

THREATENED ASPIRATIONS, UNDAUNTED RESILIENCE:

NIGERIAN YOUNG WOMEN'S AND MEN'S
PROSPECTS FOR LIVELIHOODS, EMPLOYMENT
AND ACCOUNTABILITY



Nigeria Country Report

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ACRONYMS

ACRONYMS	FULL MEANING
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease of 2019
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IDI	In-Depth Interview
KII	Key Informant Interview
YPDs	Youth Panel Discussions
PASGR	Partnership for African Social and Governance Research
MCF	The Mastercard Foundation
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bi-gender, Transgender and Queer
GBV	Gender-Based violence
IPOB	Indigenous People of Biafra
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
VPN	Virtual Private Network
OECD	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With its young people believed to be facing many challenges, such as unemployment, threats to business, and insecurity, among others, Nigeria is among the world's poorest countries (Global Finance, 2024). The COVID-19 pandemic was likely to have further compounded the challenges apart from those discussed. With approximately 206 million people, of which the youth population comprises over 70%, Nigeria has a demographic structure with some important implications: (i) it suggests that Nigerian youth constitute a significant segment of the country. (ii) the large youth population, mostly people between ages 15 and 35, face the highest unemployment rate, amounting to 64% of the total national unemployment (Mboho 2021; O'Neill 2021). The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) put the youth unemployment rate at 53.4%. Meanwhile, Aina and Oluremi (2024) have reported the Bureau as noting a plausible rise in youth unemployment in 2024.

However, pre- and post-COVID, Nigeria has continued to enact youth-focused policies and programmes with significant impacts, such as job creation, social welfare and political participation. This situation has created a context that presents opportunities and challenges that have implications for young women's and men's aspirations, resilience and adaptability as they continue to pursue dignified livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 era. This situation required a country-specific study that presented empirical evidence to guide policy action that could effectively strengthen the identified opportunities and address the challenges.

This study, therefore, was conducted to examine the aspirations and resilience of young women and men in Nigeria. The study explored the gender and social norms influencing young women's and men's aspirations and assessed the policy and regulatory environments for supporting youth aspirations, especially in the context of the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study conceptualised young women's and men's aspirations as their quest for improved living conditions or status in society, a process of young peoples' wishing and envisioning what they would like to be in the future. It is the driving force behind a young person's life path and well-being. Young women's and men's resilience was conceptualised as their ability to deploy resources to navigate through various obstacles to achieve their

aspirations. At the same time, adaptability is defined as young women's and men's capacity in the post-COVID era to influence and manage their resilience to avoid undesirable outcomes. It was projected that the extent to which young people can manage and influence their resilience determines the nature of the outcome they get in their aspirations for good livelihoods in the post-COVID-19 era.

Through a mixed-methods design that combined youth-appropriate quantitative survey and qualitative research approaches (Focus Group Discussions—FGDs, Youth Panel Discussions—YPDs, In-Depth Interviews—IDIs, and Key Informant Interviews—KIIs), data were collected by stratifying the country into its six existing geopolitical zones: South West, South East, South-South, North West, North Central, and North East. Quantitative data were collected from 1,660 survey participants (young women and men), while qualitative data were obtained from 18 sessions of FGD, six sessions of YPD, 15 IDIs, and nine KIIs among young people and stakeholders.

Key findings

1. Youth-hood and aspirations

Nigerian young women and men defined youthhood in terms of age and physical vitality as over 50% of the participants considered persons between 18 and 40 years as youth, while they also described youth as a cohort of active people with high energy levels, potential, and drive for adventures. In addition to the demographic and physical attributes, youthhood is a period of political activism. As submitted by Nigerian young people, 'proper' young women or men do not constitute burdens but valuable resources. Some markers of a 'proper' youth include *a good sense of industry, a commitment to contribute to the betterment of society, a high moral standard, and self-confidence*. Contrary to the popular gender norm that women are weak, the youth believed that women are strong and independent.

Only one out of 10 youth surveyed admitted that they had already attained the success they aspired to in life. However, about 6 out of 10 indicated that they were closer to living a successful life, while about 3 out of 10 attested that they were still

far from realising a successful life.

Among the young people interviewed, financial stability ranked highest among the indicators of success quantitatively assessed in this study, as the majority (52.0%) of the respondents considered being financially stable (rich) the topmost success priority. However, gender-specific analyses and voice disaggregation showed that of all the indicators of aspirations assessed, the topmost ambitions of young men in order of priority were to be financially stable and prosperous (56.7%), have a good job (45.2%), create good business (45.1%) and providing family support (42.7%). On the other hand, the topmost aspirations of young women in order of preference were to have a good job (48.2%), provide family support (48.9%), be financially stable and prosperous (47.2%) and a good business (46.9%). Surprisingly, although young women (29.3%) and men (26.9%) generally considered good education to achieve good livelihoods, the desire for an excellent education to attain their aspirations was relatively low among young men.

2. Youth's perspectives on dignified and fulfilling work

Nigerian young women and men considered jobs that offer good income and financial opportunities for them to pay their livelihood bills and have sufficient savings for themselves and their dependents as dignified and fulfilling work. Both young women and men, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, religion, and location of residence, held similar perspectives of dignified and fulfilling. Besides, Nigerian young women believed that dignified and fulfilling work must provide job security, add to their honour, reputation, prestige, and dignity, and not expose the workers to harm and discrimination due to gender, religion and ethnicity.

3. Barriers to Youth Aspirations in Nigeria

Insecurity and poor business environment negatively affect the aspirations of Nigerian young men and women in different ways. Compounding the existing problem was the COVID-19 pandemic, in which most of the youth (79.0%) running businesses indicated that it affected their businesses compared to the pre-COVID-19 era. The major effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth businesses was a significant loss of income, which was experienced by over 60.0% of the youth. Over 5 out of 10 young people lost opportunities and custom-

ers, and business options were reduced by about 45%. Youth who had to completely close down their businesses were about 25.0%. The trend increased unemployment, crime rates, domestic violence and poor business patronage. Generally, young women and young people in the rural segments of the country experienced fewer job opportunities than men and urban youth during the pandemic. However, the effects of the pandemic were not the same for young women and men. More specifically, young women experienced more emotional trauma: They were constrained to stay at home to take care of their children and in the process, many of them fell victim to rape and other forms of domestic crimes.

Myriads of insecurity issues such as Boko Haram, kidnapping, farmer-herder-conflict and ritual killings negatively affected Nigerian young people's aspirations. Insecurity issues forced many young people to close their businesses, abandon their farmlands or escape to safer regions because of lack of money.

4. Youth resilience and adaptability strategies

Both young women and men demonstrated high levels of resilience and adaptability. They reiterated that notwithstanding the challenges of natural disasters and artificial obstacles that threatened their aspirations, it is still possible for them to adapt and achieve success and a good life. The youth hinted that hard work, commitment, perseverance, patriotism, and focus on one's goals are required to succeed.

However, young men significantly differed from young women in their resilience and adaptability levels. Compared to young women, Nigerian men demonstrated stronger resilience and adaptability traits: they showed stronger desires to take risks and try out new things. Interestingly, we discovered that (challenges (natural or man-made) provided the opportunity for young women to try their hands at some of those jobs once socially prescribed for men, thus providing a basis to challenge some of the existing gender norms.

Recommendations

Recommendations for programmatic and strategic action

- This study has established that the youth require support and empowerment through assistance from governmental bodies, donor agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Development organisations' interventions should address digital skills acquisition, empowerment for private businesses, agriculture, and job creation, which are crucial to young people's aspirations.
- Compared to young men, young women experienced higher levels of distress during the pandemic. Besides, young women exhibited comparatively lower levels of resilience and adaptability. Therefore, interventions and empowerment programmes should give priority to young women.
- Young people in rural areas have relatively limited capabilities and opportunities to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic. Therefore, priority should be given to them during intervention programmes.
- Nigerian young women and men deployed their digital skills to cope with the impact of COVID-19. Therefore, there is a need for opportunities for young people to acquire digital skills to empower them.

Recommendations for policy and practice

- Young people in Nigeria ventured into agriculture, small businesses, and digital skill acquisition as survival strategies during the pandemic. Government should, therefore, provide financial assistance for small businesses, agricultural businesses/investments, and the digital industry.
- Government policies seeking youth empowerment should consider gender norms by giving priority to young women who were more vulnerable during disasters, especially given the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Young women and men in the country's rural areas were found to be more vulnerable, with limited opportunities and

weaker adaptability capacity. Therefore, government policies and interventions to empower young people should prioritise rural young people.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

As the largest country in Africa, Nigeria has a population above 206 million people, according to 2022 estimates (World Bank Group, 2023; Worldometer, 2023). This population is predicted to reach 264 million by 2030 and cross the 300 million threshold around 2036 according to the World Population Review (2022). The youth population comprises over 70% of the current population (218.5 million) (World Population Review, 2022). This demographic structure is like a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it suggests that the Nigerian youth constitute a significant force in the country's social, political and economic dynamics. On the other hand, this large youth population, which is officially categorised as comprising people between the ages of 15 and 35 years, has created an enormous burden of the high rate of unemployment among young women and men, and the trend has continued to spiral over the years (Mboho 2021; O'Neill 2021) with the young women and men in the country accounting for over 53.4% of the total unemployed Nigerians (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). The figure has increased over two years with institutional and government projection reports (Ejechi, 2021). Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to democracy, the country has continued to enact some policies and programmes on youth empowerment and employment, most of which were youth-specific and meant to have far-reaching impacts such as job creation, social welfare and political participation. This is, according to the Nigerian Government through its National Social Investment Programme, meant to move "millions of youths out of poverty" (The State House, 2016, Adaramola, 2024). Some of these programmes categorically tagged youth programmes were domesticated at the both State and Local Government levels. For instance, the Presidential Youth Empowerment Scheme code-named P-YES and N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfers and other youth-focused funds (e.g., Brave Women Project, Graduate Entrepreneurship Fund (Bank of Industry, 2022) which provide tenured opportunities for the youth over two years after which they are expected to have secured some skills and funds to establish on their own. This situation has created a context that presents opportunities and challenges that have stimulated young women and

men to demonstrate their technological innovation, aspirations and resilience. These social protection schemes and policy reforms across all sectors are, however, not being adequately financed or they are misappropriated by the officials in charge (Sanusi and Odeniyi, 2024).

The aspirations of young women and men are conceptualized as their quest for improved living conditions or status in society; they are a process of young people wishing and envisioning what they would like to be in the future (Tzenis 2021). It could also mean their quest to reach a specific operational space in education, career, business, politics, etc. (Hartas 2016a). Equally, young women's and men's resilience is conceptualized as their ability to deploy resources to navigate various obstacles to achieve their aspirations (Ungar et al. 2008a). Both aspirations and resilience could be influenced by many factors, such as political structure, available resources, policies, programmes, regulations and stakeholders, both formal and informal, in a given country.

While some people have described Nigerian youth as resilient, industrious and enterprising (Ozah 2018; The Cable 2018), some have tagged the youth as lazy and uneducated (Ezeh & Mbose 2020; *Premium Times*, 2018). The divergent perspectives about young women and men in terms of their resilience and aspirations influenced by different contextual factors such as inconsistent policies and the globally disruptive effects of the pandemic have attracted the attention of scholars (e.g. Dvorsky, Breaux and Becker 2020; Howie, Campbell and Kelly 2019; Kimhi et al. 2020a; Ogubuike 2021; Roman-Mata et al. 2020). However, much attention has not been given to the need to understand the aspirations of youth and how this would contribute to better and more effective development interventions in policy and programme implementation. In essence, there is a need for a scientific investigation that would yield context-specific outcomes for policy direction and meaningful interventions that would provide empirical evidence and data-driven policy recommendations for institutions, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and stakeholders whose activities and programmes have implications for aspirations (motivations, ambitions, etc.)

and dignified livelihood of young women and men in Nigeria.

The youth constitute a critical component of the Nigerian population. Hence, achieving their aspirations is essential to the growth of Nigeria's economy since they are the most active population. It is important to determine if youth resilience translates into achieving their aspirations. There is a dearth of empirical evidence showing how natural disasters like the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their aspirations and adaptability. In addition, empirical evidence to substantiate youth resilience's influence on economic productivity and well-being is imperative. Thus, this nationwide survey holistically investigated the challenges, adaptive capacity, resilience and aspirations of youth in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

In summary, Nigeria offers some unique variables such as rising unemployment, policy somersaults, insecurity, ethno-religious division, limited and unstable empowerment programmes, and fragile political environment, which call for deliberate and evidence-informed approaches towards ensuring sustainable and scalable youth development, taking into consideration youth aspirations and resilience strategies. Given the preceding gaps, therefore, as a component of a multi-country research and policy uptake project being implemented in seven African countries of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, by the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) and funded by the Mastercard Foundation (MCF), this nationwide study investigates Nigerian young women and men's aspirations and resilience in terms of prospects for livelihoods, employment and accountability during the pandemic and beyond to contribute to the emerging African perspectives and provide evidence-based policy recommendations.

Specifically, this study was designed to understand the aspirations and resilience of young women and men in Nigeria towards dignified and fulfilling work, especially in the context of the disruptive impact of the pandemic. Through a mixed-method design combining a country-level cross-sectional survey and selected youth-appropriate qualitative methodologies such as ethnography, the study investigated the gender and social norms that explain the aspirations of young women and men and assessed the policy and regulatory environments for supporting youth aspirations.

Country context and issues

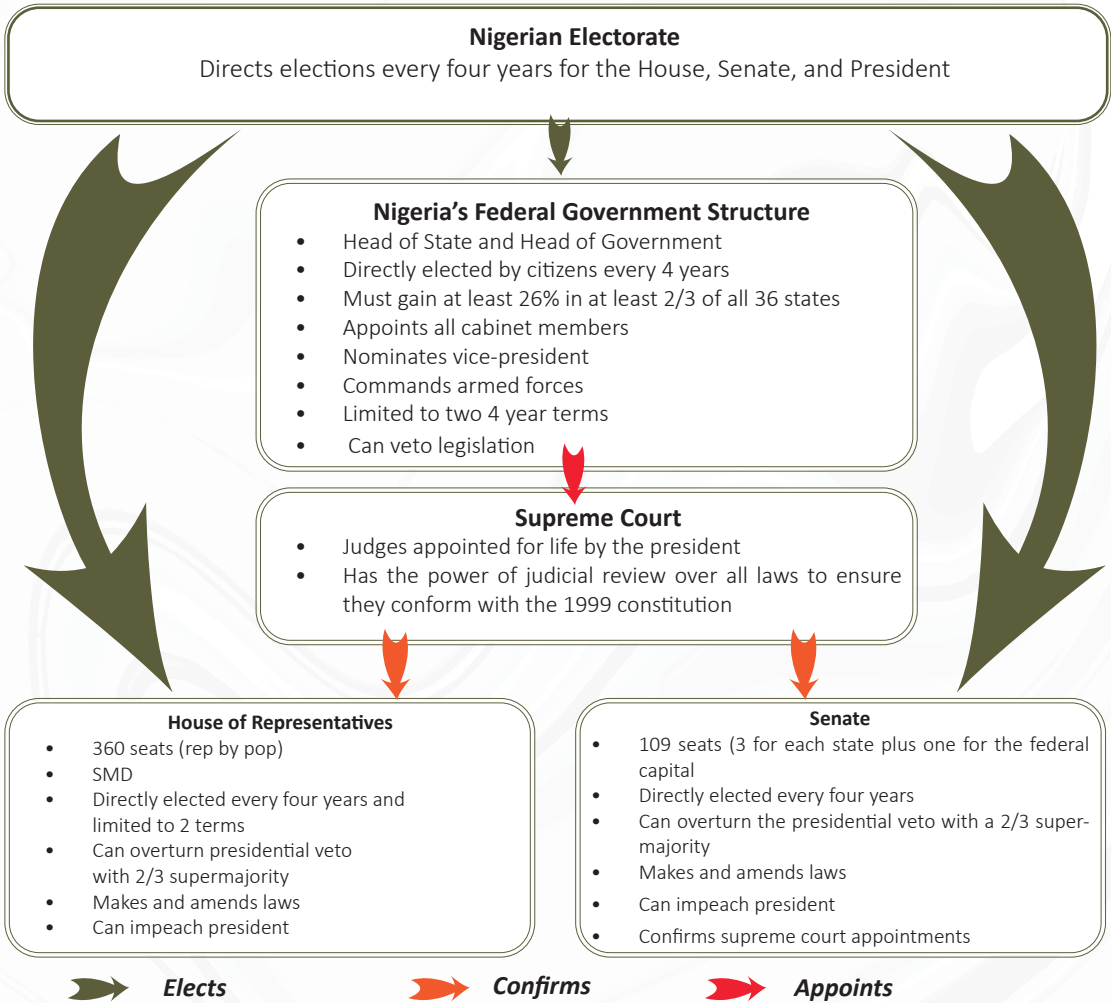
This section presents Nigeria's context and issues that could explain national policies and programmes that affect young women's and men's aspirations and resilience. These contexts and issues include Nigeria's political history, structure, demographic shift, and employment situation.

Political History and Structure

Nigeria is comprised of many nations and over 400 ethnic groups, including Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, which are the three dominant ethnic nationalities. Through the amalgamation of the Northern and the Southern protectorates in 1914, the various ethnic groups were forced to become a country, forming a union that has been described as a marriage of strange bed partners (Ojie & Ewruh-jakpor, 2009; Workneh, 2020). Perhaps it was due to this artificial creation that Hodgkin (1960) described Nigeria as a product of intricate histories of various people who are diverse politically, religiously and culturally. As a heterogeneous country, Nigeria has not been able to manage its diversity effectively. Since 1960, when it gained its independence, the country has witnessed major ethno-religious and political crises and security challenges (Odeyemi, 2014; Ojebuyi & Salawu, 2019) that have implications for youth aspirations, among other issues.

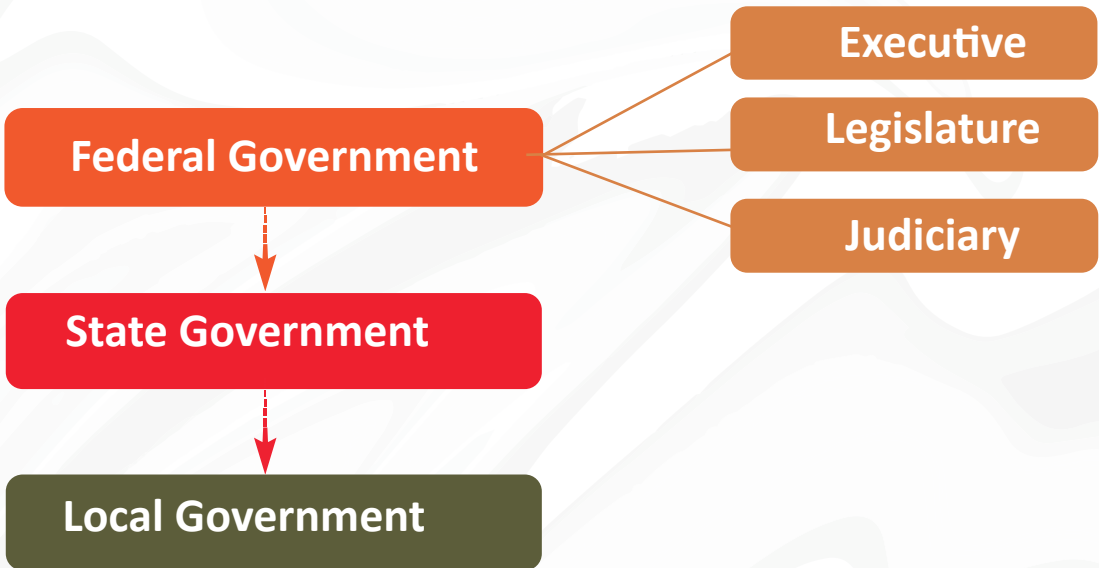
As a bi-cameral Federal Republic with the executive power exercised by the President (see Fig 1), Nigeria has three arms of government—Executive, Legislature, and Judiciary with the Supreme Court as the apex court. The President, both the Head of State and Head of Government, performs the executive functions, one of which is the appointment of ministers and heads of federal parastatals. The Legislative Arm resides in the National Assembly, which comprises the Senate (based on regional representation) and the House of Representatives (based on representation by population). The two chambers screen and confirm all the appointments made by the President.

Figure 1: Nigeria's Government Structure. Source: Summers (2022). Nigeria Political Institutions



Nigeria has three tiers of government—federal, state, and local governments (see Fig. 2)—which derive their respective powers from a federal constitution (Constitute, 2011). The Federal Government is the first tier responsible for the formulation of significant policies that affect the different aspects of the country's political and economic systems. The State Governments are the second tier coordinating the federating units, otherwise known as States, while the Local Governments are the third tier operating at the grassroots level.

Figure 2: Political Hierarchy of Nigeria.



Source: HierarchyStructure (2022). Political Hierarchy of Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://www.hierarchystructure.com/political-hierarchy-of-nigeria/>

It is clearly stated in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that the government has the primary obligation to protect the lives and property of the citizens. In other words, it is an inalienable right of the citizens to be protected by the government, as contained in Section 14(2b) that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government” (Constitute, 2011, p. 11). It is imperative to state that, apart from the corruption that has ravaged the Nigerian social, economic and political systems with serious implications for young people’s aspirations (Nelson & Ayawei, 2020), the political structure of Nigeria does not encourage the young people’s effective participation in politics in such a way that they can fairly contest elective positions by competing with the old generation of politicians. After the first lap of military rule between 1966 and 1979, when most of the military rulers were relatively young (Etebom, 2021), Nigeria’s political space has continued to be “overtly dominated by the old generation and god-fathers, who determine who gets what and favour their cronies to the detriment of many young Nigerians that are willing to participate in politics” (Olatunji, 2021, p. 1). Sections 65, 106, 131 and 177 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (Constitute, 2011) stipulate the age of people running for elective positions in the Senate and governor-

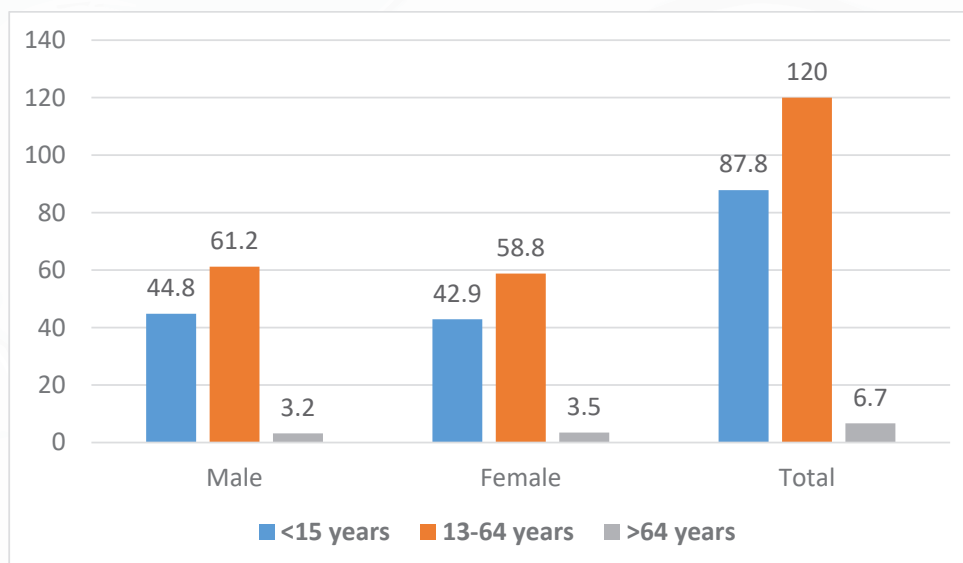
ship at 35 years old, House of Assembly and House of Representatives at 30 years old, and office of president at 40 years.

Demographic Composition and Shift

Understanding the Nigerian population composition is crucial to designing any plan, policy, and programme for the youth with gender in perspective. Nigeria ranked 7th in the world population (Countrymeter, 2022a) and 1st in Africa, making it the country with the highest population. As of April 5th, 2022, the current population of Nigeria was 216,051,502, with 109,403,641 (50.6%) male population and 106,647,861 (49.4%) female population (Countrymeter, 2022b). The statistics mentioned above revealed that the male population is higher than the female population, with a population difference of 2,755,780 (1.2%).

An overview of Nigeria’s age structure and gender composition is pertinent to know the population of male and female youth to be targeted for a particular programme or intervention. A statistical report by (Countrymeter, 2022b) revealed three age categories (<15 years, 15-64 years, >64 years) distribution of the Nigerian population using the estimated population (214,568,727 persons) at the beginning of 2022.

Figure 3: Age distribution of Nigeria's population (in million)



Source: Estimated from data available at <https://countrysmeters.info/en/Nigeria>

As shown in Figure 3, Nigerians aged 15-64 years have the highest population, and the male population was slightly higher than females across the three age groups. The age categories in Figure 3 make it difficult to estimate the actual population of youth in Nigeria. Within the context of this project, youth are categorised as individuals whose ages are from 15 to 35 years. Based on the population pyramid 2022, the gender and population distributions of Nigerian youth aged 15-35 are shown in Table 1. As presented in Table 1, the total population of youth aged 15-35 years in Nigeria was 72.4 million; young people who were male were 36.8 million (51%), while females were 35.6 million (49%).

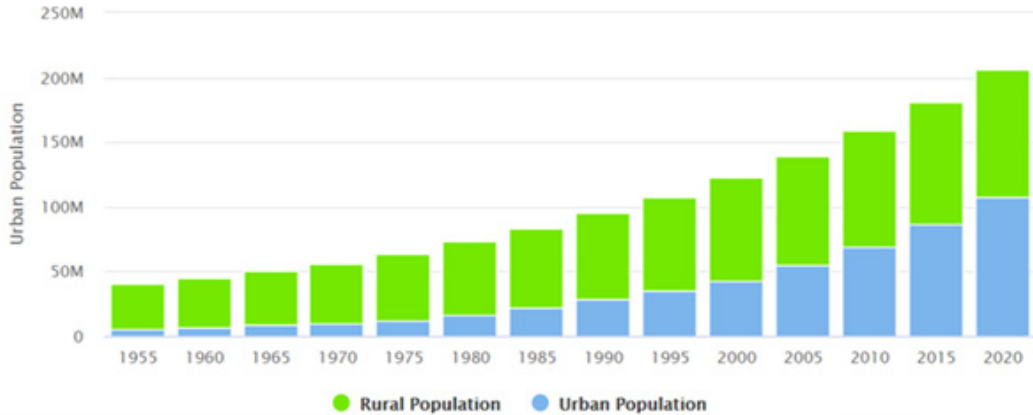
Table 1: Distribution of the Nigerian population aged 15-35 years as of April 2022 (in millions)

Year	Male	Female	Year	Male	Female
15	2.5	2.4	26	1.6	1.6
16	2.4	2.3	27	1.6	1.5
17	2.3	2.2	28	1.5	1.5
18	2.2	2.1	29	1.5	1.4
19	2.1	2.1	30	1.4	1.4
20	2.1	2.0	31	1.4	1.3
21	2.0	1.9	32	1.3	1.3
22	1.9	1.8	33	1.3	1.3
23	1.8	1.8	34	1.3	1.2
24	1.7	1.7	35	1.2	1.2
25	1.7	1.6	Total	36.8	35.6

Source: World Population Review, 2022
<https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/nigeria-population>

The Nigerian population has increased consistently from 1950 to date. Currently, the growth rate in Nigeria is 2.57%. Over the years, empirical evidence revealed that the rural population had decreased, leading to an increase in the urban population (See Figure 4). This could indicate that most of the rural population had migrated to urban areas in search of greener pastures.

Figure 4: Nigerian urban-rural population from 1955 to 2020



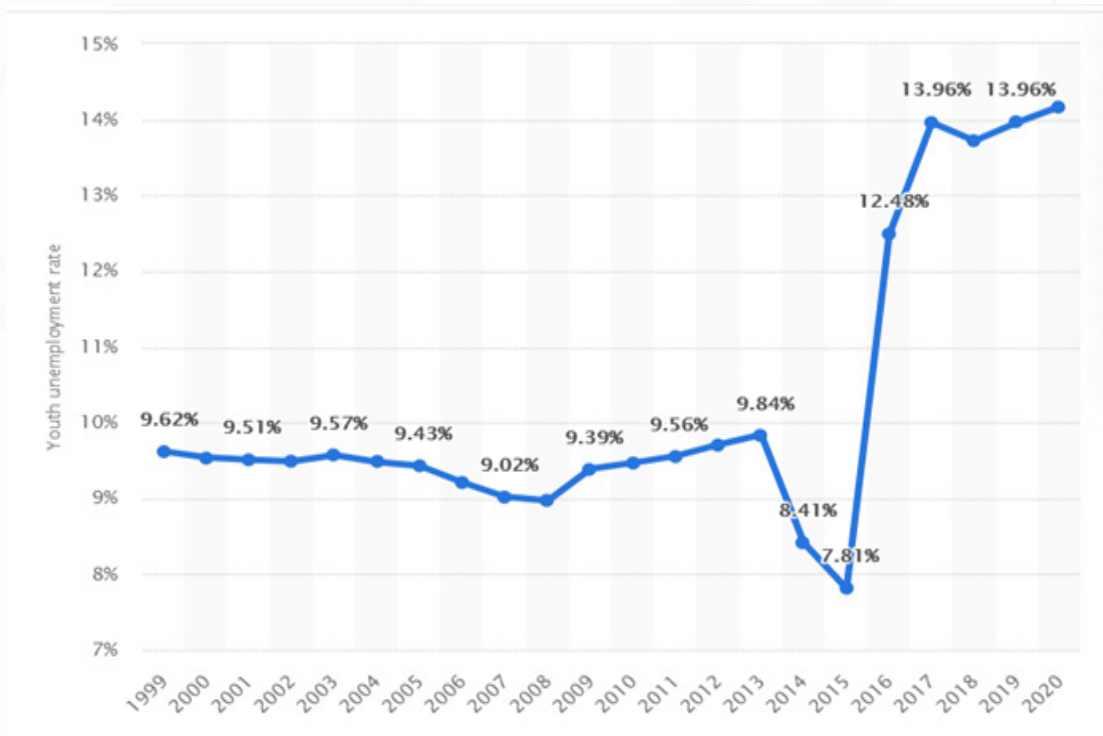
Source: Worldometers, 2021, Nigeria demographics. Available at <https://www.worldometers.info/demographics/nigeria-demographics/>

Besides, it is also worth noting that owing to development and civilization over the years in Nigeria, some rural areas have gradually transformed into urban areas, increasing the urban population. The statistics above implied that fair consideration should be given to youth in rural and urban areas in Nigeria during policy-making, especially with the realization of the prevalence of youth unemployment problems in both rural and urban areas of Nigeria.

Youth Unemployment

A new World Bank report indicates that unemployment is significantly higher for Nigerian youth (42.5%) compared to non-youth (26.3%), with the rate of employed males at just 46.4% while that of women is at 40.6% (Mboho, 2021). Data from the Nigeria Bureau of Statistics show that youth the number of youth eligible to work in Nigeria is about 40 million, but only 14.7 million are gainfully employed (Nairametrics, 2020). This implies a high youth unemployment rate among the country's youth and a weakened labour force since the most active working-age population is not employed. A survey on the youth unemployment rate from 1999 to 2020 (see Figure 5) revealed an exponential increase in unemployment among youth (15-24 years) from 2016 to 2020 relative to 1999 to 2013; unemployment was lowest in 2014 and 2015 (O'Neill, 2021).

Figure 5: The youth unemployment rate in Nigeria from 1999 to 2020



Source: (O’Neill, 2021). Nigeria- youth unemployment rate 1999-2020 | Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/812300/youth-unemployment-rate-in-nigeria/>

The majority of the youth in Nigeria place a high premium on education, even if they are not guaranteed government employment after schooling. Nigerian youth are believed to leverage their knowledge from formal education to pursue other life endeavours. According to Nigerian population literacy data retrieved in 2016 from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 59.6% of the adult population aged 15 years and above) in Nigeria can read and write, with the adult male population literacy rate at 69.2% and the adult female population at 49.7%. Interestingly, the youth literacy rate was 79.9% for males, 65.3% for females and 72.8% overall for the population aged 15 to 24 (Countrymeter, 2022b). Despite the literacy rates, Nigerian youth suffer from high unemployment rates.

ulation, adheres to other traditional religions. The major ethnic groups in Nigeria, according to a 2018 survey, include Hausa (30.0%), Yoruba (15.5%), Igbo (15.2%), and Fulani (6.0%), among others. The foregoing demographic composition shows that Nigeria is a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country. Unfortunately, this diversity has not been effectively exploited. The country has a long history of vicious politics and ethno-religious cleavages, especially among youth exercising their political agency online and offline. And in most cases, especially during electioneering, some politicians recruit unemployed youth along these religious and ethnic cleavages to perpetrate election violence (Alao, 2020; Udeagha & Nwamah, 2020).

Ethnic and Religious Cleavage

The Nigerian population is characterized by diverse religious affiliations and ethnic backgrounds. Approximately 53.5% of the population identifies as Muslim, while 45.9% identify as Christian. A small minority, comprising only 0.6% of the pop-

Research Questions

The key research questions that guided this study covered the following core variables: youthhood and youth aspiration, youth perspectives on dignified and fulfilling work, barriers to youth aspirations (e.g. COVID-19 and insecurity), and youth resilience and adaptability strategies. The research questions are listed as follows:

1. What are young men's and women's understanding of their youthhood?
2. What do youth consider success?
3. What are young women's and men's aspirations about their future?
4. What are the constraints to young people's realization of their aspirations?
5. How has the Covid-19 pandemic shaped young women's and men's aspirations about their future?
6. What adaptability and resilience strategies do young men and women employ to pursue their aspirations, especially amid militating policy, pandemic, and other challenging environments?

Methodological Approach

1. The Design

The study utilized a youth-led approach with a mixed-methods design, incorporating quantitative data collection and qualitative inquiry from young women and men across Nigeria. This ensured a holistic approach to eliciting data from the youth and other relevant players in youth matters (e.g., training and development). Eventually, this design led to the triangulation of various methods (from quantitative and qualitative approaches) selected for the study. The sample used for the study was selected through cluster sampling by using the six existing geopolitical zones (North Central, North East, North West, South East, South-South, and South West). Quantitative data for this study were collected through a national survey in Lagos, Oyo, Abia, Enugu, Kano, Kaduna, Niger, Bauchi, Gombe, Cross River, Rivers states, and Abuja (The Federal Capital Territory) randomly selected from the geopolitical zones. The qualitative aspects were Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), Youth Panel Discussions (YPDs), In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) all conducted across the six geopolitical zones.

2. The Methods

a. Qualitative Research methods

Four qualitative data collection techniques were employed for the study. They include Focus Group Discussions, Youth Panel Discussions, In-Depth Interviews, and Key Informant Interviews, as explained in the following section.

1. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Youth Panel Discussions (YPDs)

A total of 18 FGDs and 6 YPD sessions were held with young people across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria, namely, South-West, South-South, South-East, North-West, North-Central, and North-East, making 24 sessions in all. For the FGD sessions, the participants were youth, including members of the LGBTQ community and People Living with Disabilities (PWDs). Youth with common interests (i.e., transportation, represented by the National Union of Road Transport Workers; Business; Entertainment [Music/Acting]; Sports; and Humanitarian Work/Voluntary Services) were recruited for the Youth Panel Discussions. The composition was gender balanced. All the interviews were electronically recorded and transcribed.

2. In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Similar to FGDs and YPDs, the participants for IDIs were spread across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. While most participants were young, a stratified purposive sampling method was used to validate the representation of voices from different sectors. Non-youth persons working in critical sectors and initiatives were also considered for their invaluable experiences and potential insight regarding the subject for discussion. These included media consultants, politicians and political appointees, civil servants, administrators, academics, legal practitioners, digital skills experts, and youth trainers. In total, 15 IDIs and 9 KIIs, comprising 14 females and 10 males, were conducted. All the interviews were electronically recorded and later transcribed in preparation for analysis.

3. Validation workshop

In addition to the data gathered from the field, a validation workshop was held to authenticate the findings. The participants were predominantly young persons. Some participants confirmed our

findings, while some provided insights that were not captured in the conclusions of the field. These insights helped the Nigerian team to enhance the study's findings.

b. Quantitative research method

Survey

A nationally representative survey was carried out among 1,660 young people (50% young women, 50% young men) between the ages of 15 and 35. The participants were drawn from all six geopolitical zones of the country through stratified and random sampling techniques. A Probability Proportionate to Population Size Technique (PPPS) approach was used to allocate samples to each state. The technique guaranteed a precise projection of the survey result into the entire youth population of 15-35 years of each state with an acceptable confidence limit. The survey participants were young women and men across Nigeria. The quantitative data collection was managed through *SurveyCTO*, allowing for safe and real-time data transmission to the server, minimizing the loss of data and enhancing quality and integrity.

3. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. With the support of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), we produced frequencies, correlation and gendered analysis of the findings. The 1,659 valid responses that were retrieved through the questionnaire were analysed along with the study objectives.

For the qualitative analysis aspect of the study, we adopted the inductive method to analyse the data; we based the analysis on the emerging themes that emanated from the primary data gathered. The NVIVO software was used to create and code (inductive) emerging themes, while Microsoft Excel was used to aggregate the qualitative data against the corresponding interviewees/respondents. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data helped us to understand the peculiarities and intricacies of the youth aspirations and resilience in terms of their self-perception, what makes a young and proper person, and what success means to them, among others. These themes formed our findings and were supported with the appropriate quotes. Data for the study emanated from primary data that had been transcribed earlier. We gave each transcription deep reading to

enable us to fetch the emerging themes for discussion.

4. Validation

Validation for the study was done at two levels: the first was at the instrumentation level through an inception workshop with youth stakeholders who contributed to strengthening the research instruments; the second level of validity was at the stage of analysis and discussion of our findings. We did this by triangulating the quantitative with qualitative findings.

Outline of the report

This report is structured as follows:

Section 2 presents findings on youthhood and youth aspirations in Nigeria, highlighting contextual issues in the daily lives of youth, including societal perceptions and conceptualizations of these concepts. Section 3 outlines findings on youth perspectives regarding dignified and fulfilling work, with a particular focus on the comparison between young women and men. Section 4 explores findings on barriers to youth aspirations, as well as existing vulnerabilities and socio-economic challenges such as insecurity, unemployment, and informality. Section 5 presents findings on the various resilience and adaptability strategies employed by youth in Nigeria to cope, survive, and recover from the pandemic and similar challenges. Section 6 offers a comprehensive summary of the key findings across the themes addressed in the study. Section 7 provides recommendations for the Mastercard Foundation's programmatic and strategic actions, as well as recommendations for research, policy, and practice.

YOUTHHOOD AND ASPIRATIONS

Youth and Youthhood in Nigeria

Although conceptualization of youth and youthhood tends to vary across the different regions of Nigeria based on socio-cultural, ethnic and political dynamics, in this study, definitions and inferences about youth and youthhood revolved around three important aspects, namely, age and physical agility; political activism and mobilization; and ability to contribution to national development through innovative way. Sub-sections 2.1.1 to 2.1.3 present descriptions of youthhood by Nigerian young women and men.

Nigerian young women and men describe youthhood by age and physical agility

The most common definition of youthhood among discussants was based on demographics: age and physical agility. Several social and psychological factors were also mentioned as well. Youthhood is first seen as an age bracket, with over 50% stating that youthhood is between 18 and 40. However, most KII and IDI participants identified the age range of youth as being between, while suggesting an upper limit of 30 years, citing the age requirement for the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as the basis for this delineation.

Besides age range, young women and men also define youth as a group of people with high energy levels, drive, and potential who are adventurous and active. They believed youthhood is the most productive age of a human's life when goals are pursued with vigour and achieved. As one of the participants opined, *Youth are energetic, foregoing, proactive when it comes to achieving life goals, quick to respond to issues around them, have high emotions, and their curiosity is heightened as youth (Participant/KII/Female/Rivers).*

As seen through the qualitative data reviewed, many young men and women described youthhood using specific words and adjectives like *vibrant, adventurous, strong, resilient, productive, skilful, intelligent, creative, and ambitious*. A female discussant described youthhood as a period that:

“... we are young, stronger, easily do things, and always active. Young, vibrant

and productive” (Kaduna FGD, Female).

Another discussant emphasizes the strength of the youth:

Strength is a major attribute of youth, as well as the ability to reason intellectually on life issues and use his/her strength and knowledge to positively influence the community/environment (Bauchi, YPD).

Meanwhile, during the validation workshop, most participants believed that youthhood is quantitative while youthhood is qualitative; they did not differ from the fact that age 18-40 is appropriate for the period of youthhood. However, a twist was introduced when a male panellist referred to the Federal Government of Nigeria's Youth Policy of 2018, which proposed that the age range for youth should be between 18 and 29. However, a female panellist who believed that the youthhood age should be between 18-40 objected. She added that:

This is research; it is not about what the books say but what the people say they are [i.e., evidence-based]. Hence, youthhood is more than biological; it is more of a psychological thing. (Female panellist/Nigeria Validation Workshop)

This ended the argument about the age recommendation of the United Nations or other bodies, including Nigeria's youth policy documents on the age bracket of who is youth. The discussants agreed that youth is quantitative (age-related) while youthhood is all about the physical strength of the person, female or male.

A KII participant sees youthhood as the period in a person's life when they are resilient:

I see youthhood as when there is a challenge, that youth will be able to stand and bounce back on his or her feet; that is a youth for me (Female/Bauchi).

Youthhood, as defined by the young women and men above, is determined by many factors, among which they identified physical, psychological and social aspects. The young men and women shared some common factors but also faced social

stereotypes and beliefs. These beliefs or norms influence social expectations and outline the characteristics of what is socially considered the “proper young man or woman. Gender norms, reflected in communal expectations, can sometimes be restrictive because they may put young people into a particular stereotype. As seen in Table 2 below, gender norms can define how a young woman or man behaves in society and limit their self-expression.

Table 2: Gender Norms – Youthhood

Norm	Male	Female
Men are physically stronger than women. Finding: There is no support for women being physically weaker than men	Strength is a major attribute of youth and the ability to reason intellectually on issues of life and make use of his/her strength and knowledge to positively influence the community/environment [Male, YPD, Bauchi]	... we are young, stronger, easily do things, and always active. Young, vibrant and productive (Female, FGD, Kaduna). [Referring to all youth]
NORM: Home-keeping is a quality of a good female. Finding: It looks like young people still think home-keeping should be for women... somewhat upholding the norm.	A proper woman is responsible, keeps her home, relates well with people, and raises her kids well. So, those are some of the criteria used [Male, YPD, Enugu]	COVID-19 affected both young men and young ladies but ladies are the most affected because they have more responsibility and needs than guys. [Female, YPD, Bauchi]
NORM: Women are less driven than men Finding: Women are also goal-driven	Yes, I go to work steadily, so I have some boys coming to work for me; I pay them, and they help me to achieve my goals [Male, FGD, Kaduna]	Someone with a constructive mind who is determined to achieve his goal. A proper young woman who is very determined to achieve her goals [Female, IDI, Kaduna]
NORM: Women do not cherish independence – they don't mind depending on men or family. Finding: Both male and female participants describe youthhood as the time to pursue independence.	A proper young man is semi-independent, which means he has a level of influence on decisions, but when he wants to do certain things, he must consult his parents. For the woman, if it's not marriage, then she's busy with her career or vocation and also has a level of independence mentally and financially – [Male, KII, Rivers]	I want to be this self-independent woman, not someone who relies on her husband always, so, like I said, I'm into poultry; I started with 50birds. I just multiplied the money anytime I sell, so I picture myself as the owner of a big farm. I'll have my big farm, not just birds that I'll be growing but other domestic animals too, then I'll employ people like I want to have my own company and I be the boss and live comfortable [Female, FGD, Kaduna,]

Table 2 illustrates that young people are challenging gender norms. While it is socially accepted that women are strong and independent, contrary beliefs persist regarding the homemaking roles of women. The table on gender norms indicates that youth perceive women as having a significant role to play as homemakers.

Youthhood is a period of active political activism and mobilization

In addition to youthhood's demographic and physical attributes, discussants introduced the political. Youthhood is a period of voice or expression – voices against political and other kinds of evils in society. A discussant captured it this way:

“The youth are the voice, the people, the young and the vibrant people in the society that you cannot do without them; they are the future of the society at large, the nation and even the world. They are not just a mere set of people; they are the voice of society”. (Port Harcourt, FGD, Male).

Similarly, youthhood is described as when

“...person portrays leadership skills and is also fit to push his peers to the positive side, not the negative side” (Enugu, FGD, Mixed).

Youth are also described as the future of the country:

“Youth are the young people, and I believe they are the young people who will help our country and inspire us. They are the future; they are the tomorrow” (IDI/Female/Enugu).

Generally, most of the KII and IDI participants construed youth as a group that mobilizes the community to take action towards solving their problems. They are more proactive regarding community engagement and believe they are the backbone of the community, providing ideas and a workforce to drive development. The foregoing findings show that young women and men in Nigeria carry a sense of responsibility towards their community and the nation at large. They believed that their high levels of energy should be tailored towards solving societal problems, especially that of their immediate community.

Young women or men do not constitute burdens but valuable resources

To have a broader understanding of what the ideal youthhood means to young Nigerian women and men, they were asked for their description of a proper young woman or man. Their responses revealed some markers of a proper youth. These markers include **a good sense of industry, a commitment to contribute to the betterment of society, a high moral standard, and confidence**. Contrary to the popular narrative that Nigerian youth are lazy, most of the youth expected an ideal young woman or man to be hardworking and earn an honest living to care for themselves and their dependents. A female IDI participant from the

Northeast considered herself a youth because she is “hardworking and vibrant”.

A proper young woman or man is also construed as a contributor to the betterment of society. They work hard to give back to the community and support others with whatever they have. One of the participants defined a proper youth as “Someone ready to add value to the society and has the energy within him or her (IDI/Male/Abuja).

Young people, as can be seen from the responses of the discussants, also consider themselves to be contributing members of a society and a functional part of a community. They also believe they can add to the development of society through their conduct, skill and creativity. More pointedly, they refer to themselves as “pillars” and even “role models” of their society. One of them said:

“Youth are people that they [the nation] look up to [as] their future, they are the pillar of most countries and organizations and when there are no youth, there is no future and like they say the youth are the future of tomorrow” (Abuja FGD, Mixed).

Yet another said:

“A proper youth is, youth is a role model and for a person to be a good youth, he has to be doing positive things; he has to be impacting his community in general with positive things, not negative ones” (Bauchi, FGD Female).

Narratives of youthhood as a problem to be solved or as a burden to society appear incompatible with our participants’ understanding of youthhood. Rather, youth are seen as a resource, solution and the live-wire of society. A female youth panellist from Bauchi opined that youthhood is characterized by maturity and the ability to:

“... take decisions, act towards them without any influence and know what is right and wrong” (Bauchi, YPD).

“Taking decisions and acting towards them” underscores the ability of youth to solve problems independently of others, even the government. Chief among such problems is employment. A discussant said, as a youth:

“You’re supposed to start some things to prove yourself as a youth. You find

something to be doing, even if the government does not employ you. Be self-employed and be helpful. When it comes to the aspect of community, you're positively expressing yourself by advising or doing some things, even by your character; your attitude, it will express to the people that yes, this person is a good youth" (Bauchi, FGD Female).

From these views, idleness, violent gangsterism, laziness, and being a dependent burden on others are opposed to the values and ideals of youthhood as conceived by our youth participants.

When we turned to descriptions of 'a proper female or male youth, our participants were unequivocal about the criteria or characteristics. Interestingly, morality and good appearance (dressing) led the list of criteria for describing a 'proper' youth. A youth panellist said:

"A proper woman is responsible, keeps her home, relates well with people, and raises her kids well ... so those are some of the criteria used.... the way they dress, the way they talk, people they meet together, people they interact with. The way you see them, you know they are responsible. For me, I will say morals, you know. The community looks at morals, though they are not in them, but seeks morals from the youth. So, they believe that as a youth, you should have morals because you should be taught morals while you are growing up" (Female, Enugu YPD).

And another said:

"I will describe a correct young woman in a community who has a good dress code because I guess dressing goes a long way for young ladies" (Female, Enugu FGD). Emphasising independent thinking amid some level of conformity, one of the participants said:

"We think about how to bring out the best in ourselves, we don't think about trying to please other people, bringing out the best in ourselves to look good, this generation is not the type that wants to do things to please their parents" (Lagos FGD, LGBTQ)

This is an interesting twist to the discussion. Young people seem to be saying that although they support the importance of having these so-

cial values—morality, good appearance and so on—they oppose using these values and criteria as tools to essentialise and discriminate against young people. Where these values are deployed as tools to discriminate, the society is described as an oppressive community:

"There are oppressive communities; there are innovative communities. There is a community that has laws that are oppressive towards the youth that focus on your outlook more than what you have in mind" (Lagos FGD, Mixed).

Contrary to the statement by the current Nigerian President that Nigerian youth are lazy, the qualitative data shows that Nigerian youth believe in hard work, social/family responsibility, intellectual capacity, and good leadership skills.

Further, contrary to the popular narrative about Nigerian youth as ruffians, young women and men who participated in this study believed that a proper youth must be one with a high moral standard: "who does not associate with moral decadence" (Male/IDI/North-Central), "who is responsible, and patriotic" (Male/IDI/North-West), and, "who is properly educated, cultured and polite (Male/KII/South-West). Youth are not burdens to society, rather,

"...they are like the backbone of society because it is easy to implement societal objectives through them. Through them, you can actualize the norms and values in the society so when the youth fail; the society has failed" (KII/ Male/Bauchi)

From the above evidence, it is obvious that youthhood encourages self-expression and personal development. Unlike the older and more cautious generation, young men and women are exploratory and willing to test new waters. They want to be left to determine how much they want to conform rather than being forced to conform. It is safe to say that new things come easy for youth because they do not have to deal with debilitating factors like ageing, cultural restrictions and the issue of time.

Youth informality and aspirations

Research question two was used to measure what young women and men described as success in life for themselves, how close the youth were to living a successful life, the jobs/work they would

like to do and the employer they would like to work for in the future, as well as how the covid-19 affected their business and aspirations. We used both qualitative and quantitative reports to answer this research question.

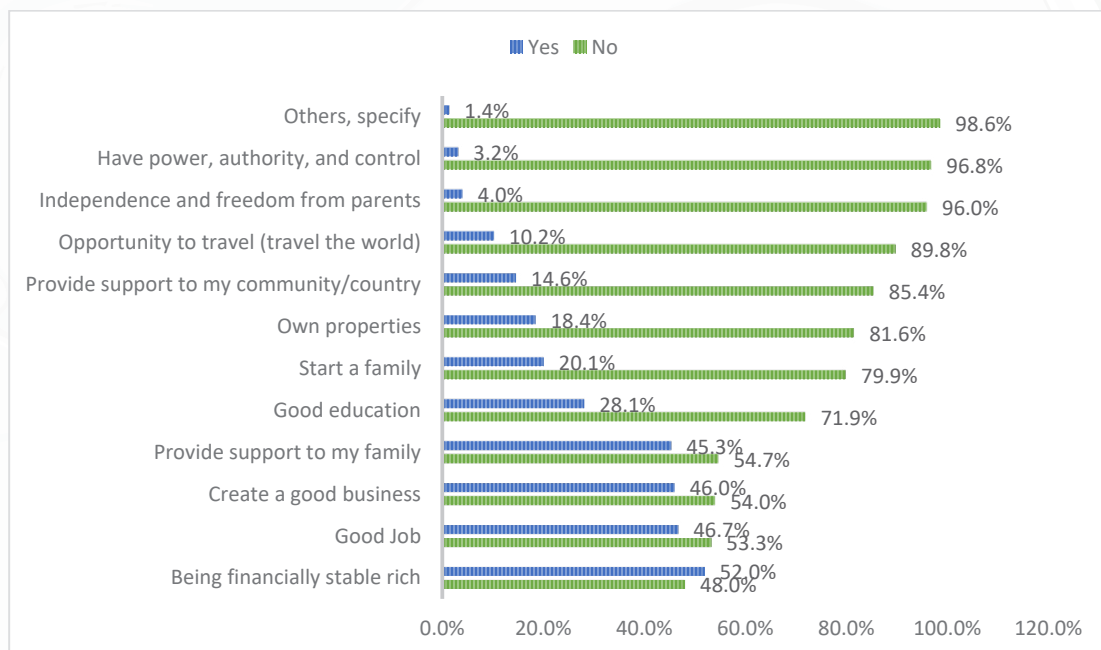
1. *Financial stability is the topmost success priority of Nigerian young women and men*

As evident in the quantitative reports, when the youth were asked to indicate their priority in terms of what they considered success in life, financial stability was preferred most out of all the indicators of success quantitatively assessed in this study. It was found that the majority (52%) consider being financially stable (rich) as the topmost success priority (figure 6). In essence, to most youth, to be successful is to have money. This is an indication of the high premium placed on money by Nigerian youth. The financial incapability of the youth is a major obstacle to realising their life aspirations. This assertion aligns with earlier findings in this study, which found that some youth stopped schooling owing to economic reasons. Besides schooling, the role money played in other life endeavours of youth cannot be overemphasized. Money is crucial to getting married and keeping the family running. Many youth need start-up capital that will assist them in turning their ideas into reality. Some youth would have loved to expand their businesses if they had access to the credit facility required.

According to Nigerian youth, the second top priority in terms of success was a good job, followed by good business and supporting the family. About 45% of the youth we surveyed indicated that the above variables were measuring success. Then, at what point is a job or business 'good'? For a job or business to be good, some elements of worthwhile financial return are inevitable. Good jobs are expected to have the requisite potential for good returns. Even supporting the family is mainly dependent on the individual youth's financial stability. Surprisingly, only close to 30% of the youth we surveyed indicated that good education connotes success. This suggests that most youth believe that a good education does not necessarily guarantee success in life. About 20% of youth believe that to be successful is to be able to start a family and to have some ownership of properties is

an achievement attributable to being successful. A few youth succeed in corporate social responsibility to their communities and country. Some youth believe that to be successful is to make a meaningful contribution to the development of the society they belong to. The opportunity to travel the world only connotes success for only 10% of the surveyed youth. This implies that there are other things youth place a premium on when travelling the world.

Figure 6: Top success priority



Interestingly, the validation workshop provided the study with Talking about aspiration and success; a male panellist contested that there is no nexus between both as success is fluid and there is no universal definition for it. He aptly captured this by saying that.

“What most youth aspire to be is not usually what they eventually become.” (Male participant/Nigeria Validation Workshop).

Similarly, a male panellist opined that success is not only about money and that an individual should domesticate it. In addition, a female panellist, while readily confirming the finding of the study that Nigerian youth are seeking to get more money, emphasised intentional personal positioning by asserting that:

“Once you get some things right, you will surely get money.” (Female participant/Nigeria Validation Workshop).

2. Success aspirations by gender

The conversation also unveils some gendered perspectives regarding the aspirations of men and women in marriage as a male panellist stated that “the aspiration of men and women going into marriage differs; men want stability, women want money.” (Male participant/Nigeria Validation

Workshop).

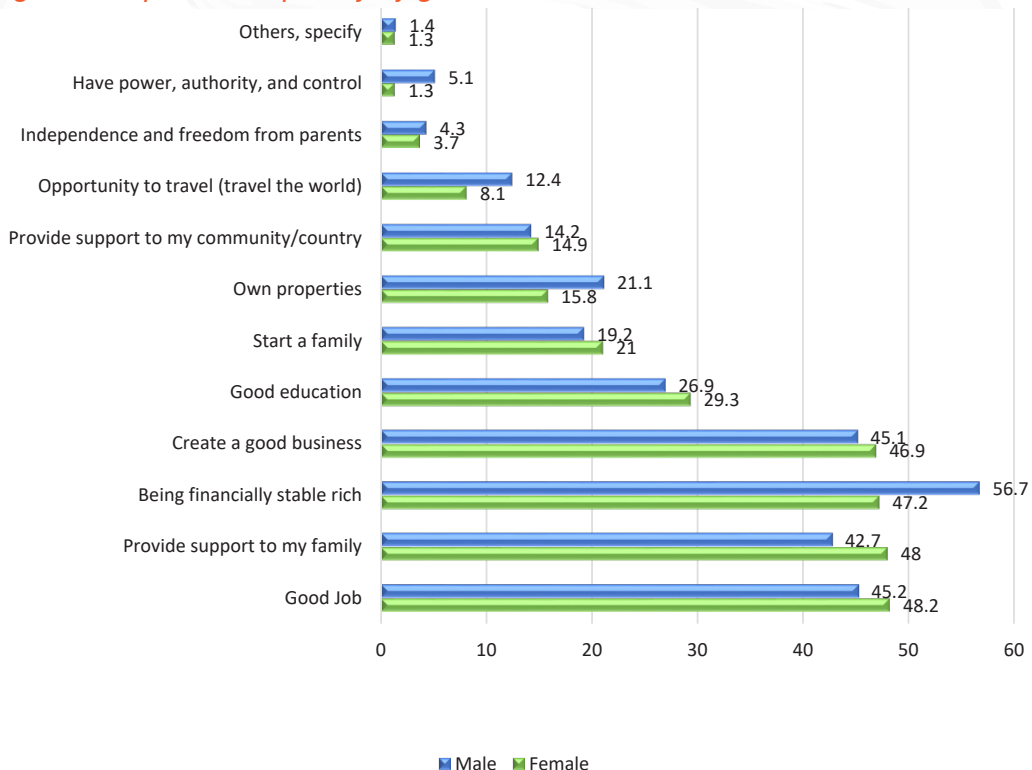
Highlighting some rationale for the youth’s quest for more money, an elderly female participant spotlighted societal decadence as a major factor in which materialism now holds sway, and many young people no longer believe in hard work because they see celebrities flaunting wealth excessively.

Further analysis by gender (Figure 7) showed that of all the indicators of success assessed, the topmost priority of male youth is to be financially stable and rich (56.7%). This is not far-fetched, considering that men are expected to be the breadwinners of their homes, and every man looks forward to measuring up to this expectation, which is mainly shaped by society. Besides being financially stable and rich, the next three (3) success priorities of males are a good job (45.2%), good business (45.1%) and providing family support (42.7%). The three are somehow connected, even with the topmost success priority of males found in this study. A good job or business is expected to yield financial returns that can sufficiently cater to family needs and all dovetail to being financially stable and rich. Good education (26.9%), starting a family (19.2%) and ownership of properties (21.1%) were also indicators of success among male youth. Success priorities of males over females were being financially stable and rich, ownership of properties, the

opportunity to travel worldwide, having power, authority and control, and having independence and freedom from parents. This indicates the degree of importance accorded to these success indicators by some male youth in achieving their aspirations. Among female youth, the topmost success priority was a good job (48.2%), followed by providing support for family (48.9%), being financially stable and rich (47.2%) and good business (46.9%). Even, if the male gender as the substantial head of the family is expected to meet household needs, results from this study show that females are not prepared to be idle in society. Females too desired to have sources of income that can enhance their financial stability and to enable them provide support for their families. The female gender does not want to be a liability to anyone, hence the quest for good jobs or businesses which are crucial to living a successful life. More females (21.0%) regarded starting a family as success relative to males (19.2%) indicating women place a high premium on marital aspirations over men. The female gender experienced more pressure from family and society to get married at an expected time. So, most women aspire to marry early as it is a sign of fulfilment, achievement, and respect in society and an escape

from society's stigmatization. Success priorities indicated by more females over males were a good job, supporting the family, good business, good education, starting a family and providing family support. Findings from this study show that both males and females desired a successful life, but their topmost success priorities are not the same. Based on the topmost success priority found in this study, males are successful when they are rich and financially stable. However, to females, success is denoted by having a good job. As revealed in Figure 7, more males (5.1%) than females (1.3%) considered having power, authority, and control to be a measure of success in life. This is unsurprising as most men are naturally wired to always want to be in control and exercise their authority by giving orders. The male gender is egocentric and would feel less of himself in the absence of the requisite power to actualize his aspirations. When power, authority and control are channelled appropriately and exercised accordingly, especially towards a productive venture, the outcome will be positive. However, if the power and authority of the male gender are not used in favour of the female gender, their aspirations are negatively affected, and their vulnerability is heightened.

Figure 7: Top success priority by gender

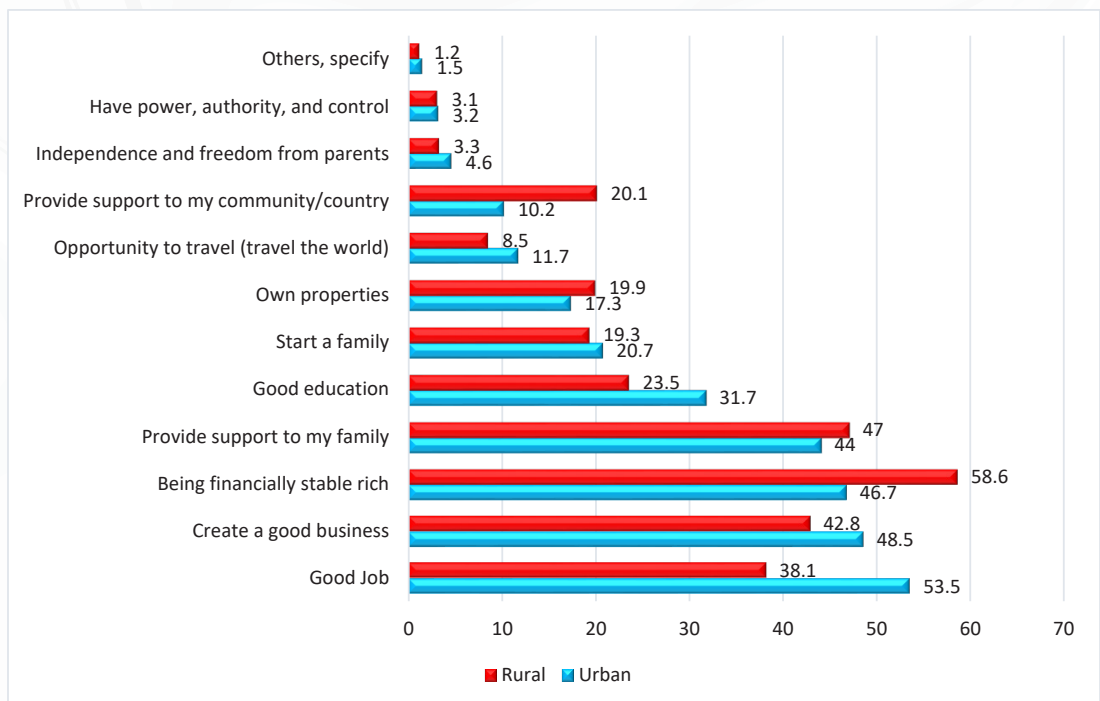


3. Success aspirations by location: Similar success indicators but varied degrees of importance attached

Urban and rural youth's top success priorities are indicated in Figure 8). In urban areas, the number one priority for success was good jobs (53.5%), followed by good business (48.5%), being financially stable and rich (46.7%), and providing support for family (44.0%). This indicates that most youth in urban aspire to get good jobs and good businesses that will enable them to be financially stable and also provide support for their family. Success priorities in urban over rural areas were good jobs, good business, good education, starting a family, the opportunity to travel worldwide, and independence and freedom from parents (Figure 8). The success of the above indicators is paramount to more youth in urban than rural areas. The result of a good education that supports the earlier finding youth shows that urban youth are more formally educated than rural youth. This can be attributed to urban youth believing that good education is part of the indicators of a successful life.

On the other hand, among rural youth, the top-most success priority was being financially stable and rich (58.6%), followed by providing support for family (47.0%), good business (42.8%), good job (38.1%) and good education (31.7%). It was found that more rural youth (20.1%) indicated supporting the community and country as an indicator of success compared to urban (10.2%). Hence, contributing to the development of one's community and country is an indicator of success in rural. Other success priorities indicated by more youth in rural over urban areas were being financially stable and rich, supporting the family, and owning properties (Figure 8). Hence, the outcome of this study shows that while more youth in urban youth areas desired good jobs, youth in rural areas desired financial stability. Thus, youth will highly welcome entrepreneurship opportunities that will enable rural youth to be financially stable. Also, the sustainability of any proposed intervention for the youth in rural will hinge on whether such interventions can enhance their financial stability. Youth in urban and rural Nigeria have similar success indicators but not at the same degree of importance.

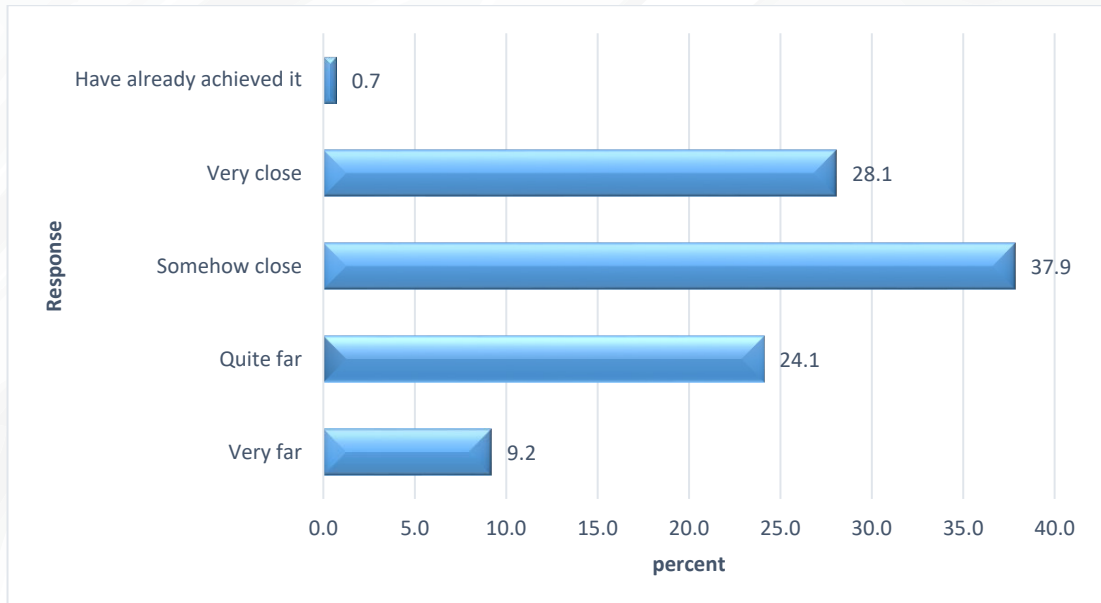
Figure 8: Top success priority by location



4. *Economic aspiration: Many young people were close to a successful life but have yet to attain the desired success*

It is important to determine the extent to which Nigerian youth feel they are close to achieving the success they desire in life. We found that very few (0.7%) youth surveyed admitted they had already attained the desired success (Figure 9). More than two respondents indicate that they are closer to living a successful life, while about 33.0% attest that they are still far away from realising a successful life. Drawing on the resilience and adaptability potential of Nigerian youth, as found in this study, they will be willing and open to changes that will enable them to achieve their desired success. The youth need a 'push' in the form of assistance since they are already on the track towards achieving a successful life.

Figure 9: Closeness to a successful life



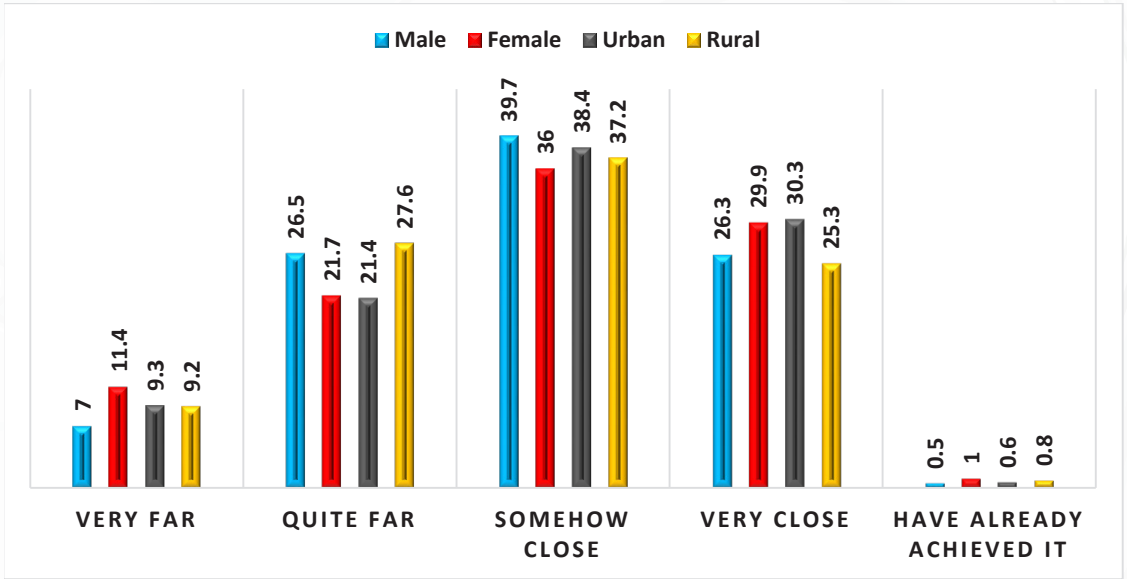
5. *Closeness to a successful life by gender*

It is important to look into the extent to which male and female youth felt they were close towards achieving the success they desired. The result of the gender perspective of living a successful life is presented in Figure 10). We found that very few males (0.5%) and females (1.0%) had already achieved the success they desired. Many male (66.0%) and female (65.9%) youth indicated they are closer to living a successful life. However, 33.5% of males and 33.1% of females attest that they are still far from attaining a successful life. These results indicate that most male and female youth need an improvement on or enhancement of what they are already doing to achieve their desired successful life. Other male and female youth who are far away from living a successful life will require guidance, redirection, refocusing, and empowerment to achieve success in life.

6. *Closeness to a successful life by location*

Urban and rural youth's closeness to living a successful life is presented in Figure 10. Very few young people in urban (0.6%) and rural (0.8%) had already achieved the success they desired. Most urban (68.7%) and rural (62.5%) youth are closer towards living a successful life. However, 30.7% of urban youth and 36.8% of rural youth indicated they are still far from attaining success. Youth in urban and rural areas do not derive the expected outcomes and maximum satisfaction from the jobs or businesses they do. Also, it can be inferred that urban youth's desire for good jobs and rural youth's desire for financial stability is geared towards living a successful life.

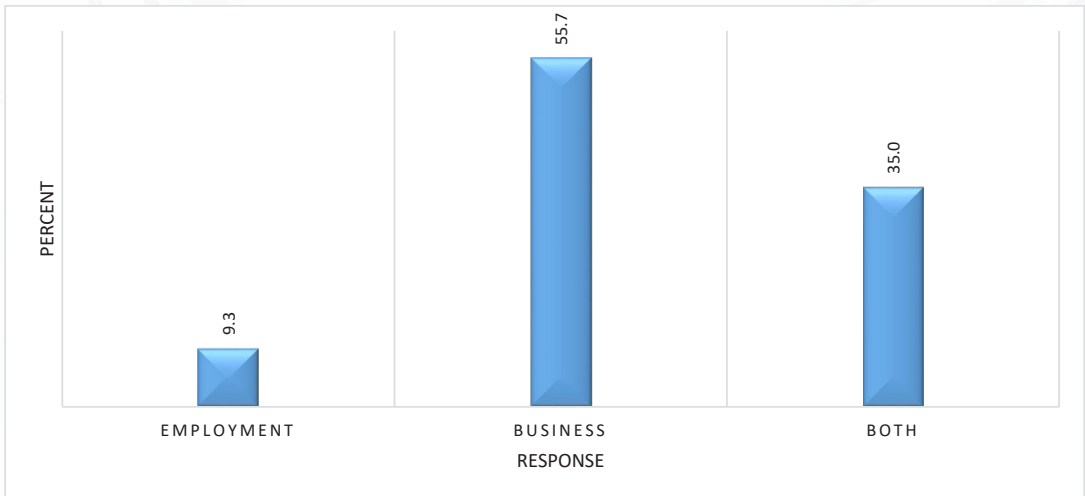
Figure 10: Closeness to a successful life by gender and location



7. Preferred future employment venture: Business investment tops the list

Nigerian youth know what they want to achieve their aspirations. More than half of the youth (55.7%) showed strong indications of business investment or employment in future (Figure 11). Some youth would like to combine both employment and business at 35.0%. We found that very few young people (9.3%) are interested in being employed alone. Thus, Nigerian youth are business-oriented, and any initiative or intervention aimed at enhancing their business potential will benefit them.

Figure 11: Preferred future employment venture



8. Preferred future employment venture by gender

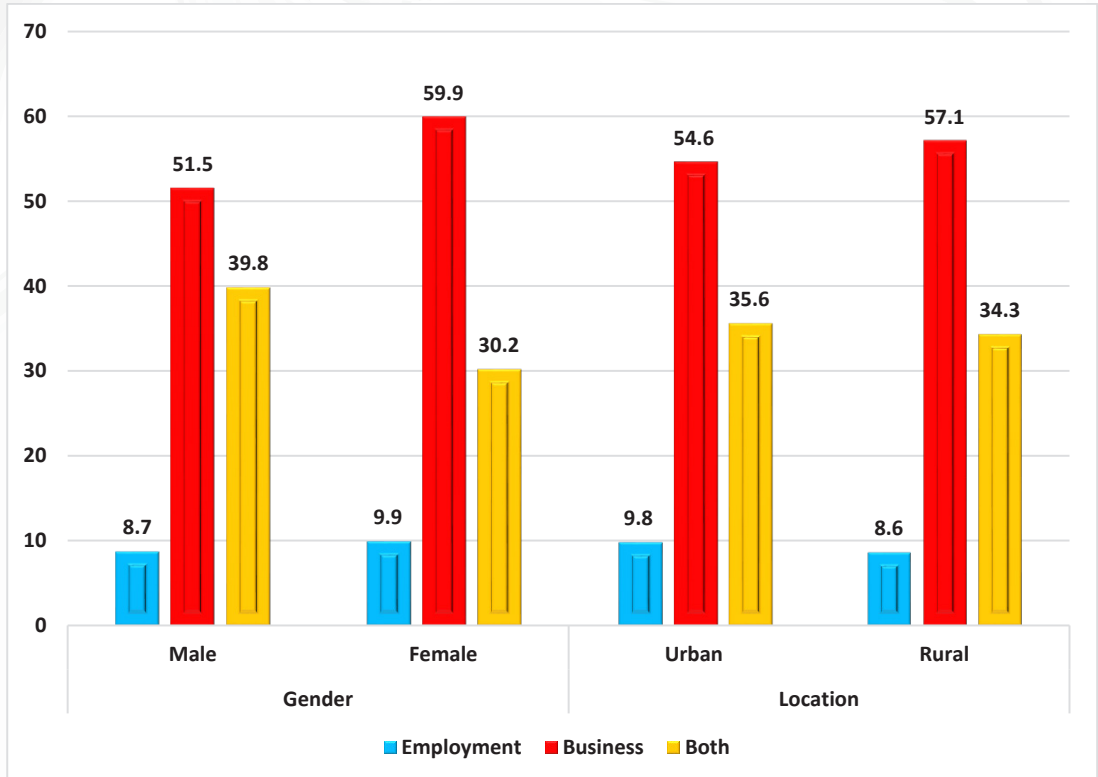
The kind of employment male and female youth in Nigeria desire or aspire to have in life is presented in Figure 12. Among male youth, a higher percentage (51.5%) showed strong indications exclusively for business investment. Close to 40.0% of male youth would prefer to combine both employment and business in the future. In the future, very few male youth would love to be employed alone (8.7%). For female youth, a greater number (59.9%) prefer to engage in business alone in the future, while 30.2% would like to combine both employment and business. Female youth interested in employment exclusively are only 9.9%. From the results of this study, employment alone is less preferred by both male and female youth in Nigeria. Rather, both males and females prefer businesses or a combination of business and employment. Youth. However, female youth preferring business alone were more numerous than male youth in Nigeria. Empowerment opportunities

that will enhance the business potentials of male and female youth in Nigeria are good and welcoming so that they will be able to achieve the kind of success or good life they desire in life.

9. Preferred future employment venture by location

Urban and rural youth's future employment venture preferences are presented in Figure 12. In urban areas, more than half of the youth (54.6%) preferred business investment only in the future. Urban youth who would like to combine both employment and business were 35.6%. However, only very few urban youth (9.8%) are interested in being employed alone. Similarly, in rural, more than half of the youth (57.1%) preferred to be in business only in the future, while 34.3% preferred engaging in business alongside being employed. Only very few rural youth (8.6%) indicate preferences for employment alone. Youth, whether in urban or rural, prefer business ventures. So, any intervention aimed at helping them realize their future preferences is paramount.

Figure 12: Preferred future employment venture gender and location



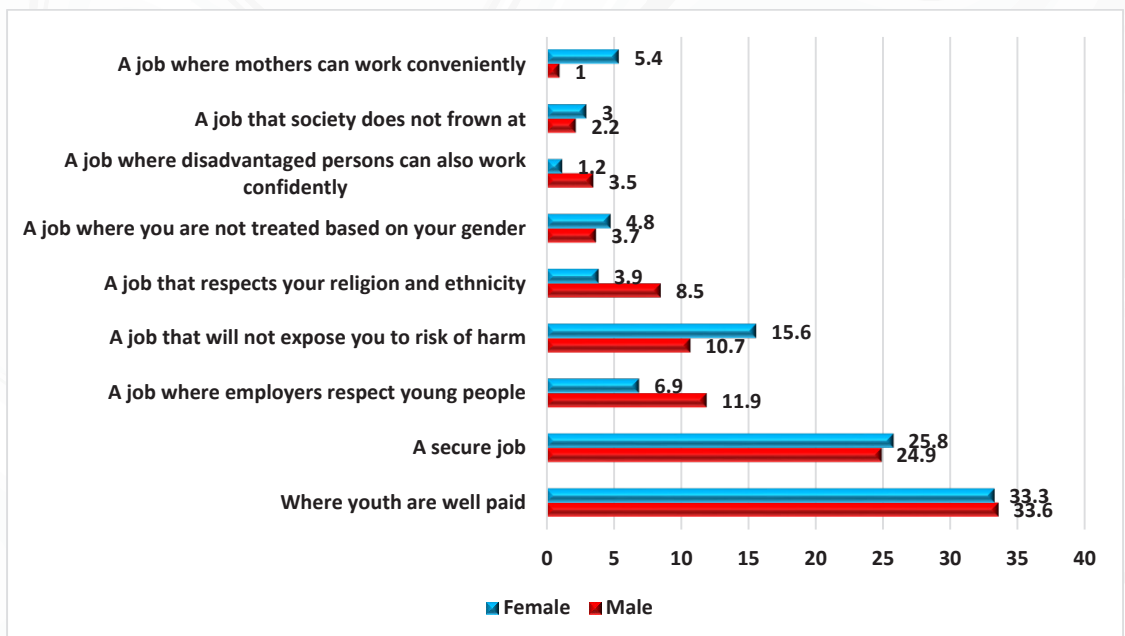
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING WORK

Nigeria Young women and men’s perspective of dignified and fulfilling work

Across the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, young women and men consider dignified and fulfilling work to be such that it offers opportunities for them to earn enough money to pay their livelihood bills and have sufficient savings for themselves and those who depend on them. This perspective of dignified and fulfilling work cuts across gender, ethnicity, religion, and location of residence of the young women and men. Among the survey respondents, nearly equal percentages of young women (33.3%) and young men (33.6%) ranked a job that pays well as dignified and fulfilling work. In the same vein, as shown in Figure 13, nearly equal percentages of rural youth (33.4%) and urban youth (33.5%) ranked a job that pays well as dignified and fulfilling work.

Meanwhile, a male panellist believed that dignified work ensures ‘security of life, not just job security’. He stated that the need for life security drives the exodus of many Nigerians to foreign countries, that is, having a job that can secure one’s life and future.

Figure 13 Comparison of young Nigerian women and men’s ranking of indices of dignified and fulfilling work (n=735)



Corroborating the survey findings, interviewees who participated in the In-depth interviews and key Informant interviews also ranked a job that pays well first as dignified and fulfilling work for Nigerian young women and men. In their view, having sufficient earnings to cover livelihood bills is considered a shield from the harassment and embarrassment that living below the poverty line brings. As one of the female respondents from southwest Nigeria put it,

Dignified and fulfilling work is something that can give young women and men a good life, a good standard of living... they can live in a comfortable place like they can afford to rent the flat of their choice, drive their cars, you know, and stay in a good environment (Female, KII, Ibadan)

A male participant from southeast Nigeria also buttressed what the female participant from southwest Nigeria said. He said,

“A dignified and fulfilling work from our perspective is first of all work that pays your bills... your house rent, your car fuelling, good clothes, etc. gives you time to also rest... pay you enough to solve your basic problems, like family problems, and pay you enough to make you have some savings. Then, in that work, you’re not embarrassed or harassed....” (Male, KII, Enugu)

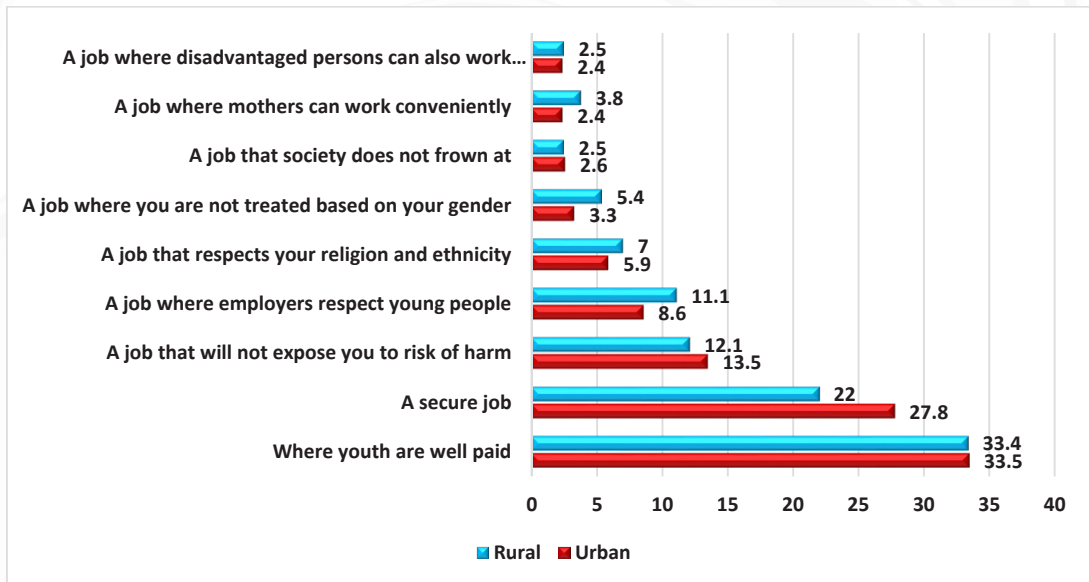
The perspectives shared above show that young women and men from southern Nigeria ranked the provision of sufficient income as a top index of dignified and fulfilling work for them.

Young women and men from the northern region of Nigeria also shared the view of their southern counterparts that dignified and fulfilling work is such that it pays well. In the words of a young man from northern Nigeria, “A fulfilling job for most young men is a job that can pay them well enough to cater for their bills and still have a little more to spend” (Male, IDI, Abujal).

Also, a female northerner shared the same view. She said, “So if I have a good job with good pay, I will gladly go for it. It will be fulfilling for me that way” (Female, IDI, Bauchi)

Further, Nigerian young women and men also believed that dignified and fulfilling work must be secure, where an employee cannot be laid off abruptly. Nearly equal percentages of young women (25.8%) and young men (24.9%) held this view. However, as presented in Figure 14, more urban youth, among many employees, ranked job security higher (27.8%) than rural youth (22%) who are majorly self-employed. The mass layoff experienced by many young urban women and men during the COVID-19 pandemic made job security rank high as an index of dignified and fulfilling work.

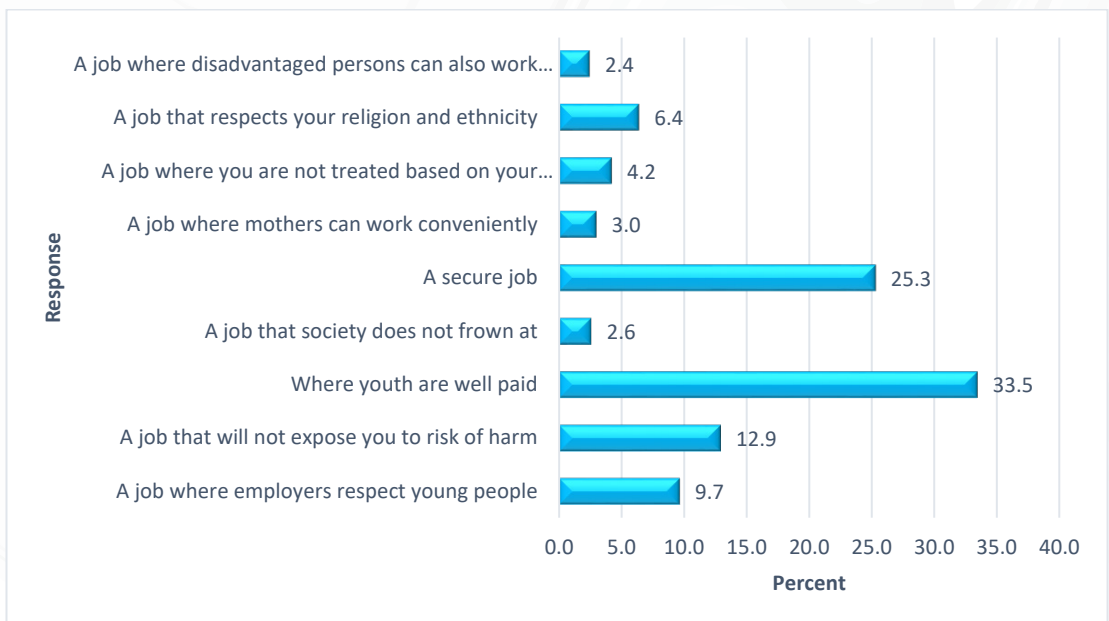
Figure 14: Comparison of Nigerian rural and urban youth’s ranking of indices of dignified and fulfilling work (n=735)



Besides providing sufficient income and being secure, Nigerian youth also believed that dignified and fulfilling work must be such that it does not expose the workers to harm and discrimination. Talking about harm, 12.9% of the survey respondents agreed that dignified and fulfilling work should not expose the workers to harm (see Figure 15). More young women (15.6%) than young men (10.7%) shared this view. This may be because men are expected to be more daring and less risk averse, culturally, in Nigeria, than women. Talking about discrimination, the survey respondents considered dignified and fulfilling work to be such that it does not expose the workers to discrimination because of gender, religion, ethnicity/race, physical disabilities, or age.

Coincidentally, the position of the participants at the Nigeria validation workshop was not different from what was recorded from the field; they agreed with all the indices that the fieldwork revealed. However, a male participant from the National Orientation Agency (NOA) added that *“it is a kind of work that affords leisure time”* (Male participant/Nigeria Validation Workshop).

Figure 15 Nigerian young women and men’s ranking of indices of dignified and fulfilling work (n=735)



Also, young women and men consider work dignified and fulfilling, adding to their honour, reputation, and prestige. Such prestige can come from the reputation of the organization they work for, the compatibility of their responsibilities/positions with their educational/professional qualification, and the legitimacy of the work. Emphasizing the place of legitimacy and compatibility with educational qualification in the definition of dignified and fulfilling work, a female interviewee said, “A dignified work is any work in proportion to your educational qualification without “wuruwuru” in it...” (Female, IDI, North-East). Another respondent said, “A dignified job is a job that you are respected for” (Male, KII, South-West). Results from the qualitative data showed that societal perception of a work’s reputation influences young women’s and men’s perceptions of it as dignified and fulfilling.

What Nigerian Young women and men need to access dignified and fulfilling work

During the in-depth interviews and key informant interviewees, participants indicated that Nigerian young women and men need funding, training, and enabling policies to access dignified and fulfilling work. Funding (provision of capital) is required to start and/or expand businesses. It could be in cash

or kind. As one of the interviewees, a young man from northern Nigeria who is into farming said,

One needs money to do something really good...If you want to have a farm, you will need money for fertilizer and stuff like that. (Male, IDI, North-West).

Another young man corroborated his views, stating that low-income family background was the reason for the much-needed funding for young women and men. He said,

Finance...because quite several youth come from low-income families. Government policies that will greatly reduce the financial burden of achieving education (Male, KII, North-East)

Training is needed to build young women's and men's capacities, especially entrepreneurial capacity. It could be in the form of opportunities for formal education (in Nigeria or abroad), mentoring, internship (with payment for the interns), or international exposure. An interviewee who opined that young women and men need education said,

Young people need proper education, proper mentoring, proper structure of internship and industrial training to be able to enhance their productivity (Male, KII, South-East)

And in the same vein, another participant, a female youth leader, said,

If the NGO or government can provide seminars for the youth, they should educate them about themselves (Female, KII, South-East).

Young women and men in Nigeria also need policies that enable them to access dignified and fulfilling work. For instance, a physically challenged young woman (a youth leader among the physically challenged in southeast Nigeria) lamented their inability to secure dignified and fulfilling work (especially in government and private organisations) because of the competitive edge that the non-physically challenged young people have above them. She prayed for the speedy passage of the physically challenged bill, which she believed would make life better for the physically challenged in Nigeria if passed into law.

BARRIERS TO YOUTH ASPIRATIONS IN NIGERIA

We explored some factors that could create barriers to the aspirations of young people in Nigeria. One of these factors is the COVID-19 pandemic, which had some negative consequences such as lockdowns, restricted social interactions, and limited financial opportunities.

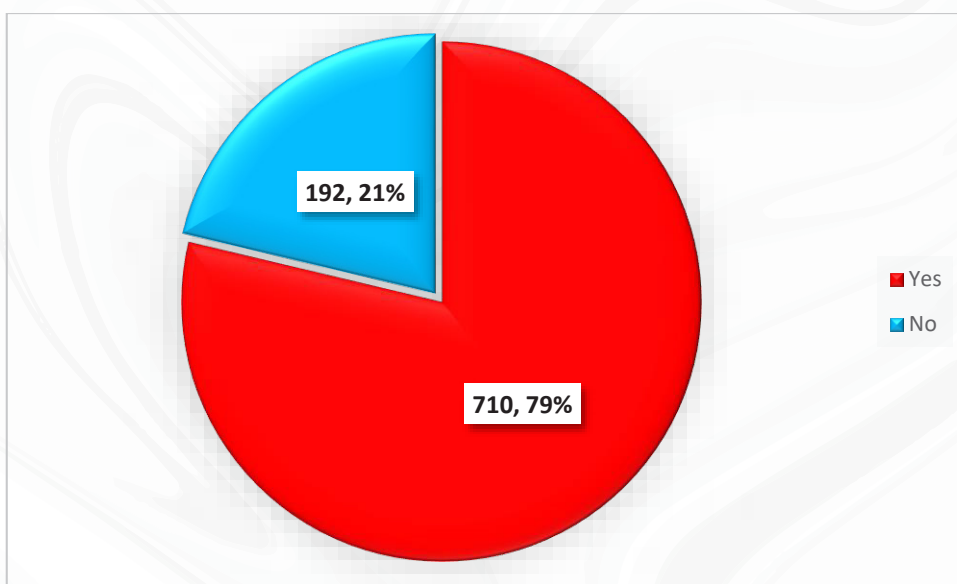
Impact of COVID-19 on young women's and men's aspirations

Although Nigerian youth present some aspirations and desire a good life with attendant means to achieve them, several barriers prevent them from achieving their goals. These barriers include the ravaging pandemic, insecurity, poor financial standing, rural-urban dichotomy and gender normative. These issues were explored as they beamed searchlight to the study.

1. COVID-19 negatively affected youth's livelihood and wellbeing

The effects of the outbreak of COVID-19 were felt globally, and Nigerian youth were not spared. As shown in Figure 16, most youth (79.0%) currently running businesses indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their businesses compared to the 19 eras.

Figure 16: Effect of COVID-19 on business compared to pre-COVID era



Furthermore, a male participant identified a three-fold barrier: leadership, followership, and government policies. In his explanation, he stated that there are no comprehensive policies in place that cater to many of the challenges youth face. Even the ones already formulated are not operational due to leadership laxity and the lackadaisical disposition of the followership.

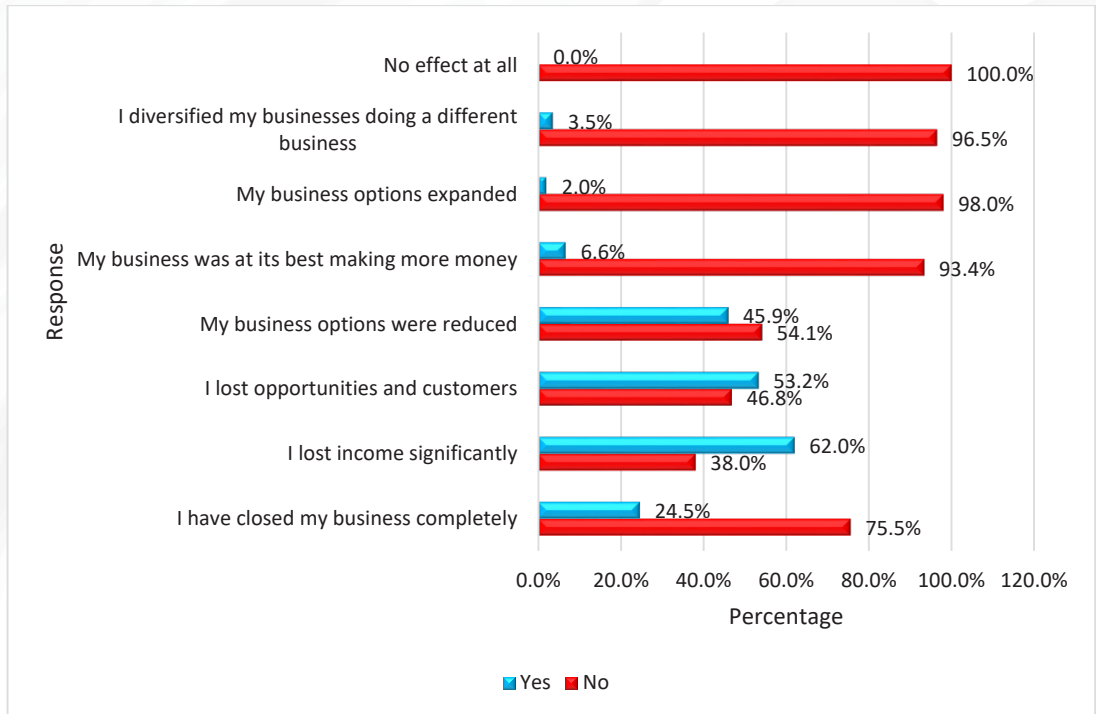
Also, a female participant at the validation workshop hinted that vilification due to religious beliefs is a barrier to youth aspirations in Nigeria. The female participant decried the prevalence of stigmatization of Islamic adherents, especially Muslim women who wear hijab in public spaces. She asserted that:

“that we cover our head does not mean our brain is covered.” (Female participant/Nigeria Validation Workshop). While another female participant mentioned gender inequality and lack of accountability from the government as factors militating against the youth aspirations, the entrenched corruption (bribery) in government parastatals was also highlighted by a female participant.

2. Nigerian youth experienced the loss of business opportunities and incomes during the COVID-19 era

The major effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth businesses was a significant loss of income, which was experienced by over 60.0% of the youth (Figure 17). More than half of the youth lost opportunities and customers, and business options were reduced by about 45.0%. Youth who had to completely close down their businesses were about 25.0%. Very few of the surveyed youth (6.6%) indicated that they experienced a positive effect on their businesses during COVID-19 as their businesses were at their best, allowing them to make more money.

Figure 17 How COVID-19 affected youth's business (n=710)



Evidence from the qualitative findings also shows that young Nigerian women and men were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In different ways, the pandemic affected young people's understanding of youthhood. It made life difficult to live. Youth shared their experiences during COVID-19 and how it impacted their daily existence. According to them, COVID-19 brought an increase in unemployment, crime rate, and domestic violence, and for business people, sales were poor. However, these wrongs were not limited to only young people. Sharing a personal experience, one of the focus group discussants said:

"... I have this job that I was doing, and I happen to be among those that were laid off, I suffered then, I think it was one of those things that happen to youth" (Female, FGD, Enugu)

Some participants related one form of job loss or another as a result of COVID-19. Other consequences of the pandemic included insecurity, violence, and a sharp rise in the cost of goods and services. Because of the curfew and restrictions, jobs were difficult to get. Those who were employed were paid half-salary. Sharing her experience, one of the young women who participated in the study said,

"During COVID-19.... some worked for six months without payment, and half their salary was paid at a point...so after that, they said we should, what's the language they used, like we should go home and have a break" (Female/KII/Kaduna)

Similarly, another participant, supporting the previous statement, discussed the challenges

faced in employment due to the pandemic, stating that:

“The COVID-19 lockdown was not funny at all. I don’t have government work. I worked with a private school... you’re just at home doing nothing and have no hope of a source of income” (Female/IDI/Bauchi).

Not only did COVID-19 lead to the loss of jobs for young women and men, but it also made some youth who had businesses lay off some of their staff to survive the hardship. It also made some young people close their businesses and relocate from urban to rural areas. One of the young people who participated in the study said COVID-19 pushed him to his village from his state capital (a sort of forceful emigration) and made him suffer loss in his business. He said,

“I am based in Jos, but COVID rules were very strict in the city centres, pushing me to my village...A little bit of a partial stop trying to get finances...due to lockdown and some other rule, I accumulated losses as household consumables expired” (Male/IDI/Abuja).

While young entrepreneurs all suffered the effects of the COVID-19 lockdown, youth in agribusiness had some particular challenges due to the nature of their business. Young people who were farmers could not get access to their farms as there was a restriction on movement. Lack of access to farms led to the loss of crops and the death of animals. As Maryam, a young female crop farmer in northern Nigeria, put it,

“COVID-19, gaskia, was not too really good for us. Then, I was serving at Borno, where I worked with the NGO. I stopped going there because of that COVID-19... I lost almost 60 to 70 per cent of what I planted there for a living” (Female/IDI/Kaduna)

Echoing similar sentiments, Ann, a youth leader and head of young piggery farmers in south-eastern Nigeria, also recounted experiencing loss, much like Maryam. She expressed that:

“Most of the youth on our side do piggery farm. During COVID-19, nobody came to buy them, and some started dying. And anyone that dies is a big loss. As a youth group, we have a piggery farm,

and those people who invested money into it, COVID-19 affected them so that they cannot stand up again” (Female/KII/Enugu).

Furthermore, young people who traded in Agricultural products also suffered losses due to COVID-19 because they could not transport the goods to locations with customers. Also, traders of consumer goods suffered losses because some of their goods expired during the lockdown. Besides bringing losses to the businesses of young people, the results from the qualitative data collected reveal that COVID-19 also led to a rise in the crime rate among young people. The lockdown brought everything to a standstill. The hard times caused “a change of mind by most youth in my area such that they engaged in sort of illicit extraordinary things”. Another participant said,

“... Some kids that were supposed to be in school because of that lockdown have to indulge in internet fraud because there was no money and there was no food and you can see some of them are school dropouts till today” (Mixed, FGD, Port Harcourt).

The feeling of idleness led some youth to drug abuse and many other social vices. As one of the female participants put it,

“Well, there was a lot of insecurity during this period. Because so many youth who were going out before then, who were teaching in a private school, going out for some little businesses, and so on, are not going out again. That led to some of them who didn’t have other sources of income having a high rate of stealing, armed robbery and other things” (Female/IDI/Bauchi).

COVID-19 affected many young people’s education negatively as some had their vision of acquiring an education cut short, and some resorted to fraud as a livelihood. All schools were closed down during the period. In some places, schools took to online platforms to facilitate learning. However, young people who could not afford ICT gadgets to access e-learning and those with poor/no internet connectivity could not participate. And, when school resumed, not all young women and men could return to school. One of the young women who could not continue schooling after the pandemic narrated her experience thus:

“COVID-19 has hindered my education because I was not able to continue with my education. I had to put a pause and it is not favourable. I should have graduated. I should have moved to other phases of my life, but now it stopped because of the COVID-19 pandemic” (Female/IDI/Kaduna)

There are many reasons why some young people could not continue schooling after the pandemic stopped them: some young women got pregnant during the pandemic, some parents lost their businesses and consequently had no financial power to continue to sponsor young people in school, some were forced to relocate to the village from towns where the young people were schooling, and they could not return to the town after the pandemic, among other reasons.

Table 3: Barriers to Youth Aspirations

YOUNG WOMEN'S VIEWS	YOUNG MEN'S VIEWS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loss of jobs, loss of business, and inability to pay loans were experienced, and young women who were in business experienced losses that disrupted their aims. One of them asserted, “Someone like me collected a loan in 2019 to improve my business but due to COVID-19 I haven’t been able to pay back the loan up till now and even what I invested the money on did not yield anything tangible because of the lockdown,” a sentiment agreed by others. It wasn’t a good experience at all, and I was affected as well; I lost my job because I was working in the hospitality industry and said I could. These losses had financial implications. Vilification due to religious beliefs is also a barrier to youth aspirations. There is a prevalence of stigmatization of Islamic adherents, especially Muslim women who wear hijab in public spaces, “that we cover our head does not mean our brain is covered.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth who used to be able to go and study, for some of them study and work, suddenly found themselves not being able to do that; of course, they could study at home, but work became something else with the pandemic, [and youth] not being able to move far from their locals (immediate communities), they would become a problem in their residential neighbourhood. A female can easily call on someone for assistance, and the person will understand. But men are egotistic and would be dying and unable to open up so that someone can help them out. Even if they open up, not everyone has the mind to help a man. I think men face a lot.” “[There is] bad governance, bad governance in every sense of it, no assistance or little to no assistance like grants, and also you can talk about corruption when we are living in a society that when the budget that is made for education, somebody is sitting on it.” “No stability in the country today, no stability in the sense that there is nothing to work with long term. Maybe, for instance, in terms of price structure, you cannot work with a certain price cost analysis as a youth doing business in the long term because the market is so unstable.” Unfriendly environments constitute great bottlenecks for the people living with disabilities in Nigeria.

Both young women and men looked for economic opportunities to survive during the pandemic. Some such opportunities include agriculture and digital businesses. Interestingly, young men and women saw big opportunities in Internet and digital technologies (see Table 3).

Participants were also asked to share their views on the constraints to achieving dignified and fulfilling work by Nigerian youth. A young male participant believes it is expedient for the Nigerian government to get their policies right so that the youth can work maximally and benefit optimally. Another male participant spotlighted ‘negative resilience’ as a constraint in which people are somewhat acquainted with suffering instead of voicing out, and this is a cultural thing where ‘you cannot disturb the undisturbed.’

Furthermore, in the opinion of a female participant, peer pressure is a big challenge for many Nigerian youth who crave a ‘soft life’ (i.e. a less stressful means of livelihood) and tend to leave their legitimate jobs for some despicable engagements, mostly cybercrimes. Expanding the conversation, the session featured the perspective of persons living with disability (PLWD) in the discourse. A male person with disability male participant highlighted the lack of effective implementation of existing government policies

as a major albatross. He specifically noted that the Nigerian leaders don't follow the provisions of the constitution in employing the right percentage of persons living with disability during and after the recruitments into government parastatals. Also, a male participant identified a lack of relevant skill sets as a limitation for youth to get dignified and fulfilling work. This was buttressed by a female participant who pointed out that lack of both hard and soft skill sets constitutes a significant constraint for the youth.

3. Male youth and rural youth were more affected by natural disaster

We discovered that the effects of COVID-19 on businesses were not the same for male and female youth (Figure 18). Men (83.7%) felt pandemic effects on businesses more than female youth (72.2%) during the COVID-19 outbreak. Nevertheless, the majority of male and female youth suffered from the aftermath effects of the global pandemic. A participant in the focus group discussion pointed out that young men were more affected by the COVID-19 disaster than younger women. This is presented in the qualitative evidence below:

Yes, it's 70% for young men. During the COVID-19 pandemic, as a man you lost your job. Your wife could easily lose her job, but if you lose your job, you can't stay at home. So it's the men who suffered more (Male, FGD, Enugu).

Participants pointed out that the nature of men's jobs made them more vulnerable to the pandemic. Whereas some women's jobs could be carried out at home, most men's jobs could not. Such jobs included being the riders of motorcycle taxis (popularly called Okada), butchers, long-distance drivers of heavy-duty trucks, and construction site workers.

Similarly, most youth in urban (75.2%) and rural (83.1%) indicated that COVID-19 affected their businesses. The businesses of youth in rural areas were more affected than in urban areas. A participant, for instance, pointed out that rural youths had more struggles with survival during COVID-19 than their urban counterparts. They observed that:

The lockdown allowed the Fulani herdsmen to terrorise and attack villages; this caused a change of mindset by most youth in my area such that they engaged in sort of illicit extraordinary things (YPD, Abuja).

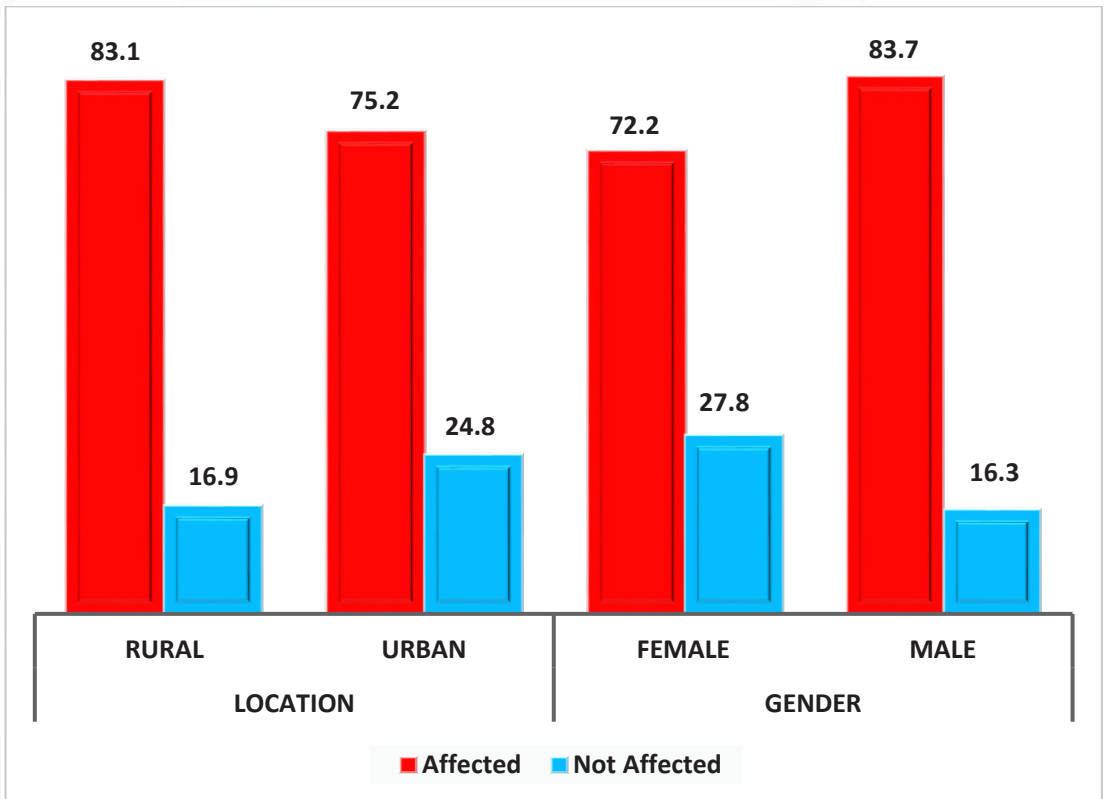


Figure 18: Effect of COVID-19 on business compared to the pre-COVID era by gender and location (n=710)

4. Young Women were more affected

No doubt, COVID-19 affected both young women and men. However, the findings of this study showed that it affected women more. Women had fewer job opportunities than men during the pandemic. They were also constrained to stay home to care for their children. The pregnant mothers who needed to visit the hospitals also suffered at the hands of the medical practitioners, as everyone was being careful of contact with the virus. Participants reported that many young women were left unattended to by the medical practitioners because they were suspected to have been infected with the virus. Keeping personal hygiene was also difficult for the women. They admitted that little money at hand if they had it at all, was meant solely for feeding. Hunger was also at its peak, especially for children being taken care of by their mothers. The emotional torture was high for many young women who had to watch their children cry from hunger without having any food

to give to them. When the government supplied the palliatives, many young women could not access them because of the crowd that gathered to collect them and the chaos at the collection sites. Gender-based violence (GBV) was also high during the pandemic. During the pandemic, GBV was not unconnected to insufficient financial resources in the home. And in most cases, women are the victims of GBV. Moreover, because of the hardship, many young women were preyed upon by young men and sexually exploited.

Almost without exception, the position was that women suffered the consequences of the pandemic more psychologically than men. A male discussant in Kaduna FGD explained that COVID-19 impacted negatively on the psychological well-being of youth, especially women. He claimed that women faced many difficulties, as seen in the following quotes:

“You see, women face more challenges than we the men during the COVID-19 lockdown because they’re not like we men who can manoeuvre our way to some extent, as my brother said, security challenges” (Male Discussant in Kaduna FGD).

Similarly, another discussant said:

“By the time the lockdown was off, there were around 30-40% of them, ladies, that couldn’t return to school, they’d gotten pregnant, unwanted pregnancies, and it was majorly online prostitution business” (Ibadan FGD, Male).

Another participant narrated the experiences of young women during the pandemic:

“Women were more affected during the pandemic. Young women, precisely, were more affected. We had situations where young girls were raped; we had situations where young girls were molested and abused; and we also had situations where, you know, these young women could not go out to work. So, there were men who were ready to prey on them, take advantage of them and give them in return to have their body” (Male/IDI/Kaduna)

Young women were not the only ones who had this opinion; male members of FGDs also confirmed that there was an increase in gender-based violence as a result of COVID-19. A youth panellist in Kaduna said:

“Young women were most affected as they have a lot of needs and responsibilities towards themselves and their families... there were a lot of crises between the husband and wife” (Mixed, FGD, Kaduna).

This signifies that some homes were broken during COVID-19.

This was not to say that men found the pandemic to have brought them only light troubles. Men also said that they experienced psychological trauma during COVID-19; in their case, the need to provide for and protect their families in an uncertain period left them burdened with anxiety. Some discussants in the Bauchi YPD stated that:

“Men were most affected because of their ego and economic power, and they were at the forefront of fending for the family...men

were affected, and indirectly, it affected the females” (YPD, Bauchi)

5. People with disabilities have some special barriers to their aspirations

Apart from the general atmosphere of challenges that confront the Nigerian youth, people living with disabilities expressed challenges that are peculiar to them. A male person living with a disability stated that aside from the non-implementation of extant policies, the socio-political environment is not ‘disability-friendly’ as there are no structures in place to ensure the inclusion of persons living with disability in governance and public administration. The participants lamented the government’s gross violation of its policies on the representativeness of persons living with disabilities in governance and employment. He noted that the trend has also empowered private organisations to disregard policies and even the law regarding inclusiveness.

4.2 Insecurity is the bane of youth aspirations in Nigeria

Nigeria is facing several insecurity issues such as Boko Haram, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflict, and ritual killings. The agitation by the Indigenes People of Biafra (IPOB) in the South-eastern part of Nigeria has added to the list of the insecurity indices in Nigeria. The IPOB has constituted itself as a government as it declares sit-at-home at will in the region. This has continued to hamper businesses. Regarding the insecurity, an in-depth interview participant disclosed that Boko haram has pursued her from her privileged zone of the Northeast, where she would have loved to farm.

“I am scared to move to my state, it has been over eight years now that I have not gone to Borno State, our elder brother is there, but even if there is an issue there and we want to move, he will tell us not to come but I can’t move. If it were to be that there was no issue of insecurity, I would go there, the issue of land, I think I have taken care of that, it is just for me to build the poultry and put the birds there, so the land has been taken off my shoulder. However, I can’t move because of insecurity”. (IDI/Female/Bauchi).

Notwithstanding that this participant was working with a human rights organisation, she still believed that farming would bring her a lot of income and give her what she required to live a fulfilling and dignified life. However, the path to the aspirations has been cut off by the yet-to-end (Boko Haram) insurgency ravaging the Northeast of Nigeria. The same concern was expressed by a lawyer from Yobe, who noted that “insecurity has affected our profession a lot because going outside the jurisdiction is difficult (IDI/Male/Lawyer/Bauchi).

Poor financial capability and weak networking (connection) hinder youth aspirations

Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative findings revealed that the financial incapability of Nigerian youth constituted a challenge to achieving their aspirations now and if the status quo remains, it will affect their aspirations in future. The qualitative findings show that the majority of the youths (82.5%) surveyed indicated that the most important constraint to their aspired jobs or business realisation is the lack of money. This financial capability or stability is an aspect of youth lives affected by insecurity. This is with specific reference to their sources of income. Also, securing a job in desired places is, according to the youth, based on a strong connection. A participant from Southeast recounted her experience:

“My example...I was among people who hustled for Road Safety. The first year, and second year, I went for the first and second interviews. They were hailing me: you did this you did that. At the end of the day, I didn't get the job, while some people who sat at home and didn't even step out, got the job. They didn't even come out and get some slaps from the army, where they would tell you to sit and stand in the sun. My skin became dark, but the people that got the job were not there with us”. (FGD/Female/Enugu).

This illustration above provides a situation where people who have strong connections with people in government are privileged for positions in government and even outside government service.

YOUTH RESILIENCE AND ADAPTABILITY STRATEGIES

Nigeria Youth Resilience in the Face of Difficulties

In this study, youth resilience was determined using seven indicators: perseverance and commitment, positive self-image and optimism, relationship and social support, humour and positive thinking, emotional regulation, spirituality and faith, and personal confidence and responsibility.

These indicators are explained below in detail (5.1.1 to 5.1.7), but each of them is defined briefly here:

- **Perseverance and Commitment:** This refers to young people's ability to continue on a predetermined course in the face of difficulties.
- **Positive Self-image and Optimism:** This has to do with avoiding self-pity and hopelessness.
- **Relationship and social support:** This is the ability to leverage social networks and social capital in times of difficulty
- **Humour and Positive thinking:** This refers to the ability to 'joke it away' and stay positive in difficult times; it is another measure and arsenal of resilience.
- **Emotional Regulation:** This is the ability to recover emotionally quickly from losses.
- **Spirituality and Faith:** This has to do with taking part in religious activities and expression faith in God
- **Personal Confidence and Responsibility:** This is avoiding blaming others, and being confident in tackling difficulties, not giving up.

Each indicator was measured based on relevant statements on a scale of 1-5 where one means strongly disagree, two means disagree, three means neutral, four means agree and five means strongly agree. Then, the youth were asked to rate the level of agreement on the statements under each indicator.

For each indicator, responses to the statements presented were summed to determine the final score. Then, the final scores for all the respondents were added for each indicator and the average score was computed for each indicator.

For perseverance and commitment (34.62±3.70), the minimum score was 22 and the maximum score was 40. For positive self-image and optimism (36.49±3.47), the minimum score was 15 and the maximum score was 45. For relationship and social support (21.23±2.80), the minimum score was 8 and the maximum score was 25. For humour and positive thinking (12.38±1.96), the minimum score was 3 and the maximum score was 15. For emotional regulation (21.21±2.85), the minimum score was 7 and the maximum score was 25. For spirituality and faith (26.36±2.64), the minimum score was 16 and the maximum score was 30. For personal confidence and responsibility (25.62±2.90), the minimum score was 9 and the maximum score was 30. For youths' overall resilience (177.91±15.57), the minimum score was 116 and the maximum score was 206. *(The figures in parenthesis are mean and standard deviation)*

1. Nigerian youth are committed and can persevere in the face of difficulties

Nigerian youth can achieve their goals even if they are difficult. They believed that things could be different or improved through continuous hard work. There seems to be an inner strength that makes an average Nigerian youth believe that bowing to pressure or giving up is not an option for them. Thus, Nigerian young people are highly resilient, perhaps as a survival instinct. The mean of both male (34.80) and female (34.44) youth are highly perseverant (see Table 5), and this agrees with the assertion made by a male interviewee that: 'perseverance is what has been keeping us going still...'. However, male youth significantly outperform female youth's perseverance and commitment capability ($t=1.996, p<0.05$). The strength of the perseverance nature of the male gender was revealed in the assertion made during a group discussion with males from Northern Nigeria, a discussant stated:

"Like, there's this trait of being a youth, they call it resilience. Being resilient means 'you go for it', ...you work for it, anyhow it comes you must still take it that way and keep moving. During the pandemic, I tried

my best to improve my craft as a youth; though I had to go on many hunger strikes, I kept going” (Male, FGD, Kaduna).

Similarly, a male interviewee expressed his resilience in the face of challenges:

“The fact that I have a goal that I want to achieve, even though there is a pandemic, motivated me more to go after my dreams” (Male, IDI, Lagos).

Nigerian youth are focused on relentlessly pursuing their aspirations, rejecting impossibility as their fate, and are not afraid of challenges. Challenging times are seen as an opportunity for learning and growing. For Nigerian youth to

achieve their aspirations, they must do their best, no matter the outcome, to navigate their way towards attaining their aspirations. Nigerian youth are committed to achieving their aspirations and can persevere in the face of any unpalatable situations they encounter along their path to success, irrespective of whether they reside in rural or urban areas. On average, 34.5% of the youth in rural areas and 34.7% in urban centres show a high level of perseverance in the pursuit of their aspirations despite uncertainties in their way (see Table 4).

Notwithstanding the challenges posed by COVID-19, Nigerian youth face multiple challenges that predate the pandemic. However, COVID-19 only aggravated the problem.

Table 4 Youth resilience indicators differential in urban and rural

RESILIENCE INDICATORS	LOCATION	N	MEAN	MEAN DIFF.	T	DF	P-VALUE	REMARKS
Perseverance and commitment	Urban	927	34.73	0.246	1.342	1657	0.180	Not Significant
	Rural	732	34.48					
Positive self-image and optimism	Urban	927	36.64	0.342	1.992	1657	0.047	Significant
	Rural	732	36.30					
Relationship and social support	Urban	927	21.19	-0.099	-0.722	1657	0.470	Not Significant
	Rural	732	21.29					
Humour and positive thinking	Urban	927	12.49	0.245	2.533	1657	0.011	Significant
	Rural	732	12.24					
Emotional regulation	Urban	927	21.30	0.193	1.370	1657	0.171	Not Significant
	Rural	732	21.11					
Spirituality and faith	Urban	927	26.44	0.175	1.341	1657	0.180	Not Significant
	Rural	732	26.27					
Personal confidence and responsibility	Urban	927	25.65	0.075	0.521	1657	0.602	Not Significant
	Rural	732	25.58					

Sig. (2-tailed) at $p=0.05$

2. The resilience of Nigerian youth is revealed in their positive self-image and optimism

Most surveyed youth were concerned about their personality, optimistic about the future of Nigeria, felt free to be themselves, optimistic about their future, feel harmony with themselves, usually recovered quickly after ordinary illness or injuries and believed they could be successful without travelling outside the country. There were no significant differences in positive self-image and optimism along gender lines (see Table 4). Male (36.57%) and female (36.40%) of the youth had positive self-images and were optimistic about their future and the country to which they belonged. However, urban and rural youth significantly differ in their positive self-image and optimism ($t=1.993$, $p<0.05$). The youth in urban

(=36.64) are more optimistic about their future and the future of their country relative to youth in rural (=36.30). A positive self-image is an inner drive and internal motivation for success. When the thinking faculty of youth is distorted, they are demotivated, and the speed at which they should attain their aspirations is deterred. Nigerian youth are optimistic that they can achieve their aspirations through self-employment. It was garnered during a discussion with a group of LGBTQ that the resilience of Nigerian youth is shown by their drive to be their bosses because of the urge to actualise their aspirations. During the discussion, one of the LGBTQ stated: "I think he said something about that, self-employed, that you know what you want to do yourself, like be your boss".

3. Youth's social relationships are crucial to their resilience

Young men and women in Nigeria have at least one close person who can help during difficult times such as COVID-19. They are open to their family members' feelings, easily relate to others in their workplace, and have good friends that they can trust. This is a strong indication of Nigerian youth's resilience and ability to cope with unforeseen circumstances. The circles of friends and families are vital in the advent of any eventualities and give youth emotional strength to not relent in realizing their aspirations. The roles of friends and families are golden; aside from emotional support, they provide a strong financial base for the continuity of the realization of individual aspirations. A group of female discussants from Northern Nigeria attest that the COVID-19 period fostered relationships among people.

"I think during the COVID-19 period, it connected many people. It has made you think of others. It has brought people very close to each other like contributing, assisting, helping, reaching out to others that need you..." (FGD/Female participant/Lagos).

Social support is also important to the avoidance of depression among youth and emotional imbalances youth undergo due to life issues. Further, the outcome of this study shows that young men (=21.29) and women (=21.17) have great social relationships that can accelerate their aspirations, all things being equal (see Table 4). However, male social relationships seem more excellent

than female ones. Nevertheless, the social relationships and support of both genders in Nigeria are great, and they have the requisite potential to sustain their resilience in difficult times. Socialization is one of the resilient mechanisms identified by the LGBTQ group interviewed. One of the group discussants stated:

"Socializing, working hard and patience. For me, smart work and strategic thinking. More like street smarts" (LGBTQ member, Lagos).

Hence, to be resilient, socialization has to be coupled with other abilities such as smartness, hard work, patience and strategic thinking.

Also, in rural (=21.29) and urban (=21.19) segments of Nigeria, youth social relationships were great, but social relationships were more enjoyed by the rural folks (Table 4). This is an indication of the strong social network in rural areas, which is primarily family and friends. Notwithstanding, youth in urban and rural Nigeria have been able to build strong social networks and support that are of great importance to their aspiration, resilience and adaptability. In this study, social networks were found to be connected with getting job opportunities. A male interviewee noted, "...most of the job opportunities that are around or within the country are normally through social networks".

4. Nigeria youth's humour and positive thinking aided their resilience

Humour and positive thinking of youth are major drivers of their aspirations and a prominent component of their resilience. Youth who are positively minded are usually result-oriented and are never deterred by failure. In fact, to them, failure is part of the ingredient and a stepping stone to greatness. Youth positivity is manifested in their ability to envision the funny side of things and find humour in difficult situations, as assessed in this study. Findings presented in Table 5 show that there was a strong consensus among males (=12.45) and female (=12.30) youth that they are humorous and positively minded, which is a good way to overcome defeat, successfully sail through difficult times and plan better next time opportunities present themselves. This aligns with the submission made by male group discussants from Southern Nigeria: "COVID-19 also helped me reason very fast and know how to go about things."

Similarly, during an interview session with female group discussants from Northern Nigeria, a female youth spoke thus:

“I had to think outside the box and tell myself things would not be the same again. The world will take a while to be the way it was before COVID-19. So, I had to think outside the box to find other ways to survive. COVID-19 is an eye opener that anything can happen anytime, and what will I do to sustain myself for a long while and be prepared for eventualities...”
(Female-Only FGD, Bauchi).

However, urban youth’s humour and positive thinking significantly differ from rural youth’s ($t=2.533$, $p<0.05$). In essence, As shown in Table 4, youth in urban ($=12.49$) are more humorous even if the situation is unpleasant and are positively minded better than rural youth ($=12.24$).

5. Youth resilience draws on their emotional regulation capabilities

Emotional stability is a major factor in the pursuit of youth aspirations. Emotional regulation of youth was measured in terms of their ability to recover emotionally from losses and setbacks, handle unpleasant emotions such as sadness, fear and anger, manage their worries, stay calm under challenging circumstances and handle their frustrations. Youth manifestations of these emotional regulation capabilities revealed their resilience towards actualizing their aspirations and becoming a better version of themselves. The emotional regulation capabilities of male ($=21.40$) and female ($=21.03$) youth were quite high (Table 1), but much higher for male youth significantly ($t=2.639$, $p<0.05$). Thus, male youth can better manage their emotions, such as fear, frustration, worries, sadness, and anger, than female youth. Also, the male gender has more capacity to recover quickly from losses and setbacks than the female gender. The outstanding emotional regulation capabilities of the male gender might not be disassociated from their high perseverance nature over females, as discovered in this study. A male interviewee from Southern Nigeria attests that “Youth resilience improved by 100% because of COVID-19”. Another male interviewee from Eastern Nigeria stated: “I am determined to start somewhere, anyhow”.

Concerning areas of residence within the coun-

try, both youth in rural ($=21.11$) and urban ($=21.30$) has a remarkable ability to manage their emotions (Table 2). Hence, the emotional regulation capabilities of youth are independent of whether they live in the rural or urban part of the country. The emotional strength of Nigerian youth enhances their optimism about themselves and their country. A female interviewee from Northern Nigeria expresses her amazement at youth recovery capability from the pandemic outbreak thus:

I can say that the youth bounced back so quickly... COVID-19 is something that we have never experienced, for youth to experience this and bounce back again just like nothing happened is something...
(Female, IDI, Bauchi)

Likewise, a male interviewee affirmed Nigeria’s youth recovery ability thus: “I can say that the youth can bounce back or even start afresh and/or continue with what they are doing...”

Youth’s ability to manage their emotions confers mental strength, which is crucial to maintaining stability, pliability, and adaptability amid difficult or unexpected changes. Nigerian youth can handle unpleasant situations, stay calm under challenging circumstances, handle frustration, and recover from losses and setbacks. However, after COVID-19, recovery has been slow, but youth are not discouraged. A male youth interviewed speaks on youth recovery after COVID-19 thus:

“We are progressing in the right direction, but it might be at a slow pace. I can say I have recovered, and it is moving slowly. I will continue progressing from there. But then, quite alright, we thank God we are headed in the positive direction” (Male Youth, YDP, Lagos).

6. The spirituality and faith of Nigerian youth that they will succeed is strong

Youth’s spirituality and faith were gauged based on their convictions regarding the meaningfulness and purposefulness of their lives, that most things happen for a reason, getting through hard times by faith, believing that learning lessons from life can bring out the best in them, finding spiritual strength when faced with problems and drawing strength and courage for their life by their religious or moral beliefs. The spirituality and faith of male

(=26.47) and female (=26.26) youth were strong (see Table 5). Thus, male and female youth believed that their life had meaning and purpose, substantiating the fact that youth indeed aspired and are aiming at their fulfilment. The fulfilment of these aspirations connotes living a meaningful and purposeful life for the youth. The tenacity of youth in actualising their dreams stems from their belief that they are born to succeed and not to fail. There was a belief among the sampled youth that good or bad, most things happen for a reason. With this mindset, youth can pull through difficult times and forge ahead in their aspiration conquest. Nigerian youth have realized that learning lessons from life can bring out the best in them. In addition, Nigerian youth's religious or moral beliefs give them the strength and courage for their life. This helps boost the mental health of youth. Hence, the two prominent religions (Christianity and Islam) practised among the youth aided their aspirations and instilled good morals.

Table 5 Gender dimension of youth resilience indicators

Resilience indicators	Gender	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	t	df	p-value	Remarks
Perseverance and commitment	Male	829	34.80	0.362	1.996	1657	0.046	Significant
	Female	830	34.44					
Positive self-image and optimism	Male	829	36.57	0.163	0.957	1657	0.339	Not Significant
	Female	830	36.40					
Relationship and social support	Male	829	21.29	0.122	0.888	1657	0.375	Not Significant
	Female	830	21.17					
Humour and positive thinking	Male	829	12.45	0.155	1.610	1657	0.108	Not Significant
	Female	830	12.30					
Emotional regulation	Male	829	21.40	0.369	2.639	1657	0.008	Significant
	Female	830	21.03					
Spirituality and faith	Male	829	26.47	0.215	1.659	1657	0.097	Not Significant
	Female	830	26.26					
Personal confidence and responsibility	Male	829	25.74	0.237	1.665	1657	0.096	Not Significant
	Female	830	25.50					

Sig. (2-tailed) at $p=0.05$

Most youth attested that their personal belief gets them through hard times and that they find spiritual strength when faced with problems. As shown in Table 4, a similar trend of results was obtained among youth in rural (=26.27) and urban (=26.44). Both urban and rural youth agreed that their religious or moral beliefs gave them strength and courage. The measure of faith and spiritual strength displayed by urban and rural youth indicates that any challenges to their aspirations can be overcome. Many young people claimed that their recourse to spiritual resources strengthened their resilience. Faith and religion are vital sources of comfort when faced with challenges or struggles such as social interactions. Similarly, an extensive systematic review of literature by van Breda and Theron (2018) identified recourse to the spiritual

as one of the major resilience strategies of young people in South Africa. This study underscores the need not to write off spirituality as an inconsequential frivolity.

7. Nigeria youth can confidently face difficult situations and are responsible

Knowing how confident and responsible Nigerian youth are in pursuing their aspirations is necessary, as this also explains their resilient nature. In this study, youth confidence and responsibility were ascertained in terms of retrospect on the reason for getting upset, the ability to rely on oneself when there is no help, accepting responsibility for whatever happens in one's life, adjusting to change if the situation requires it, personal confi-

dent in solving life problems and finding strength in one's relationships. A group of female discussants from Northern Nigeria speaks on one of the changes experienced thus:

"...at that time (COVID-19 time), because it came to one's realization that you can sit here, apply for a job abroad and work and get paid. You don't need to start walking around with CVs and apart from that you can do your business, cool business without carrying your things on your head and going all over" (Female, FGD, Kaduna)

Young men (=25.74) and women (=25.50), whether they reside in rural (=25.58) or urban (=25.65) display high personal confidence and responsibility (see Tables 4 and 5). There were no significant differences in youth confidence and responsibility along gender lines, likewise concerning areas they reside within the country.

In essence, youth in Nigeria are confident that they can solve the life problems they are faced with. They find strength in their social networks and are ready to change if that is what the current situation calls for towards reaching their goals. This is evident in how Nigerian young women and men are migrating to digital platforms to learn and expand their life and business horizons to keep pursuing their aspirations despite their challenges. COVID-19 pushed many young people online; some have stayed there ever since, exploring new digital livelihood opportunities. A female interviewee from Southwest Nigeria said:

"COVID-19, as I said earlier, moved me into the online space, and I am now more deliberate about taking my business out there" (Female, IDI, Lagos)

Young women and men are leveraging digital platforms to access markets and opportunities to realize their aspirations. Many of them who do not have enough funds to run physical businesses are running online businesses. And, when the government imposes insensitive policies, like the Twitter ban in Nigeria, young people use their ICT skills to circumvent the legislation and continue the pursuit of their aspirations. A female interviewee stated:

"...young people are so smart that they still find a way to bypass the Twitter ban. For example, they used VPNs to access Twitter during the Twitter ban" (Female

IDI, Ibadan).

When youth cannot find physical jobs, they navigate online for remote jobs, and many are doing well in them. Nigerian young men and women are responsible for their actions and think of reasons for manifesting negative emotions such as getting upset. Even when help is not forthcoming, Nigerian youth still pull through by themselves. They are accountable to themselves and take responsibility for what their life turns out to be. From the foregoing, it can be understood that Nigerian youth are open-minded and can adjust to changes that come their way, as they hardly give up on what they love doing in life. Male group discussants from Southern Nigeria spoke on their resilience during difficult times such as COVID-19:

"...it made us stronger; me as a person, as a youth, made us stronger; COVID-19, after the whole lockdown thing, made me realize that thinking out of the box is important. It is all one for himself, every man is a carrier of his cross. There's nobody for you. It is you and you alone for yourself. So, it opened my eyes to understand the fact that you need more streams of income" (Male, FGD, Rivers)

Young people take responsibility for their life ambitions by exploiting available opportunities. This explained why skills acquisition was found to be crucial to youth actualization of aspirations in Nigeria. One of the male interviewees from Northern Nigeria asserted thus:

"...most young women and men now have chosen to look at life more positively and are more willing to explore on their own to see how they can make their lives better... many are now beginning to understand that even academic qualification may not necessarily be all you need. You need skills these days" (Male, IDI, Kaduna).

Young women and men are fortifying themselves with required out-of-school skills to improve their resilience and pursue their aspirations despite difficulties. The current realities have taught young women and men in Nigeria to look beyond their academic qualifications when considering what to use to solve their problems. Entrepreneurship is now much embraced. Young graduates are seen learning trades and crafts to have skills

to earn income for survival. And of course, getting skills helps build resilience as the skills are used to earn money to survive while the young people keep working on achieving their big aspirations.

8. Nigeria youth are resilient irrespective of their location, but young men show stronger resilient traits

There was a disparity in youth's resilient capability along gender lines in Nigeria. Male and female youth's resilience capabilities ($t=2.126$, $p<0.05$) differ significantly (see Table 6). Male youth resilient capabilities ($=178.73$) outstands that of female youth ($=177.10$), indicating that the male gender is more resilient during challenging moments and displays a better capacity for commitment and adjustment than the female gender. Hence, Nigerian youth's resilient capability cannot be considered location-specific. In other words, youth are resilient regardless of their location or area of residence.

However, male and female youth in urban areas do not significantly differ in their resilience capability. Hence, male youth can be youth compared relatively with female youth in urban areas. Likewise, there is no significant difference in the resilience capability of male and female youth in rural areas.

Considering the youth's location in Nigeria, the resilient capability of both male and female youth who live in urban areas does not significantly differ from that of youth living in rural areas (see Table 6). Thus, Nigerian youth are resilient irrespective of their location. Youth in urban and rural areas should mutually benefit from interventions tailored to their aspirations. Likewise, the resilient capability of males residing in urban areas is not significantly different from males living in rural areas. Similarly, females living in urban and rural were not significantly different in their resilience

Table 6: Youth Resilience Summary

Youth resilience	Gender	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	t	df	p-value	Remarks
Overall resilience by gender	Male	829	178.73	1.624	2.126	1657	0.034	Significant
	Female	830	177.10					
Overall resilience by gender in urban	Male	462	179.20	1.528	1.540	925	0.124	Not Significant
	Female	465	177.67					
Overall resilience by gender in rural	Male	367	178.13	1.753	1.473	730	0.141	Not Significant
	Female	365	176.38					
Youth resilience	Location	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	t	df	p-value	Remarks
Overall resilience by location	Urban	927	178.43	1.176	1.528	1657	0.127	Not Significant
	Rural	732	177.26					
Overall resilience of males by location	Urban	462	179.20	1.068	0.942	827	0.347	Not Significant
	Rural	367	178.13					
Overall resilience of females by location	Urban	465	177.67	1.293	1.246	828	0.213	Not Significant
	Rural	365	176.38					

Sig. (2-tailed) at $p=0.05$

Youth Adaptability

Youth adaptability concerns how young people navigate and adapt to challenging situations such as COVID-19. Understanding youth adaptability is important to know how their adaptability mechanisms can be strengthened. In this study, adaptability was quantitatively determined in terms of youth's ability to think through some possible options, devise a new way of getting out of challenges, source for valuable resources to deal with new situations effectively, adjust expectations to assist in a new problem,

seek out new information, reduce negative emotions, minimize frustrations, and drawing on positive feelings and emotions. Interestingly, COVID-19 brought about positive changes to youth lives as they navigated their way through the challenges posed by the pandemic. A discussant during a group discussion with male and female youth in Southeast Nigeria claimed:

“COVID-19 changed me and I am bold to stand anywhere to face whatever thing ...let me just say that COVID-19 has made me stand out. For me, the pandemic changed my mentality, it taught me how to adapt.” (Male/FGD/Enugu)

Unfortunately, the pandemic only came to aggravate the challenges faced by the youth in Nigeria; it, therefore, stretched the resilient capacity of the youth.

1. Nigeria youth can adapt to new situations irrespective of their location, but young men show stronger adaptability traits

Young women and men involved in the study showed strong adaptability across the different adaptability indicators. However, the male gender adaptation capacity was much stronger compared to the female gender (Table 7). Male and female youth adaptability differ significantly ($t=3.876$, $p<0.05$). Similarly, there was a significant difference in the adaptability of male and female youth in urban ($t=2.851$, $p<0.05$) and rural ($t=2.629$, $p<0.05$). This indicates that the youth gender influences the adaptability capacity of youth, and in this study, the male gender was found to be more adjustable to changing situations in urban and rural areas.

Table 7: Youth Adaptability Summary

Youth adaptability	Gender	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	T	df	p-value	Remarks
Overall adaptability by gender	Male	829	39.22	0.706	3.876	1657	0.000	Significant
	Female	830	38.51					
Overall adaptability by gender in urban	Male	462	39.29	0.686	2.851	925	0.004	Significant
	Female	465	38.60					
Overall adaptability by gender in rural	Male	367	39.13	0.734	2.629	730	0.009	Significant
	Female	365	38.39					
Youth adaptability	Location	N	Mean	Mean Diff.	t	df	p-value	Remarks
Overall adaptability by location	Urban	927	38.95	0.184	0.997	1657	0.319	Not Significant
	Rural	732	38.76					
Overall adaptability of males by location	Urban	462	39.29	0.162	0.613	827	0.540	Not Significant
	Rural	367	39.13					
Overall adaptability of females by location	Urban	465	38.60	0.210	0.823	828	0.410	Not Significant
	Rural	365	38.39					

Sig. (2-tailed) at $p=0.05$

Adjustment skill of the male gender to changing situations was demonstrated by a male interviewee from the Northern part of Nigeria, he explained what he did during COVID-19 thus:

Applying little tricks on entrepreneurship, I re-strategized my transport business to a delivery business since there were restrictions on people's movement. I was so committed to my business (Male, KII, Kaduna).

The greater adaptability potentials of young men cannot be disassociated from the expectations of men based on sociocultural norms. According to OECD (2021), the societal expectations that set the pace for this, which they describe as restrictive masculinities, are the norms that a “real” man should be the breadwinner, working for pay to provide for the material needs of the household; be financially dominant, earning more than women; work in “manly” jobs, regarding those professions that society defines as “men’s work” and not those it views as “women’s work”; be the “ideal worker”, prioritizing work over all other aspects of life; and; be a “manly” leader, cultivating an assertive and space-occupying leadership style.

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, men were still expected to find means to provide for their family members, relatives and even their girlfriends or fiancées. So, men had no choice but to “hustle” to care for their families. During a group discussion with female interviewees in Northern Nigeria, someone noted that:

“In our society, there is a certain age, and some families consider that males are supposed to be independent at that age... they should hustle for their lives but in the aspect of ladies, unless you’re married or you’re in school, you cannot be that far from your family” (Female, FGD, Bauchi).

Because men bear the burden of provision, a measure of financial responsibility is conferred on them by society as the main provider for their homes. Similarly, an interviewee stated during a discussion with male group discussants from Southern Nigeria stated that:

COVID-19 helped me to think about how to hustle to make money. After COVID-19, I gained more life experience, such as talking and some other things.

Therefore, there is more pressure on young men to adapt to changing situations brought on by COVID-19. In a group discussion held with female interviewees from Ibadan, a discussant noted that “COVID-19 affects young men more because when it comes to the hunger part of it, we girls will see something to eat somehow, and it will come from men, so I think it affected the men more”.

Likewise, a female interviewee from Northern Nigeria affirmed:

“Let me not be biased; the men were more affected than the women. The reason is that in my community, in the North specifically, most of the ladies don’t go out to work and look for what to eat; the men go out and look for what they will eat and bring it home to feed themselves” (Female, KII, Kaduna).

Thus, male adaptability potentials are connected to finding ways to remain financially secure. Although males are more likely to adapt faster in a negative situation and follow their aspirations, young women would also try to change the odds when stacked against life’s reality. One of the female youth from Northern Nigeria asserted: “Entrepreneurship is that which I would advise women to go for because being an entrepreneur and having things of your own, being a boss of yourself”.

Young women in Nigeria believe in financial freedom and empowerment for women and see business or trading as a way to achieve that goal. A group of female discussants interviewed from the Federal Capital Territory submitted that most youth could overcome COVID-19 challenges through empowerment. During the interview, a female youth stated: “Most of the youth have been able to overcome the obstacle caused by COVID-19 by engaging themselves in learning skills”.

Concerning location or place of residence (Table 7), there was no significant difference in the adaptability of rural and urban youth. Likewise, males in urban and rural do not significantly differ in their ability to adapt to changing situations. Similarly, females’ adaptability abilities in urban and rural do not differ significantly. Hence, the ability of youth to adapt to new situations is not location specific as youth are building their capacity to contain changes that come their way, whether in urban or rural. Irrespective of location, both young women and men can adapt to new situations and cope with new challenges.

2. Different resilient and adaptability mechanisms deployed by young women and men during COVID-19 explained

What stood out for both young women and men was the different resilience and adaptability mechanisms they deployed. There were four major mechanisms enhancing youth resilience and adaptability in Nigeria.

Mechanism 1: Recourse to the digital

Digital creativity was a key resilience and adaptability mechanism for young men and women. Because of the many restrictions that came with COVID-19, many migrated online as a means of survival and communication. During a group discussion with male and female youth from the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), a female youth explained how she survived the COVID-19 period: “During the lockdown, a lot of people brought ideas, cooked from home and put them online and it helped, we also made money”.

For many of these Nigerian youth, social media was a means to an end, survival being that end. A youth during a group discussion with male interviewees in Northern Nigeria claimed that:

I noticed that during COVID-19, the lockdown made youth in my environment more digital. So, they are mostly into internet businesses now. I have seen them around. You have to be inspired to do something. When you want to do something, you have to determine these are your goals, and they'll surely come (Male, IDI, Abuja).

For many young men and women, digital migration was a way to keep their businesses and dreams afloat. A male interviewee stated: “Youth were able to adapt to the COVID situation at that time by engaging themselves in online business, which was giving them money”.

The recourse to the digital was not for the time being. It became a part of young people’s arsenal even in the post-COVID era. The acquisition of digital skills as an adaptability mechanism is consistent with previous studies in the literature. For instance, Workneh (2020) and Bosch (2016) who worked among young people in Ethiopia and South Africa, respectively, as well as Dzisah (2018) and Oyedemi

and Choung (2020), who studied young people in Ghana and South African youth, respectively, identified how youth leaned on the digital, mainly social media, as a major resilient tool in times of crisis. However, some studies suggest that young people use digital media more for entertainment and “catching cruises” than for serious business (Omotosho, 2020). However, given the findings of this current study, the coming of the pandemic seems to have shifted that trend.

Further, a popular gender norm or belief about technical, including digital work, is that it is a men’s world. Men dominate most STEM disciplines. However, this is fast changing as both women and men turned to digital tools in a bid to escape COVID-19 consequences. For instance, a female interviewee from Northern Nigeria talked about challenging the traditions and beliefs held by parents about jobs for women. She says:

“...now we too want to do it differently from what they did, we want to explore, we want to try new things, innovations are coming in, new business ideas are coming in, and we want to key in and develop a new and digital society” (Female, IDI, Kaduna)

COVID-19 allowed women to try on some of those jobs once meant for men, thus proving a basis to challenge some of the existing gender norms.

Mechanism 2: Recourse to the spiritual

Both young women and men talked about depending on God, praying, and fellowship with others in their religious groups to survive the problems caused by COVID-19. A female interviewee from Lagos described her coping and survival mechanism as: “Hard work, being prayerful, diligence and determination are important so that you can achieve a good life”.

However, among young men, the survival method was described thus:

I think it is the strategy of management: you manage what you have, and just hope in God it will end one day (Male, FGD, Lagos).

Neither the females nor the males talked of spirituality as a sufficient tool for adaptability. They both mentioned it along with other tools like hard work and management skills. Likewise, closeness to God was one of the resilient and adaptability

mechanisms identified by a mixed group interviewed in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. They said that:

“...being close to God is very important. Seize the opportunity that comes your way, try to be with people, who when they are around, will be able to correct you and always be ready to accept mistakes and move on.”

Mechanism 3: Recourse to the social: mentorship and empowerment

Recourse to social networks was one of the major adaptability mechanisms of young people during and after COVID-19. A male interviewee from the Federal Capital Territory said: “Social network plays a vital role in assisting the youth to cope with the crisis caused by COVID-19.”

This networking is done in search of mentorship and financial empowerment. Whereas some claimed to have developed new networks during the crisis, a far more recurrent claim was the recourse to the people already known before the crisis: mentors, financial supporters, friends, former classmates and neighbours. A discussant during a group discussion with young men and women in Southern Nigeria stated:

“...we tried to search for an empowering scheme or all these organizations that empower people, even if it is not a big organization. The little families or compound where you see that this person has made it in life and is doing very well, you can go there and say ‘Ma/Sir, I want to do this your stuff,’ and you share your opinion or idea with the person.” (Mixed, FGD, Enugu)

This shows that the average Nigerian youth looks for opportunities to improve their situations and go out of their way to look for a means to self-development. This finding is interestingly consistent with those of Makhnach (2014) and Dvorsky et al. (2020), who studied resilience among Russian youth. They discovered that youth resilience was built upon interaction with family members, friends and peers. This study pushes this forth by showing that the network of people on whom young people leaned for support in terms of mentorship, skills impartation and emotional and other

forms of support was wider than just the immediate and extended family. It includes anyone with whom young people came into regular contact and who was willing to support them with skills, counsel and other forms. This network width reflects the communal nature of African societies, a trait that is becoming gradually endangered.

The social relationship of Nigerian youth is strengthened by their willingness to be mentored. Young women and men seek mentoring to gain experience to pursue their aspirations despite their problems. They believe that being tutored and being put through by others who have trodden a path before is helpful. A young female farmer from the Northern part of the country noted that mentoring in any form is a coping mechanism for young people. To her, gleaning from the knowledge of experienced and skilful people is a pathway to personal growth and an easier way to overcome challenges, pointing out that:

“Right now, I’m undertaking a mentorship course... I think it goes a long way in helping, having someone more experienced than you, someone you can relate to, someone that can help you share your problem or advise you” (Female, IDI, Kaduna).

This shows that mentoring is a positive coping mechanism for Nigerian youth. The mentoring can be face-to-face or virtual, formal or informal, by some family or non-family members. The most important thing is exchanging knowledge and virtues in the mentor-mentee relationship. In some cases, the mentoring is semi-formal, more like an apprenticeship scheme. One of the female interviewees from Southern Nigeria explained:

“From where I came from, there is a method we call stewardship that our males go through. After secondary school and some after primary school, they go on stewardship, serving someone who has made it in a business they aspire to. They have a period to serve, sometimes 4, 5 or 6 years; the person undergoes some skill training, after which they are sponsored if someone can be sponsored” (Female, FGD, Enugu).

Apprenticeship and entrepreneurship are means to employment. Literature suggests that in times of crisis, those employed manifest bet-

ter resilience than those not. Roman-Mata et al. (2020) found that those who were employed were more likely to have a higher level of resilience than those who were not. In the case of Nigerian youth, getting busy with something that is not idle, be it entrepreneurship or apprenticeship, is a robust adaptability mechanism. However, men and women appeared to have different reasons for entrepreneurship. While young women see it as a way to be financially independent of men by “having things of your own and being a boss of yourself” (Female, IDI), young men see it as a way “to earn enough to provide for the family” (Male, IDI).

As much as entrepreneurship is good for attaining financial independence, the need for multiple income streams is more important. A group of male discussants from the Federal Capital Territory agreed on needing more than one source of income as a resilience and adaptability strategy. A male youth stated during the interview that:

“...multiple streams of income in the sense that you have to try and expand and broaden so that whenever one gets closed, the other will still be open. So, multiple streams of income are one of the strategies that I think we can use.” (Male, YPD, Abuja)

Mechanism 4: Recourse to aspirations - an eye on the goal

Young women and men remained resilient during the COVID era by keeping their eyes on their personal and career goals. A female interviewee claimed that COVID-19 indeed creates hunger among the youth. In her words:

“COVID-19, for me, brought a lot of hunger; and it is not about food; people wanted to explore, and people were tired of staying all alone in their houses. So, that hunger to do, to create, to innovate...” (Female, IDI, Rivers)

Youth were able to stay focused despite the destabilization caused by COVID-19. They can map out the path towards the realization of their goal. A female discussant told of her own goal and example:

“I want to become a microbiologist and own a lab of my own. However, to achieve my goals, I must go for my master’s and read clinical microbiology.” (Female,

FGD, Lagos)

For this category of young people, the motivation was a constant connection with their career goals and aspirations. Therefore, one could say that to cope with the many constraints of COVID-19 on their aspirations, many Nigerian youth displayed a high level of inner resilience. This is reflected in earlier discussions that Nigerian youth draw on positive emotions as a means to overcome their challenges.

CONCLUSION

As a component of a multi-country research and policy uptake project carried out in seven African countries of Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, by the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) and funded by the Mastercard Foundation (MCF), this nationwide study investigated gender and youth aspirations, resilience and adaptability during and after COVID-19 in Nigeria. It was designed to project the missing voices of young African women and men in discussions about their adulthood transition, aspirations, resilience, adaptability and livelihoods from the Nigerian context.

The findings established that Nigerian young women and men used age and physical agility to define youthhood, with over 50% of the youth describing persons between 18-40 years as youth, while they also considered youth as a group of active people with high energy levels, potential, and drive for adventures. Apart from the forgoing attributes, the participants described youthhood as a period of political activism. The participants admitted that proper young women or men are not considered burdens but useful resources. Some markers of a proper youth they identified include *a good sense of industry, a commitment to contribute to the betterment of society, a high moral standard, and self-confidence.*

Explaining how close they were to attaining the desired success, only one out of 10 young people we surveyed admitted that they had already attained the success they desired. However, more than 60.0% indicated that they were closer to living a successful life, while about three out of 10 attested that they were still far from realising a successful life.

The findings show that, among the young people interviewed, financial stability ranked highest out of all the indicators of success that were assessed. It was also found that the majority (52.0%) of the youth considered being financially stable (rich) as the topmost success priority. However, through gender-specific analyses and voice disaggregation, of all the indicators of success assessed, the topmost aspirations of young men in order of preference were to be financially stable and rich, have a good job, have a good business and provide family support. Conversely, the topmost aspirations of young women, in order of priority, were to

have a good job, provide family support, be financially stable and rich, and have a good business.

The findings also show that most of the youth (79.0%) currently running their private businesses indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their businesses compared to pre-COVID 19 era. As they suggested, the major effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on youth businesses was a significant loss of income which was experienced by over 60.0% of the young people. Apart from the fact that more than half of the youth lost opportunities and customers, and business options were reduced by about 45.0%, young people who had to close down their businesses completely were about 25.0%. In addition, COVID-19 brought an increase in unemployment, crime rates, domestic violence and poor business patronage.

However, young women, compared to young men, had fewer job opportunities during the pandemic and experienced more emotional trauma. They lamented that they were constrained to stay at home to take care of their children, and in the process, many of them fell victim to rape and other forms of domestic crimes. One good thing, however, was that the pandemic was also a period when many young women and men activated and explored their creativity, resilience and adaptability, developed their talents, and improved their survival skills by migrating to the digital space. Unfortunately, the situation was not the same in the rural parts of the country. Young people residing in rural areas were more vulnerable during the pandemic as they had limited alternatives, such as digital technologies and business opportunities that are relatively available in the cities. Therefore, their adaptability capacity was weak.

Having their aspirations met is the major thing that interests youth worldwide, even though it is done through different means. Nigerian youth aspirations are centred upon self-sufficiency through gainful employment, which would consequently make them financially independent. Previous studies (Roman-Mata et al., 2020) have confirmed that those who are employed (public employees, self-employed and private employees) tend to be more highly resilient. This does not vary from the current study, which found that gainful employment is a critical factor in realising youth aspirations in Nigeria.

It is a natural phenomenon that young people are energetic and, if given the right opportunities and empowerment, they are the most active and productive age group in any country's workforce. This is what our current study has shown, as Nigerian youth expressed a strong desire to be productive, especially if given the opportunity, which can come from financial empowerment, palliatives, and inclusion in policy frameworks. Again, this directly speaks to young women and men's resilience and creative capability towards achieving their aspirations and innovative ideas (Moran, 2010). The current study has shown that the resilience and adaptability of the youth are made known and displayed during challenges such as the pandemic. Aligning with this are the findings by Dvorsky et al. (2020), who established that developing resilience strategies and the capacity of the youth is a function of some levels of exposure to and experience with adversity.

Resilient capabilities are necessary to overcome numerous emotional, behavioural and psychological imbalances that young men and women in Nigeria face during uncertainty or in difficult situations. Difficult moments in the lives of young people pose a threat to attaining their aspirations. The good news is that despite the demanding situations that young men and women in Nigeria face, they remain resilient in pursuing their aspirations.

Young women and men in Nigeria showed that they were resilient and could forge ahead in the face of the daunting challenges of COVID-19. The resilience of Nigerian youth is attributable to certain factors assessed in this study. These factors (also called resilience indicators) were perseverance and commitment, positive self-image and optimism, relationship and social support, humour and positive thinking, emotional regulation, spirituality and faith, personal confidence and responsibility. This is unlike the situation in other climes, such as Italy, as affirmed by Lenzo et al. (2020) that during the global pandemic, depression, anxiety and stress were prevalent among the sampled Italians, who were mostly female (72.2%). Hence, there was an inverse relationship between resilience factors and depression and other challenges mentioned. In this current study, it has been established that young women and men convincingly agreed with all the indicators of youth adaptability, among which are the ability to think through possible options to assist in new situations and having the capacity to develop new ways of going about

things rather than getting depressed.

Meanwhile, the findings of a study by Carriedo et al. (2020) in Spain align with our current study that young men and women differed significantly in their resilience capacity during the pandemic outbreak. Our study established a similar trend: Young men, compared to young women, demonstrated higher resilience and adaptability levels during the pandemic. It was also found that younger respondents had higher resilient capacity than those older. Our current study presents no contradiction to what Carriedo et al. (2020) have found out, especially, as our research has established that agility, self-confidence, resilience factors, and the ability to hustle are major attributes of young people.

This study has established that Nigerian young people can think through several options to function well in a new situation and adjust their expectations towards achieving their goals. This shows that Nigerian young women and men do not mind diversifying if that is what will help them achieve their aspirations. During uncertainty, Nigerian youth have the capability of developing new ways of getting things done and are ready to make necessary adjustments demanded by new situations. Nigerian youth are dynamic and flexible; this is evident in their ability to change how they do things to achieve their aspirations. The adaptability of Nigerian young women and men is also apparent in their ability to reduce negative emotions like fear, minimise frustration or irritation and draw on positive feelings and emotions like enjoyment and satisfaction to help them deal with uncertain situations when they arise.

Based on the current findings, four lessons can be learned about the aspirations, adaptability and resilience of young women and men in Nigeria. One, young women and men in Nigeria are highly optimistic about their potential to achieve their aspirations despite challenging environments. There is a form of tenacity that Nigerian youth possess that makes them grow tougher in the face of difficulties. Second, young women and men are willing to learn whatever it takes to achieve their aspirations, within their means. They are ready to submit themselves to mentoring, schooling, discipleship, and artisanship to acquire needed soft and hard skills to surmount their challenges and fulfil their aspirations. Third, young women and men are willing to collaborate with others to

jointly work towards achieving their aspirations. Whether online or face-to-face, young people in Nigeria are eager to join efforts with others with similar visions, passion, interests, competence, and goals to fulfil their aspirations together. Lastly, young women and men in Nigeria are motivated to keep working towards their aspirations to liberate themselves, loved ones, and communities from the current harsh economy in the country. Young Nigerians are neither lazy nor selfish. Irrespective of their challenges, they love to work hard to succeed and make others succeed.

From the policy environment perspective, the findings of this study confirm that young women and men in Nigeria consider the government to be the primary stakeholder in providing support for fulfilling their aspirations. Specifically, young women and men expect the government to create and strengthen the market for goods and services produced by young people, support them with finance to kick off and sustain their private businesses, and provide wider training opportunities for them. Further, the findings of this study show that young women and men in Nigeria desire their voices to be heard and considered while the government is formulating youth-oriented policies. They desire to be included in policy discussions and given more political leadership space. Young women and men in Nigeria consider some youth-oriented government policies as not promoting their aspirations well enough because the youth were not consulted before the policy frames were drawn. Moreover, the findings have established that many young people are engaged in youth empowerment projects to help others build resilience and achieve their aspirations.

The current study's findings support existing evidence that the government of developing nations is largely the principal stakeholder in the welfare of the citizens (The World Bank, 2017), including young people. The government is the almighty to whom everyone looks up for provision. Thus, the government is at the centre of providing sustainable support to fulfil the aspirations of young women and men in Nigeria. A study by Mustapha and Omar (2020) has established that Nigerian youth want their aspirations heard and considered by policymakers. This current study has also affirmed that young Nigerians want to be involved in politics so that the leadership can formulate better policies that will be youth-friendly. However, our findings contradict the previous submission

that suggests that young people in Nigeria largely desire white-collar government jobs (Agbontale et al., 2019; Efido & Ogbu, 2020). The narrative is changing as Nigerian young people want to be themselves, do their businesses, and fulfil their aspirations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made for the Mastercard Foundation, research, government policy, and practice:

Recommendations for MCF's programmatic and strategic action

- This study has established that young women and men in Nigeria are already on the track towards achieving a successful life and are willing to adapt to changes that will enable them to achieve their aspirations for good livelihoods despite many challenges they encounter; therefore, what the youth need is a 'push' in the form of assistance and empowerment from government, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations such as *The Mastercard Foundation*. Development organisations' interventions should address digital skills acquisition, empowerment for private businesses, agriculture, and job creation, which are the core issues underpinning young people's aspirations.
- Young women and men have expressed disappointment in how government interventions meant for youth empowerment usually end up in the hands of officials and agents of government. Funding for youth empowerment, especially by the Mastercard Foundation, should be channelled, not through any intermediary, but directly to the beneficiaries (i.e., the youth), while effective monitoring mechanisms to ensure that grants are judiciously utilised are implemented.
- This study has established that, compared to young men, young women were more traumatised during the pandemic. Besides, young women, compared to young men, have demonstrated weaker resilience and adaptability capabilities. Therefore, MCF's interventions and empowerment programmes should prioritise young women.
- Also, in their intervention programmes, the Mastercard Foundation should prioritise young people in rural areas because they were found to have relatively limited

capabilities and opportunities to adapt to the challenges of the pandemic.

- Nigerian young women and men demonstrated their resilience and adaptability by resorting to different strategies to cope with the impact of COVID-19. One such strategy that stood out was recourse to digital skills and opportunities. MCF should prioritize providing opportunities for young people to acquire digital skills as a way of empowering them.

Recommendations for research, policy, and practice

- Also, Nigeria's youth have demonstrated creativity, resilience, and adaptability capabilities during and after the pandemic by venturing into agriculture, small businesses, and digital skill acquisition as survival strategies. The Federal and State Ministries of Labour and Employment should create an enabling environment and provide financial assistance for small businesses, agricultural businesses/investments, and the digital industry. This could be facilitated if the government and other stakeholders can collaborate to provide what we call "Young People Business Villages" across the country, where young people can settle for business activities (especially agriculture and digital skills acquisition) for a stipulated period. The village should have a constant power supply, internet, restrooms, and adequate security to enhance productivity.
- It has been established that, compared to young men, young women's levels of resilience and adaptability during and after the COVID-19 era were lower. Therefore, government policies seeking youth empowerment should consider gender norms and encourage active youth involvement. Specifically, in terms of interventions and policy formulation, young women should be given priority.
- Similarly, given that young women and men who reside in the rural areas of the country, compared to those in the urban centres, are more vulnerable with limited

opportunities and weaker adaptability capacity, government policies and interventions aimed at empowering young people should prioritise rural young people.

- This study has confirmed that the government has much to do regarding providing a support system for the largest section of its population—the youth. For instance, the top priorities of the youth are financial stability, good jobs, private business, and support for the family. Therefore, government agencies and development financial institutions such as the Ministries of Labour and Empowerment, Nigeria Bank of Industry, and National Directorate of Employment, should create more dignified and fulfilling jobs, provide financial and advisory support for young people to be able to establish large, medium and small projects/enterprises, and organise vocational skills development training for the young women and men.
- It must be emphasised that the government's efforts in bridging the unemployment gap among the youth are acknowledged. However, the government and donor agencies must adopt collaborative policy-making frameworks with young people and stakeholders on youth matters to let the government get first-hand information on the actual needs of the youth instead of thinking for the youth on their needs.
- Some young people engage in youth empowerment projects to help others build resilience and achieve their aspirations. This youth category needs special attention and encouragement regarding training and financial assistance from government and non-governmental organisations.
- The current study has shown that sociocultural values shape gender norms. Although the current study is a national study, it did not focus specifically on comparative gender norms and young women's and men's resilience and aspirations in the country's different regions. It is, therefore, suggested that researchers conduct further studies with specific attention given to how cultural nuances affect young women's and men's prospects for livelihood in the post-Covid era among the different ethnic

groups in Nigeria.

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