted to do science in school, but my parents said that it involves many payments so I opted to do Home Economics since I could still be a nurse through that. I had wanted to be a doctor but because of issues with money, I am becoming a nurse.” Poor peri-urban female FGD (15-24)

Skills Mismatch

A number of youths also pointed that they were not able to advance their goals as they could not get a job that matched their skills. A discussant explained,

“For me, it goes back to what somebody was saying about having skills verses qualification. For me I want the responsibility, but they are not able to give it to me because they want a master’s degree. I want to be given the responsibility get they want master’s degree and 5 years work experience. So, for me that is a challenge.” Urban FGD

Lack of Government Connections

While some participants believed that one does not need government connections to succeed, others strongly believed that their lack of government connections hindered their advancement. A participant lamented,

“Someone might have the required skills and all that, but if I don’t know person who can link me to this job, you won’t get it.” Urban FGD

Another added,

“Now looking for a job in the government sector; even in the private sector is about whom you know.” Urban Affluent Female FGD (25-35)

These fears were confirmed by one of the participants who admitted to getting a position through connection. She stated,

“Because in Ghana you will hear people saying ‘whom you know’ and ‘who knows you’ and per the little involvement we are able to analyse that most are true because with myself it’s my internship that I did, it was because I know someone, because I learnt some people wrote their letters and they were not picked so it was because I know someone there”. Female youth leader

Lack of Social Support

Some participants noted that having a strong social network would go a long way in supporting their dreams and overcoming challenges in their journey to achieve their dreams. A participant said,

“We need parental support, so it may be that we may not be strong financially as a family, but based the words of encouragement that can be given to the children of some little things than can be done for them, it can give the child a good heart to do what they have to.” Poor peri-urban female FGD (15-24)

Youth Motivations

Despite the barriers faced the youth reported to have high hopes of being successful and this must be backed by an equal measure of motivation. Almost all the young women and men surveyed (98%) were confident of realizing their ambitions. The youth held the view that with hard work, perseverance and determination, they can turn their fortunes around, and many (95%) suggested that learning from the past holds the key to a successful future. This finding is consistent with existing research from Ghana and elsewhere (Yeboah et al., 2020; Yeboah, 2019).

Table 9. Youth motivation in Ghana

Subject	Percentage
I am confident I can achieve my goals	98%
I am confident I can shape my future if I work hard enough	98%
There is no failure if I am not able to achieve something today, I will have learned a lot to make it better next time	95%
Success is 90% hard work	81%
To succeed in this country, you need to have family members in the government	46%

But having a positive mindset and needed qualification is not all the young men and women needed

to be successful in the context where opportunities for decent work or employment are embedded in political connections and networks. In fact, a very good proportion of the youth (46%) surveyed held the view that one's political networks and connections matter if one is to be successful. This view was common among the young men and women alike. A young woman shared her thoughts:

"Sometimes qualifications do not even matter. All you need is to know someone in high positions in government. The person would help you secure your desired job. So, the "whom you know" mantra really works. You will not go far if you do not know any high-ranking official".

A male discussant also added

"In our present days, before you can get a position, you need to have links. That's what is happening in Ghana now"

This situation possibly is not ideal as many qualified youths are cut off from gaining a dignified employment and going on to fulfil their aspirations, but this seems to be the reality or normal practice in the context where the young people find themselves. One respondent elaborated this further:

"They are trying to make it a necessity. When you know someone in government, it makes life easier and simple. Even when you need documentations to start your business you must know someone else you will be subjected to unexplainable delays. So, a country like Ghana it is important to know someone".

Awareness and use of technology

Most youth reported being aware of and able to use technology. The most cited technology was internet, TV radio and specific social media platforms such as Facebook, Whatsapp and Yahoo. Almost all interviewed youth had access to mobile phones that are internet enabled. As such, they reported that they indeed were able to use technology in their pursuance of career goals. An interviewee noted,

"Check on the internet to get a scholarship to undergo computer science bachelor's degree. I have done this personally through the University of the people. And I did it for one year and it is renewable." Refugee youth interviewee

Indeed, the interviewed youth have confidence with the use of technology. They even explained how technology has helped their entrepreneur activities. An interviewee commented,

"If you have your smartphone assuming you are self-employed, and you are selling your product sometimes you can use it to market your stuffs, even the whatsApp you can advertise your product on whatsApp, Facebook for example you can be able to create a platform and leave your contact for people to call you. I am selling bags, shoes, you leave your contact there, and people can reach you." Female youth leader

However, some youths were quick to point out the negative effects of disruptive technology.

"Yes, currently looking at the kind of software we've been using at the job places, I think it is taking most of our jobs. Now we have accounting soft wares, so why do we need an accountant? So, let's say if the company needs over 5 accountants, because of the software, they will just need one instead of 5. So, I think it has a negative influence on us." Urban FGD

Overall, the Ghanaian youth have embraced the use of technology in their day to day lives. Despite this, the disruptive technology worries some since they worry that they will soon be replaced by technology in a country where majority of the youth are unemployed and underemployed.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has provided insight into the aspirations and job prospects of young women and men in Ghana before COVID-19 pandemic. Overall, it is evident that while some young people are confronted with the reality of unemployment, all including those who are employed aspired for a future in which they will have modern jobs, own a business and be financially secured and self-reliant. The aspirations of the young men and women also embodied desires of securing good quality education, start and provide financial and other support for family members. Nevertheless, financial constraints as well as lack of awareness of opportunities including government programmes on employment and networking affect the potential of young people to realize their aspirations. However, the youth studied were hopeful of being successful in life, stressing the importance of hard work, determination and perseverance.

Overall, what these findings tell us is that while young people are constrained by various structural forces, they still exercised some considerable agency and imagined possibilities for improved life chances in the future. The importance of starting once own family and providing support for family members as an important dimension of youth futures highlight how young people in Ghana and elsewhere in Africa are embedded in complex family-based relations of independence, dependence and inter-dependence with significant economic dimensions (Hashim and Thorsen, 2011; Yeboah, 2021). The youth studied saw the possibility of being able to succeed stressing the importance of pursuing higher quality education, starting a venture and finding employment in an organization. This point to the agency of young people in charting their life course and the futures that they aspire for themselves.

Based on these findings, the following suggestions are put forward as part of effort to improve the job prospects of young people for them to realise their aspirations.

Provide opportunities for young people to secure financial support to pursue their various ventures. The study found financial constraints as key to preventing young people from either pursuing higher education or enter their desired economic

ventures. While there are several targeted interventions to ensure financial access for the poor and all, young people with limited political connections are unable to secure opportunities. It is recommended that existing government and private sector as well as future initiatives that seeks to provide financial support for young people ought to be transparent to allow young people from diverse background to access such funding to pursue their future aspirations around employment and education

The findings show that young people consider good quality education as important for them to succeed in life. In this regard there is the need to ensure access to quality education both now and over the long term to enable a transition from low paid jobs to dignified and sustainable employment both in the short and long term, which in turn can translate into better employment outcomes for young people to realise their aspirations.

Take the views of young people on their aspirations more seriously in policy decisions, programme design and implementation. The study found that young people consider modern jobs, good quality education and dignified employment as important part of their aspirations. In this regard it will be useful for policy and programmes to become more ambitious through a process of structural transformation, which can provide opportunities for young people to access modern employment for them to realise their aspirations of supporting family members

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