

YOUNG WOMEN AND MEN'S ASPIRATIONS AND RESILIENCE: Prospects for Livelihoods, Employment, and Accountability before, during and beyond COVID–19

Rwanda Country Report

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ACRONYMS

AFD	Agence Francaise de Developpement
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
EICV 5	Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey 5
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
IDIs	In Deep Interviews
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
ILO	International labour Organization
IPAR	Institute of Policy Analysis and Research
NEP	National Employment Policy
NISR	The National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda
NST	National Strategy for Transformation
NYC	National Youth Council
NYP	National Youth Policy
PASGR	The Partnership for African Social and Governance Research
PSDYES	The Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Strategy,
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SSA	Sub-Saharan African
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Globally, young women and men are important human capital for sustainable development. The wheel of human civilization is driven largely by their innovation, energy and passion. As a result of the strategic value of the youth in global development agenda and in order to harness their full potential, there are global conventions and protocols that are aimed at providing enabling environment for young women and men. Notable among the multilateral protocols on youth empowerment are United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that envision inclusive development by 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063. The SDGs promotes equal access to quality education (SDG 4), decent employment (SDG 8), among other aspects of life. Employment is particularly crucial for the realization of not only economic but social and political aspirations of young women and men. Youth empowerment through promoting access to decent employment and business opportunities is emphasized in SDG 8, with a specific target (Target 8.6) focusing on promoting youth employment, education and training.

Despite the general consensus among policy and non-policy stakeholders about the importance of youth empowerment, young women and men continue to face challenges to decent livelihoods and satisfaction of their aspirations. About 64 million young people globally are unemployed while 145 young workers live in poverty ((Youth Employment in Conflicts and Fragile settings by Elisa Selva and Federico Negro), particularly in Africa where the rate of youth unemployment is estimated at 10.6% in 2020 (ILO, 2020). Such challenges often limit the ability of young men and women to realize their aspirations in the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres of life, rendering them vulnerable to various dimensions of risks that originate from within their communities and beyond. This is quite daunting and threatens inclusive development especially in Africa where youth constitute the largest share of the population.

The research adopted a youth-led mixed methods approach that utilized both qualitative and quantitative data. Quantitative data was collected through a randomly selected nationally representative sample across the 16 districts of

Rwanda. A total of 1599 young women and men between the ages of 16 and 30 years and from different demographic backgrounds – including levels of education, socio-economic status, youth with disability and political affiliation – responded to the survey questions. Data analysis has been done through simple descriptive statistical analytical analysis.

Findings on youth economic aspirations showed that the highest number of respondents are unemployed. 56% of respondents are unemployed while 44% of respondents are working mostly in trading, transportation, financial service, and agricultural business. Male respondents are mostly working compared to female respondents (working male respondents are 59.2% and working female respondents are 41%). Main occupations like lawyer, transportation and factory are 100% dominated by young men, while main occupation like office work, fashion or garment, and teaching basic education are mostly dominated by young women.

Most respondents consider to have a successful life if they have created a good business (confirmed by 71% of respondents), they have a good job (confirmed by 66% of respondents) and when they are rich (confirmed by 53% of respondents). When considering the gender; both young women and young men have agreed on these three (3) above aspects of successful life. In general respondents said that the three (3) top most priorities success in life are good job, good business and good education (38.2%, 26.2% and 9.6% respectively).

However, all female respondents have different views as they all mentioned that having power authority and control on their own; and having independence and freedom from their parents are two top most priorities success in life, while the two top most priorities success in life according to male respondents; are providing support to their community and independent travel the world (83.3% and 100% respectively).

Half of respondents confirmed that they are very far to achieve a successful life (confirmed by 50% of respondents) and quite far to achieve a successful life (confirmed by 30% of respondents). Only 1% of respondents have achieved the successful life and 4% of respondents confirmed

to be very closed to achieve the successful life. However, male respondents confirmed to achieve or very close to achieve the successful life more than female respondents (56.7% male respondents and 43.3 % female respondents have achieved the successful life; and 57.1% male respondents and 42.9% female are very closed to achieve the successful life).

Most respondents aspire to be involved in trading business in future as confirmed by 58% of respondents and self-employed as confirmed by 70.8% but they are less likely wishing to work in family business (only 14.4 % respondents wish to be in family business in the future). The main reason why young people chose to be self-employed; is because it is more secure as confirmed by 57% of respondents.

Some respondents are running businesses. It is seen that young people are less likely to run a business especially young women (37% of

male respondents and 27% female respondents confirmed to run a business). The main business run by these youth people is mainly farming.

It is seen that automobile/transport, ICT and construction related are businesses mostly dominated by young men (100%, 88% and 86%). While beauty related, handcraft maker and trading are businesses mostly dominated by young ladies (76%, 64% and 49%).

Recommendations

Challenges that young people in Rwanda are facing in achieving their life aspirations need a youth responsive policy formulation and implementation. Additionally, there is need for information sharing and building the young people’s knowledge to create a common understanding based on the evidence emanating from the young men and women’s own voices.

From this study findings, the following are actionable points for consideration:

Table 1 : Recommendations for MCF’s programmatic and strategic action

Issue	How to address the issue?	Responsible organ
Skills gap in financial literacy, leadership, managerial and networking capabilities	To ensure continuous training of young women and men to equip them with requisite skills Considering gender parity major challenges that remain in areas of tertiary education, ICT, STEM, and TVET education, there is a need to focus on increasing female enrollment and completion in these programs, promoting competence-based gender responsive programs by increasing the female dividend in trades with more labor market potentials.	MasterCard Foundation and development partners
Funding gap	Strengthen funding mechanisms that support youth especially young women to access finance and in order to get rid of poverty. Strengthening the resources mobilizations and revision of investment plan to incorporate young men and women aspirations.	MasterCard Foundation and development partners

Table 2 : Recommendations for Policy makers programmatic and strategic action

Challenge	How to address the challenge	Responsible organ
Access to finance	To review strategies and policies in place to facilitate young women and men have access to finance	MINECOFIN, BDF, RDB, BRD, MINICYOUTH, and NYC
Management challenges of cooperatives and tontines	There is need to establish of policies and guidelines governing young people's non-state cooperatives and tontines	MINICOM, RCA, MINECOFIN, and MINICYOUTH
Access to decent jobs	There is need to incentivize and empower young people to achieve their aspirations.	MIFOTRA, PSF and RDB
Inadequate income generating activities	There is need to lay more strategies and provide supports to informal sector and ensure sustained escapes from poverty.	MINALOC, MINECOFIN, PSF, LODA, and MINAGRI

Table 3 : Recommendations for MCF's programmatic and strategic action

Issue	How to address the issue?	Responsible organ
Skills gap in financial literacy, leadership, managerial and networking capabilities	To ensure continuous training of young women and men to equip them with requisite skills Considering gender parity major challenges that remain in areas of tertiary education, ICT, STEM, and TVET education, there is a need to focus on increasing female enrollment and completion in these programs, promoting competence-based gender responsive programs by increasing the female dividend in trades with more labor market potentials.	MasterCard Foundation and development partners
Funding gap	Strengthen funding mechanisms that support youth especially young women to access finance and in order to get rid of poverty. Strengthening the resources mobilizations and revision of investment plan to incorporate young men and women aspirations.	MasterCard Foundation and development partners

Table 4: Recommendations for Policy makers programmatic and strategic action

Challenge	How to address the challenge	Responsible organ
Access to finance	To review strategies and policies in place to facilitate young women and men have access to finance	MINECOFIN, BDF, RDB, BRD, MINICYOUTH, and NYC
Management challenges of cooperatives and tontines	There is need to establish of policies and guidelines governing young people's non-state cooperatives and tontines	MINICOM, RCA, MINECOFIN, and MINICYOUTH
Access to decent jobs	There is need to incentivize and empower young people to achieve their aspirations.	MIFOTRA, PSF and RDB
Inadequate income generating activities	There is need to lay more strategies and provide supports to informal sector and ensure sustained escapes from poverty.	MINALOC, MINECOFIN, PSF, LODA, and MINAGRI
Inadequacy of Youth involvement in the programs that support them	Listen to young people's voices from grassroots (local) to national level their aspirations, their challenges and how they cope with shocks, and how some issues can be addressed to have their problems solved.	MINICYOUTH, NYC, and MINALOC
Missing link in terms of coordination	Enhanced collaboration and communication between policy makers, civil society, researchers, and implementers.	MINICYOUTH, NYC and MINALOC

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Introduction

Youth empowerment is often considered as a crucial component of the development process, particularly in countries with a strong demographic dividend (Chang et al., 2022; Mpakaniye, 2017). This is motivated by several considerations ranging from the desire to ensure equitable development processes following the concept of “leaving no one behind” as envisioned in national and global policy commitments (Ndagijimana et al., 2018; The Commonwealth, 2016; Zimmerman et al., 2011). Besides equity issues, promoting youth empowerment is considered a tool for preventing young men and women from indulging in anti-social behavior, and a means of preventing socio-political unrest and violence (Hazler and Carney, 2002). Indeed, youth challenges like unemployment have been linked to a higher propensity of youth involvement in violent crime, terrorism and political violence in countries like Israel (Caruso and Gavrilova, 2012), Zimbabwe (Mude, 2014) and Nigeria (Ajaegbu, 2012).

Young people play a very important and tangible role in sustaining the economic growth of their countries, once their accessibility to education and employment is accounted for. Hence, empowering them economically results into sustainable socio-economic development, as well as political stability, which nations need to flourish. When young people are exposed to unemployment and lack of opportunities, it affects their social life and at the same time prevents them from fully enjoying their rights. This also goes beyond an individual level, and affects the country's socio-economic development sustainability and prosperity as a whole (Chang et al., 2022; EDC, 2021).

The global youth unemployment rate currently stands at approximately 13.6%, and this significantly varies by region. Youth unemployment is highest in Northern Africa with a rate of 30%, which is more than twice the global rate. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest youth unemployment rate in the world at over 30%. Young women face even higher unemployment rates than young men in most African countries (Youth Employment

in Sub-Saharan Africa by AFD and the world bank). These numbers show that there is a need to help young people enter into, and remain in, employment. However, the ongoing pandemic

and resulting global economic challenges further complicate this need. About 68 million young people globally are unemployed while approximately 145 million young workers live in poverty (Youth Employment in Conflicts and Fragile settings by Elisa Selva and Federico Negro). This means that employment no longer guarantees the way out of poverty, particularly in Africa where the rate of youth unemployment was estimated at 10.6% in 2020 (ILO, 2020).

Despite the already existing barriers on youth employment accessibility globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has also been identified as another major challenge that worsened this situation, with a significant number of jobs being lost, which has further exacerbated the youth unemployment challenge. In order to recover from this situation, there is a need to provide young people with appropriate skills and support to re-expose them to the labour market. A 2020 survey conducted across youth populations in Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and the UAE displayed that 72% of youth are facing increased difficulties in finding employment since this COVID-19 outbreak in a special way (Bieszk-Stolorz and Dmytrów, 2022; Qiu et al., 2023).

There exist clear variations across sub-regions worldwide, despite the fact that four in ten young people are considered to be engaged in the labour force (either employed or unemployed). Participation is highest in Northern America, at 52.6 per cent, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, at 48.9 and 48.2 per cent, respectively. The lowest rates of youth engagement are seen in Northern Africa and the Arab States, where only about 27 per cent of young people participate in the labour force (ILO, 2020).

The World Bank estimated that one billion young people will try to enter the job market, but less than a half of them will be able to find formal jobs. This explains the fact that the majority of them find themselves lagging into marginalized groups category, unemployed or experiencing working poverty. This foreseen increase in economic inequality and insufficient job opportunities has the potential to negatively impact a generation of young people around the world, in one way or another. Many factors determine youth employment, among them geographical mobility

(migration), education, economic activities, as well as demographic features of young people. (Canagarajah and Sethuraman, 2001; World Bank, 2019).

In Africa, unemployment among youth is a widespread problem, and the same applies to EAC (East African Community). For instance, in Uganda, youth unemployment is around 21% among women and 11% among men, while in Tanzania, roughly 14% of those 15-24 years old are unemployed, with females having 1.5 times higher unemployment rates than males. In Rwanda, the unemployment rate among young people (16-30 years) is 25.5 percent according the labour force survey (NISR, 2021). Additionally, many young people are engaged in vulnerable employment which renders them unlikely to have access to benefits or social protection programmes.

Despite the general consensus among policy and non-policy stakeholders about the importance of youth empowerment, young women and men continue to face challenges to decent livelihoods and satisfaction of their aspirations. About 64 million young people globally are unemployed while 145 young workers live in poverty. The rate of youth unemployment is quite high in Africa, estimated at 10.6% in 2020 (ILO, 2020). Such challenges often limit the ability of young men and women to realize their aspirations in the economic, socio-cultural and political spheres of life, rendering them vulnerable to various dimensions of risks that originate from within their communities and beyond. This is quite daunting and threatens inclusive development, especially in Africa where youth constitute the largest share of the population.

Country context and issues

The official definition of youth in Rwanda is individuals aged between 16 and 30 years (NYP,2015). This age category constitutes 55% of the country's population, based on estimates from the 2020 labor force survey. The youth challenge remains quite critical in Rwanda, particularly issues related to limited access to employment and business opportunities. The 2020 labor force survey estimated youth unemployment rate to be 22.4%, much higher than 17.9% among the general population and far above the global average of 13.6% (NISR, 2021).

One of the priority areas under the Economic Transformation pillar of Rwanda's National Strategy

for Transformation (NST1), (2017), is to create 1,500,000 million jobs which translates into over 214,000 decent and productive jobs annually in order to spur economic development. To achieve these ambitious job targets, the NST1 set out the following strategies which highlights youth employment services in Rwanda; Mainstreaming employment planning into all key sectors of the economy and strengthen the coordination, implementation and monitoring of the National Employment Programme (NEP); develop a mechanism to support at least one model income and employment-generating project in each village; develop and enhance strategic partnerships with private sector companies in the implementation of Work Place Learning (Rapid Response Training, Industrial based training and apprenticeship) and to scale up the number of graduates with skills relevant to the labor market. This will be done through working with the private sector to update the Labor Market Information.

Based on the foregoing analysis, the critical issues to engender youth employment revolve around empowering youth by enabling them to build human capital and providing them with opportunities for quality jobs. An empirical analysis of existing employment policies and programs in Rwanda aimed at addressing the youth employment challenges, the country research team will need to use an integrated approaches involving different levels of government and multiple stakeholders, including relevant ministries such as the Ministry of youth and culture, Ministry of public service and labour, Ministry of Education, and other agencies such as the National youth council, National women council, Rwanda development Board in charge of national employment programmes, National Council for People with Disabilities and reaching out to historically marginalized people, internally displaced people, nationwide youth centers, training providers and social partners.

In view of the complex nature of developing country labour markets, and the diversity of income-generating activities that people undertake, the youth employment challenge requires policy action beyond basic education and labour markets, in areas such as credit markets, infrastructure, business regulation, and rural development. In addition to basic education, high productivity skills that can accelerate youth employment include those relating to processing, marketing, machinery operation

and repair, commercial transportation logistics and quality control. Responsibility therefore lies with governments to ensure coherence and coordination (ILO, 2012).

In view of employment trends in Rwanda, there is an urgent need to build a body of knowledge and evidence that will provide insights to policymakers about emerging trends in the marketplace, real and potential disruptions - including the likely impact of digitalization and automation on youth work prospects- and current and future opportunities. The project design is expected to enable the critical review of existing youth employment policies in connection with key labor and social policies including related sectoral policies. It will also review existing empirical evidence on the impacts of these policies in order to address the knowledge and evidence gaps, notably regarding the disconnect between the supply and demand sides of employment for young women and men in Rwanda, the transition from informal to formal (higher quality) employment and the roles of labor regulations and their enforcement.

There is a need to analyse the extent to which the existing social and labor policies and regulations impede or reinforce strategies and programs that promote creation of work and employment opportunities for youth and particularly for young women and other marginalized groups in Rwanda. Further, the fragmented strategies for youth employment represent key challenges associated with programmatic gaps in the operationalization of youth employment policies. They are often manifested in the lack of strong coordination mechanisms, which result in ineffective duplication of certain policies and neglecting focus on high potential impact areas.

Another programmatic challenge is the allocation of inadequate funding spread over a very diverse range of youth projects in Rwanda. This leads to spreading funding too thinly to achieve any of the policy objectives. There are numerous funders with interest in supporting youth employment initiatives especially the marginalized youth and other groups. In this regard, the project will seek to document experiences of donor coordination mechanisms where they exist and understand the implications where there are none. The review will therefore seek to highlight programmatic gaps in the implementation of these policies.

An Overview of Youth Policies in Rwanda

In Rwanda, youth empowerment is at the core of national development and several policy actions have been taken to empower young men and women, including the Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Strategy (PSDYES), National Youth Policy, National Strategy for Transformation (MINECOFIN, 2017), National Employment Policy (NEP) of 2015, among others. The relevance of youth empowerment is signified by the fact that 43% of the population is categorized as youth between the ages of 16 and 30, according to the Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey of 2017. The policy efforts notwithstanding, youth unemployment remains quite high, estimated at 22.4% (higher than 17.9% among the general population) according to the labor force survey of 2020 (NISR, 2021). Measures to promote the economic, social and political aspirations of young men and women ought to appropriately consider factors like preferences, socio-economic status, environment that influence differences among endowments and aspirations of youth. This hence calls for a multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary approach to youth empowerment, based on credible evidence on the youth challenge and potential remedies. In this regard, the Partnership for Social and Governance Research (PASGR), with funding from MasterCard Foundation, implemented the “Young Men and Women Aspirations and Resilience” research project to investigate the nature and dynamics of youth aspirations. The project further intended to understand the challenges and opportunities presented to youth by the recent outbreak of COVID-19 in as far as fulfilling their aspirations is concerned. In Rwanda, the project has been implemented by the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR-Consult Ltd), as part of a larger project involving seven countries – Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, and Uganda. Study purpose and objectives

Aim /Purpose

The aim of the study was to create a thorough understanding of young men’s and women’s aspirations regarding their future, from social, economic and other dimensions of life. The study further aims to unveil the consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic had on young men and

women, including potential adjustments to their aspirations of the future.

Specific Objectives

The overall objective of this project was to explore and interrogate the aspirations and resilience of young women and men in Africa; how these may or may not have shifted through the COVID-19 crisis and the implications presented for public policy in Rwanda. This report on Rwanda is part of the multi-country project on understanding drivers and motivations of young women and men in sub-Saharan Africa with case studies in other countries including Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda. Specific objectives of the study include to:

1. Examine young women and men's aspirations for their future.
2. Identify and analyze gender and social norms that guide the lives and aspirations of young men and women.
3. Establish whether young women and men's aspirations have changed with the advent of COVID-19 pandemic.
4. Analyze what the young women and men are experiencing in their lives and livelihoods in a COVID-19 world.
5. Determine the extent to which the various provisions, regulations and policies in Rwanda are aligned with young women and men's aspirations and ideas about what they see themselves doing in the future.
6. Document lessons learned about the adaptability and resilience of young women and men's aspirations.
7. Create basis for informed and inclusive public policy discourse and action on young women and men employment, aspirations and futures including gender issues brought about by the pandemic, by providing inclusive spaces for diverse and several players (researchers, policy actors, CSOs, community members) to apply research evidence in policy processes.

Approach and Methodology

Through the integration of PASGR's *Utafiti Sera*¹ (Research-Policy) unique framework, the study adopted a youth-led participatory research methods that enabled the inclusion of young women and men in the research process right from the inception, collection preliminary views, development of study tools, collection of data, validation and dissemination. The inclusion and constant engagement of youth ensure that the voices of young women and men are included and represented throughout the research phase. Mixed methods were used in the design and execution of the study. Quantitative data were collected using SurveyCTO software while qualitative data were collected from focus group discussions (FGD) of young men and women and key informant interviews(KII) with youth representatives.

1. Quantitative Methods

Target Population

The research targeted Rwandese young women and men of ages between 16 and 30 years old. Data was collected from a total of 16 districts spread across the four provinces and the city of Kigali. In this regard, Burera, Gakenke and Rulindo districts of the Northern province; Kamonyi, Huye and Nyamagabe districts of the Southern province; Bugesera, Rwamagana, Kayonza and Ngoma districts of the Eastern province; Karongi, Rusizi, Rubavu, Nyamasheke and Nyabihu districts of the Western province; and Kicukiro district of Kigali city were considered in this study. Rural, and urban settings were considered in capturing youth-hood, youth's aspirations, youth perspectives on dignified and fulfilling work, impact of COVID-19 on aspirations, youth resilience and adaptability strategies and realities in terms of access to jobs, education, income. Specifically, this study targeted the following youth's categories: primary and secondary school drop-outs, university graduates, TVET Graduates, historically marginalized people, youth with disabilities, refugees (youth) and ascertained that no youth category's voice were left unheard.

¹ *Utafiti Sera – Swahili Word for Research-Policy – is a unique and innovation framework for driving evidence-informed decision making (IEDM) in Africa by creating platforms and safe spaces where diverse group of stakeholders, mainly, researchers, policy practitioners, subject experts, government authorities and citizens engage in continuous collaboration and negotiations to ensure generation of robust evidence and knowledge and that appropriate policy outcomes and uptake occur.*
<https://www.utafitisera.pasgr.org>

Survey's Sample size determination

Multi-stage sampling technique has been applied in this study. Multi-stage sampling groups population into small groups. Multi-stage sampling method was used because it tries to overcome the shortcomings of random sampling by splitting the population into various distinct groups and selecting entities from each of them. This ensures that every category of the population is represented in the sample. The determination of the sample size is done by applying the Slovin's formula $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$ (Omang and Angioha, 2021).

This formula was chosen because it offers a definite size of the sample. In this formula, 'n' stands for the sample size, 'N' represents the total population and 'e' represents the adopted confidence level. Research findings will assume that these numbers represent the whole population and their perception could form the conclusions about the entire population (Ryan, 2013).

The total youth population as per EICV5 is Two million five hundred eighty-one thousand, five hundred eighty-one point zero two (2,521,581.02). Hence, the computation of the sample size is as follows:

$$n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$$

Where: **n** = sample size **N** = Total population
e = Percent error
n=1599

As seen from the computations above, the sampled size is 1599 of young women and men who have been identified to be part of the survey study. Since we captured data from 16 districts, the target sample size became 100 respondents per district and 1600 in total.

Data collection techniques and instruments

The data collection tools were developed based on the objectives of the assignment. Also, the technical experts from PASGR and IPAR-Consult jointly reviewed the developed tools and provided feedback to ensure that the tools included all key elements before the data collection phase. Both primary data and secondary data were collected through desk review as well as interviews with key stakeholders. The data has been analysed using STATA 17 software.

2. Qualitative Approach

In addition to the quantitative analysis, qualitative data has been collected to complement the quantitative findings while enriching insights and validating the results. This was achieved through Key informants' interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Our approach was participatory in design. The qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis with NVivo software using a coding frame with a thematic focus on different components/aspects.

Key Informants Interviews

13 Key Informant Interview (KII) were conducted. It included; Youth Centers Coordinators, Youth and Sport Officers at district level, Sector Level Staffs in charge of Social Affairs and Youth and Cell's executive secretaries.

In-depth interview (IDI)

30 In-depth interview (IDI) were conducted. It included; representatives of National Youth Council (NYC) at sector level and cell level, heads of youth cooperatives, coordinators of youth volunteers, youth representatives of National Council of People with Disability (NCPD) at sector level, different young people in local administration.

Focus group discussions (FGDs)

29 Focus Group discussion (FGD) were conducted. It included; young women and men graduates from secondary, universities and TVETS, young women and men attending TVETS, young women and men with disability, young women and men in schools and young women and men who are out of primary or secondary

3. Training of enumerators

Enumerators underwent a 2 days training conducted by IPAR-Consult Ltd to familiarize them with the data collection methods and tools and remind them of ethical considerations. A 1 day pilot study was conducted in Gicumbi district after which the tools have been harmonized and well organized before starting the field data collection. Four survey teams were deployed for data collection and each team comprised 1 team leader (IPAR-Consult Ltd staff) and at least 4 data collectors. Interviews were conducted by team leaders while data collectors carried out survey questionnaire administration. Each FGD was carried out by a moderator and a minute taker.

4. Ethical considerations in survey and interviews

The study strived to conform to local as well international standards in terms of research governance, quality assurance and research ethics as recommended by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, NISR, in its mandate of providing research visa as stipulated in the Law NO 45/2013 of 16/06/2013 regarding research and statistical activities in Rwanda. Prior to field data collection the National Ethics Committee approved the research tools and procedures. All stakeholders, key informants, and respondents to the questionnaire and guide interview for FGDs were asked to give written consent to their participation in the study. The young women and men aged between 16 and 17 years old, were asked to sign assent form with authorization of their parents or legal tutor. IPAR-Consult Ltd team were responsible for field coordination and supervision in order to assure the quality of the field work.

5. Data Analysis

For the data analysis we used mixed methods approach. For the quantitative data analysis we used descriptive statistics using both tabulation and visualisation in order to explore patterns and correlations. Moreover, inferential statistical analysis was conducted in order to explore difference using t-test and chi-square. For qualitative analysis we used thematic analysis using NVIVO software. MOSER framework have been used for analysing gender norms and perspectives, in order to elaborate the difference in young men and women's practical needs and strategic needs.

(a) Outline of the report

The present study is presented in seven sections arranged as follows:

The first section provides a background to the core study themes, namely, youth and youth-hood, development challenges and opportunities from global, continental and within the Rwandan context. The second section presents a synthesis of the main findings on youth and youth-hood and the aspirations. In section three we mainly focused on the analysis and discussions about youth perspectives on dignified and fulfilling work. The fourth section describes and discusses the impact of COVID-19 in the context of youth aspirations as well as existing vulnerabilities and social-economic

challenges. Under section five, the report captures resilience and adaptability strategies that youth in your context applied to cope, survive from the pandemic and other similar shocks. Section six present a synthesis of the key findings while the seventh is dedicated to Recommendations for research, policy, and practices. Youth-hood and aspirations

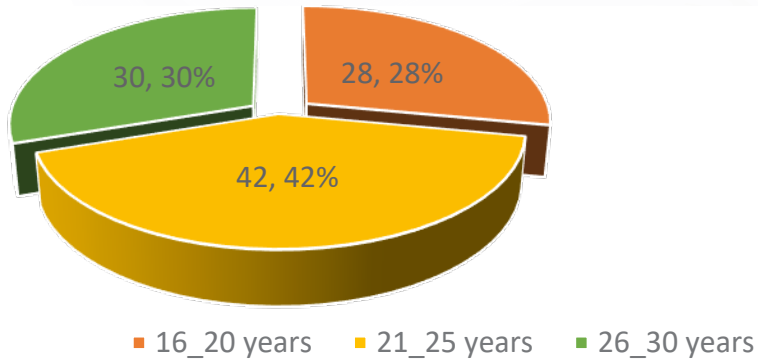
The current new national youth policy defines youth as the population whose age is between 16 and 30 years. According to EICV 5 results, the total youth population in Rwanda, in the age range between 16-30 years, increased from 3,151,000 in 2013/14 to 3,165,000 in 2016/17. Overall, people aged between 16 to 30 years make 26.6% of the total population of Rwanda of all ages in EICV5 (NISR, 2017a). In this regard, Young men and women of at least 16 years of age and at maximum age of 30 years of age voluntarily participated in this study. The findings presented in this section are articulated in a way that covers what young women and men think of their youth-hood.

Main demographic characteristics of the respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents impact considerably their views and perceptions about the topic under study (Purdie et al., 2002). For this study, data were collected by young women and men and from the youth. Full youth participation in this study helped to capture women' and men's own perceptions on youth-hood, social, cultural and economic dimensions. The findings show that 52% of the youth were young women while young men were 48%. This study is in agreement with the national population and household census which reported that females represent 51.5% of the Rwandan population while males are 48.5% (NISR, 2023)².

² See National Institute of Statistics (2023): Rwanda Population and Housing Census. https://statistics.gov.rw/publication/Rwanda_population_2022 (Visited 27/07/2023)

Figure 1: Respondent by age groups



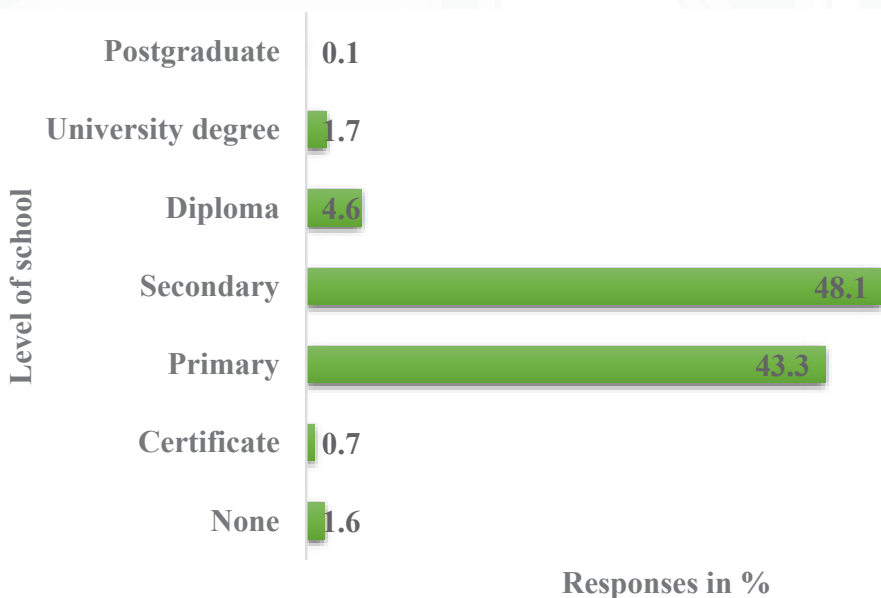
Source: Field data 2022

In addition, this study finding show that respondents were into three age groups as follows: 16-20 years' old were 28%, 21-25 years' old at 42% while 26-30 years' old were 30% (see Figure 1). The age range influences the **perceptions and expectations of youth** on different aspects of their lives (Feldman and Rosenthal, 1991; Leavy and Smith, 2010).

The government of Rwanda has invested and established various interventions to ensure access to education: school feeding programme, access to 9- and 12-years basic education, girls' rooms at schools, girls' education policy, early childhood development centers, digitalization of education especially during Covid-19, education grants, and increased infrastructure for learning facilities

including those for learners with disabilities. These mechanisms have translated into increased access to education for both young girls and boys (GoR, 2023). In this study, 48.1% of the young men and women have completed secondary school, 43.3% completed primary studies, 4.6% completed diploma courses while 1.7% had completed a university degree (see Figure 2). In this regard, the country statistics show that females are however lowly enrolled or represented when it comes to primary (49.8%), TVET (44.2%), and High Learning Institutions (44.9%) (GoR, 2023). Part of the explanation is the increased rate of dropout rate for girls in the lower and upper secondary levels estimated at 11.1% and 8.3% respectively (GoR, 2023; NISR, 2023).

Figure 2: Level of school Attended



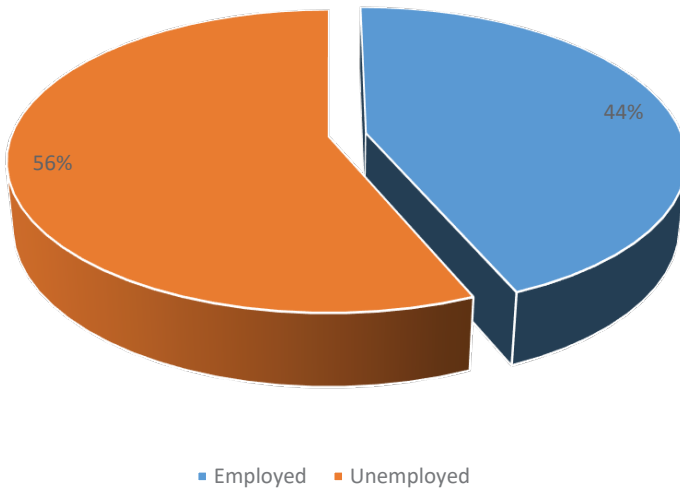
Source: Field data 2022

According to the Population and Housing Census of 2022; at the national level, 5% of the resident youth population in Rwanda has never been to school. Those who were attending school at the time of the Census make up 23%, while those who attended in the past but are now out of school constitute the majority with 72% (NISR, 2023) (*Fifth Rwanda Population and Housing Census, 2022, Thematic Report Socio-Economic Status of Youth July, 2023*)

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Rwanda is one of the top-performing countries in education (<https://www.unicef.org/rwanda/education>)vc

The Rwandan government have initiated the basic education for all, where education is free in primary school level and secondary school level. This is the reason why, the majority of young people interviewed have attended at least secondary school (48.1 percent) or primary school (43.3 percent)

Figure 3: Employment rate of respondent



Source: Field data 2022

Access to productive and decent jobs by young men and women is critical to their economic empowerment and development (Hill, 2011). In the Rwandan context, recent literature shows that women remain less represented in the labour force at 48.8% in 2021/22 compared to 64.1% for men, with an estimate of 15.3% of the gender parity gap (NISR, 2017b). When employment rates are examined at the economic activities sector level, the agriculture sector employs a large share of both male and female Rwandans (39.8% and 55.6% respectively), followed by the services and industry sectors (NISR, 2021, 2017b).

The findings of this study as displayed in Figure 3 show that 56% of young men and women are unemployed while 44% of them are working; mostly in trading, transportation, financial service, and agricultural business. Male respondents are more employed compared to female respondents (working male respondents are 59.2% and working female respondents are 41%). The closure or downscaling operations by businesses which employ the majority of young men and women

in terms of short-term jobs during the period of Covid-19 pandemic is susceptible one of the major causes of the high unemployment rates recorded among the youth during the study period.

Another demographic characteristic that has been linked to affect livelihood of young men and women is the marital status and the size of the family (Anyanwu, 2014). The literature demonstrates that early marriages are associated with lack of emotional readiness for the hardship of married life, in addition to refraining young men and women career opportunities and obstructing their capacity to develop their future economic potential. Especially for young women, instead of developing their socioeconomic potential, marriage, pregnancy, child-rearing, and domestic chores all force girls who marry early to abandon their dreams (Anyanwu, 2014; Bhagavatheeswaran et al., 2016; Roby et al., 2009). This study shows that 78.5% of the interviewed young men and women have never been married, 13.6% were married while 6.8% were living together but not legally married.

Youth-hood

The United Nations defined youth as a group of persons whose age category lies between childhood and adulthood (i.e. between dependence and independence); and it attributes to these people the age range of 15-24 years.. Themajority of young people are attributed to the stage of transitioning from education to seeking for jobs (UN, 2013). Rwandan Law considers citizens ageing from 16 to 30 years old as youth. The difference in age brackets while referring to youth lead to the lack of universally agreed definition of 'youth' (Leavy and Smith, 2010). Similarly, qualitative data findings of this study show that youth-hood age range differs from what is stipulated by the Rwandan Law. For example, someone who is not married, remains considered young even if his 40 years old. The young men and women views show different ranges in this regard.

"in the community adultpeople without education, consideryouth as every person who is single(unmarried) even if he/she is 40 years old, but by the law a youth is someone with the age between 18 years and 35 years old" (female FGD of Burera district),

"I am a youth, firstly because of my age, secondly I feel more comfortable with youth than the eldest ones, as someone with the age between 18 and 35 years is regarded as a youth" (IDI_NYC_Kinyababa of Burera district).

It is worth noting that young women and men's views on who is included in the youth category seems to be a matter for negotiation and relate to how young people's identities are shaped and perceived. For instance, some young men and women think that youth-hood is a period of singleness. This corroborates the findings of Waldie (2004), who stated that in the eyes of one community a young man without the resources to marry may remain a youth longer than another of similar age, which confirms that age alone is an inadequate descriptor of youth-hood. This has also been witnessed across different FGDs during study.

"Our understanding of Youth-hood is that when you get married, then you are not considered as youth anymore" (FGD 1 of Ngoma district),

"We think that those who are not married are the one to be considered as Youth" (IDI 3, district of Ngoma).

In this study, it has been realized that understanding or defining 'youth' goes beyond categorizing people based on age and life stage alone. Young men and women narratives recorded within the current study consider youth as 'power of the country' and associate young people with hardworking capabilities and potentials:

When we asked, 'who do you consider as a proper youth (Young men and women)?' most of the respondents described youth in descriptive terms as those who are energetic workforce. For instance, a young female in Burera says 'A proper youth is the country's powerful energy'. A young man in Huye district said 'youth –hood is when young people are energetic and capable of exploiting any available opportunity which can led them to happy mood'. Further, a respondent from Gakenke said that 'A proper young women and man is that person with future energy and force, as a pillar for the future of the country'. Such narratives showcase the tendency to view youth as a group in transition towards the future. However, young people are current members of society, not just citizens of the future, and are in a state of being and not just becoming.

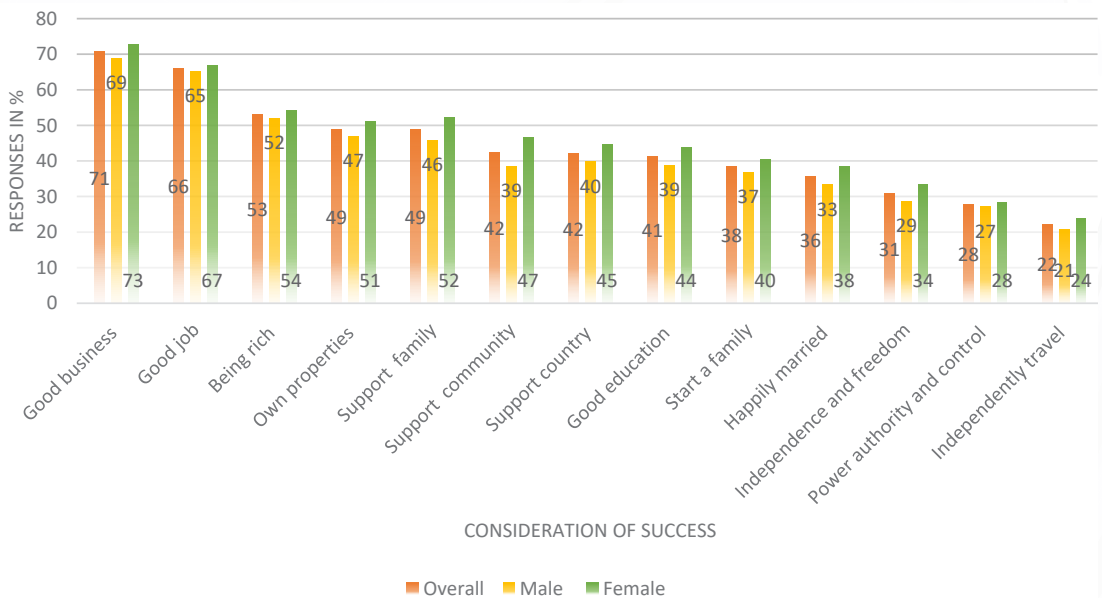
Youth aspirations

Youth aspirations are a process of young people hoping and imagining what their lives will be like in the future. It should be noted that aspirations are not simply formed through individual interest, but through young people' interactions with other people, institutions, and other aspects of their social lives. For example, neighborhoods, schools, family, and popular culture shape young people' aspirations (Bishop and Willis, 2014). The literature also shows that socio-economic, income and social class correlates to aspirations, with higher levels relating to higher aspirations, although these can be altered by the effects of beliefs and attitudes (Sewell and Shah, 1968).

One of the main goals in this study was to find out what are the major aspirations of the Rwandan youth and their hopes for the future. The quantitative data illustrated in Figure 3 shows that most respondents consider themselves to be successful in life if they have created a good

business (71% of the respondents), have acquired a good job (66% of the respondents) or when they are rich (53% of respondents).

Figure 4: Respondent's Consideration of success in Life by gender



Source: field data 2022

It can be noticed from Figure 3 that most respondents consider to have a successful life if they have created a good business (confirmed by 71% of respondents), a good job (confirmed by 66% of respondents) and or when they are rich (confirmed by 53% of respondents). When considering the gender; both young women and men have more agreed on these three (3) above aspects of successful life. Those observed aspects are associated with the dynamic processes through which aspirations are formed, shaped and influenced. Such dynamics include but not limited to economic context, social norms and customs, parental and peer influence, media, previous attainment and gender related norms, and relates the local context.

For instance, higher education is often framed in terms of broadening career opportunities and young people's abilities to support their livelihood in the future. But it is more than that. Higher education attainment can broaden opportunities for youth to feel respected, secure a sense of dignity, and be a force for social change. However, what matters most is having aspirations for higher education because it can unlock young people's abilities to start taking the steps necessary to improve their lives and make a difference in their communities (Kao and

Tienda, 1998). In this regard, huge gaps still exist in higher education, ICT, STEM and TVET whilst a commendable progress in gender parity in access to education at primary and secondary schools has been achieved³. Failing to ensure gender parity in these areas of education has negatively affects women's economic empowerment. This implies limited women's capital development and limited access to gains offered through higher education, ICT, STEM, and TVET in terms of decent employment.

In this study, education aspirations have been viewed in as path to leadership positions and entrepreneurship. This signals the good will of young men and women to learn and acquire skills needed to the labor marked. As different FGD members explained:

“My aspirations for tomorrow are to become a leader or work for the government” (Female FGD, Karongi);

“I desire to study and excel and be a great leader” (Female FGD, Karongi);

“The main youth aspirations in their context are to get some training about how they can create a job themselves” (Male FGD, Nyabihu).

³ NISR (Statistical Yearbook: Education, 2021).

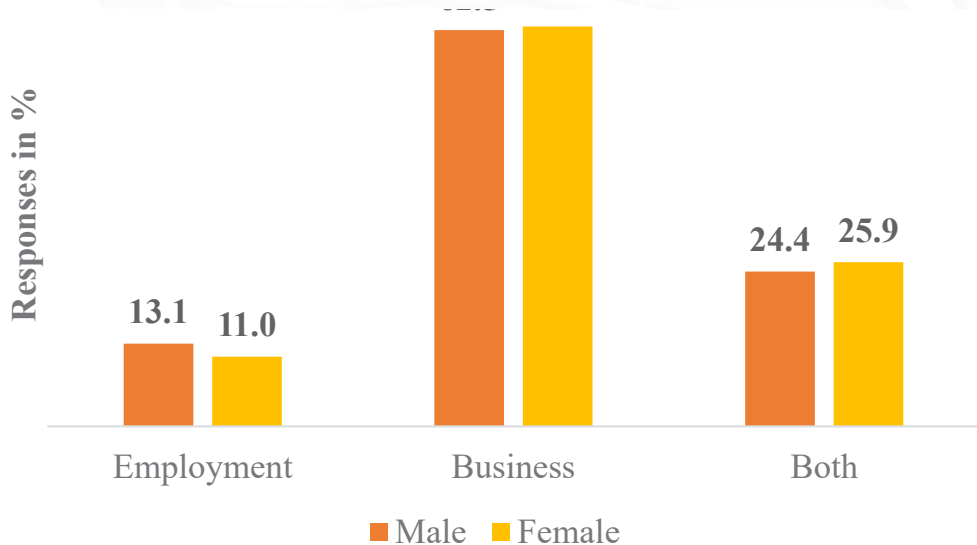
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES ON DIGNIFIED AND FULFILLING WORK

According to the annual labour force survey , in 2020; the annual unemployment rate stood at 17.9 percent, and this was higher among females (20.3 percent) than among males (15.9 percent) and higher among young people (22.4 percent) than among adults (14.1 percent)(NISR,2021). In 2021,the unemployment rate among young people (16-30 years) was 26.5 percent, as compared to the one among adults (31years and above) which is estimated to be 17.1 percent (NISR, 202). In 2022, the unemployment rate among young people (16-30 years) was 25.6 percent, as compared to the one among adults (31 years and above) was 17.0 percentThe unemployment rate is not a representative indicator of the situation facing youth in Rwanda’s labour market. It is instead more informative to look at various measures of underemployment. Underemployment, as defined by both the ILO and the NISR, refers to all situations in which labour is insufficiently utilized (Laterite, 2015).

The ILO labels a decent work as ‘a work that sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives; involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men’(ILO, 2023). However, the literature does not yet provide a unified definition of a dignified and fulfilling work.

To have an understanding of what young Rwandans think about their future and thereafter deduce their insights about dignified and fulfilling work, this study inquired about their future ventures. Figure 4 shows that 63% of the respondent intend to venture into business, 25% into employment while 12% plan to venture into both business and employment.

Figure 5: Respondent’s Future Venture by gender



Source: field data 2022

In this regard, it is clear that both young men and women are almost equally willing to venture into business. The environment close to the young women and men and the broader Rwandan social context influence these perspectives. Phenomena such as financial and the COVID 19 pandemic crisis, and rise of new media can therefore affect the determinants of what the young women and men consider as dignified and fulfilling work and their aspirations in general over time. The willingness of the Rwandan youth to venture in business has been reflected in the qualitative data, where most of the respondents wanted to create jobs (as entrepreneurs) and were saving to start a new business.

“My future is to create jobs and be able to make profit” (Female FGD, Rusizi),

“The plans are that I am trying to put together some cash and start a small business, currently, I am saving the best I can” (Youth commissioner, Bugesera).

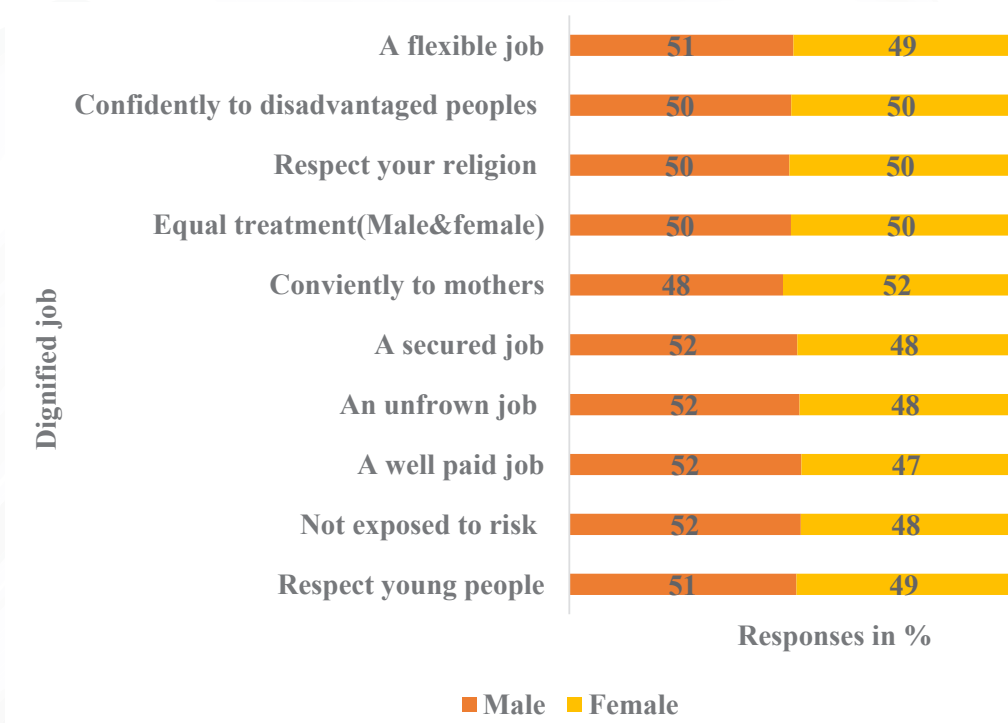
“Living a good life for me is when I have anything I could run and earn money” (Male FGD, Gakenke),

The study further explored what kind of jobs Rwandan young men and women wanted to be part of. The findings show that the majority of the respondents (58%) intend to be working in trading sector in the future. This reflects what young men and women in Rwanda have previously mentioned about creating their own business as an indicator for a successful life. Additionally, 70.8% of the respondents confirmed that they preferred to be self-employed while 37.1% wanted to be employed in public sector. The reasons for their choices of type of employment varied from how secure the job is (57% of the respondents), good pay (55%), good benefit (53%), a job that is supportive to families (51%), a job that avails opportunity to grow (47%), flexibility of working (45%) among others.

Examining what young men and women in Rwanda consider as dignified and fulfilling work, the study results show that this is a job where you are: well paid, secured, respected by employers, not exposed to risks, and not treated based on your gender. Also, dignified and fulfilling work should be convenient to mothers, respect the

employee's religion, give space to disadvantage persons just to mention a few. Disaggregating the results by gender, Figure 5 young females consider job where mothers can work conveniently more fulfilling than their male counterparts (52 and 48% respectively). On the other hand, male respondents' perspectives of dignified and fulfilling work dominate when it comes to a secured job, a well-paying job, a job that respect young people and a job that do not expose employees to risks.

Figure 6: Respondent's definition of a dignified and fulfilling Job by gender



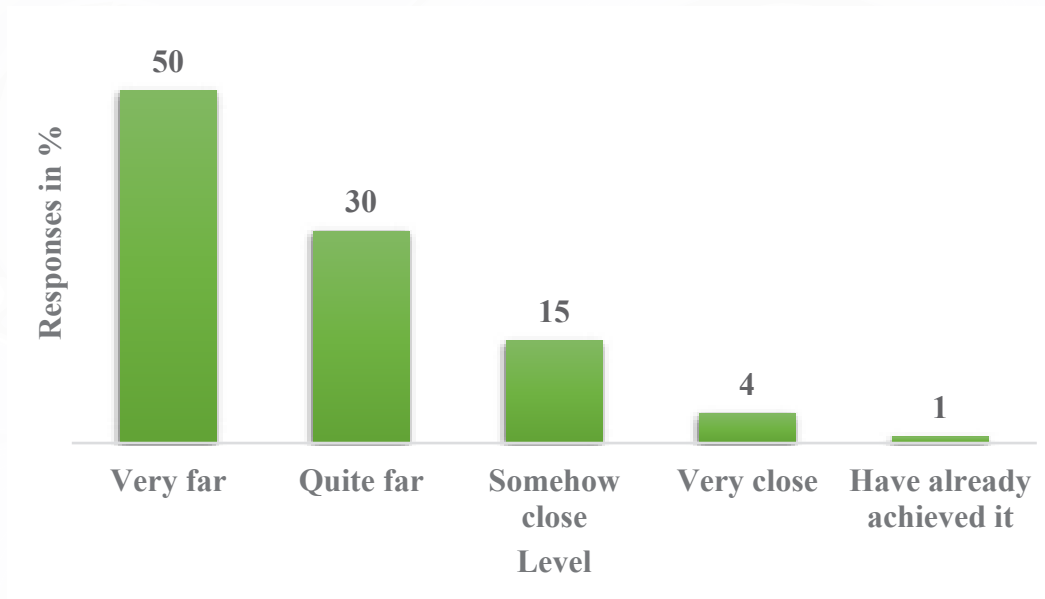
Source: field data 2022

The findings from qualitative data shows that apart from having a job or being a business owner should be accompanied by a culture of saving to be successful young. This is how a female respondent from rural sector of Rusizi district said:

“For a girl to be seen as successful is when she has a job or has a business, and is capable of taking care of herself, also when she is a member of a tontine and able to contribute to that tontine, and then be able to save her money and buy some domestic animals, and later she can open an account in a bank and save more money and keep investing, that’s when they can say she is successful” (Female FGD, Rusizi)”.

The study further investigated young men and women hope for the future. We inquired on how close to successful life they think they were. According to Figure 7, 50% of the respondents think that they are very far, 30% are quite far, 15% somehow close, while 4% were close to achieving their dreamed successful life. It is 1% of the respondent that confirmed to have achieved their successful life (See Figure 7).

Figure 7: Respondent statement on how close they are to live the successful life



Source: field data 2022

From those who mentioned to have achieved success, male respondents are more optimistic to achieving their successful lives compared to their female counterparts (See Annex). The qualitative data results link the loss of hope for a successful life in young men and young women of Rwanda to unemployment (which considerably rose during the COVID-19 pandemic) and lack of financial support.

“It is not easy because, now you go to school your family pay your school fees but at the end you became like those others who have never attended school. In general, the unemployment rate has increased and because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is not easy” (Female FGD, Burera),

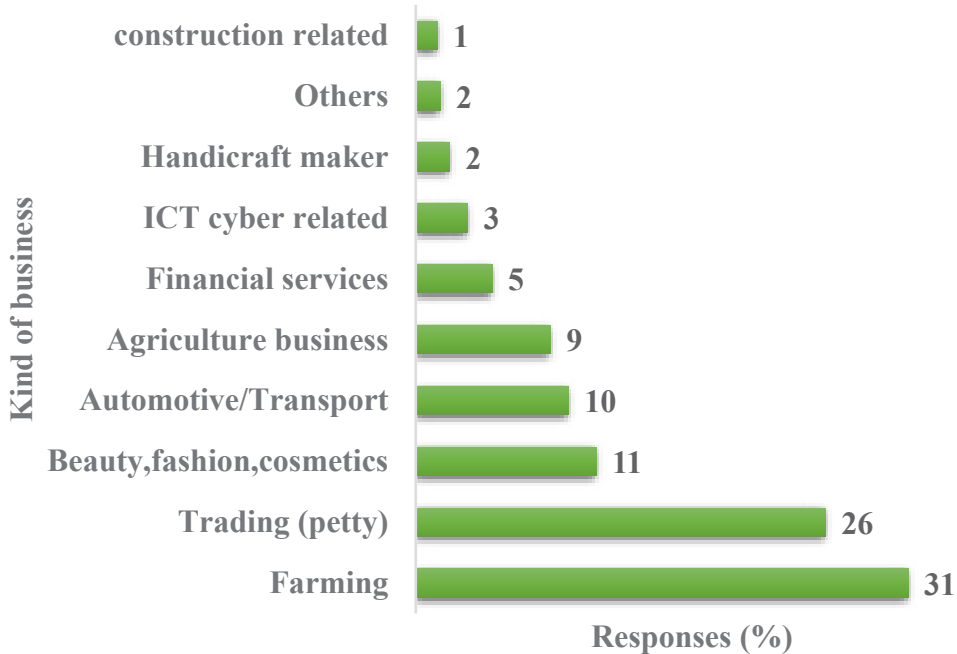
“It is impossible when we do not have any financial support” (FGD Bugesera)

The bulk of the literature dedicated to the aspirations highlight potential differences in correlations between aspirations and outcomes for young people living in different socio-cultural and political conditions (Leavy and Smith, 2010). Similarly, insights of young men and women on what dignified and fulfilling work is, have been influenced to some extent by the COVID-19 pandemic. The next section explores what Rwanda youth occupations during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected their livelihood and aspirations.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ASPIRATIONS

As previously mentioned most the respondent dream job was to create their own business or simply be employed in trading sector. The study further inquired about the respondent types of business the youth of Rwanda were engaged in during the study period. The results showed that 31% of the youth were employed in farming, while 26% were in trading (See Figure 8).

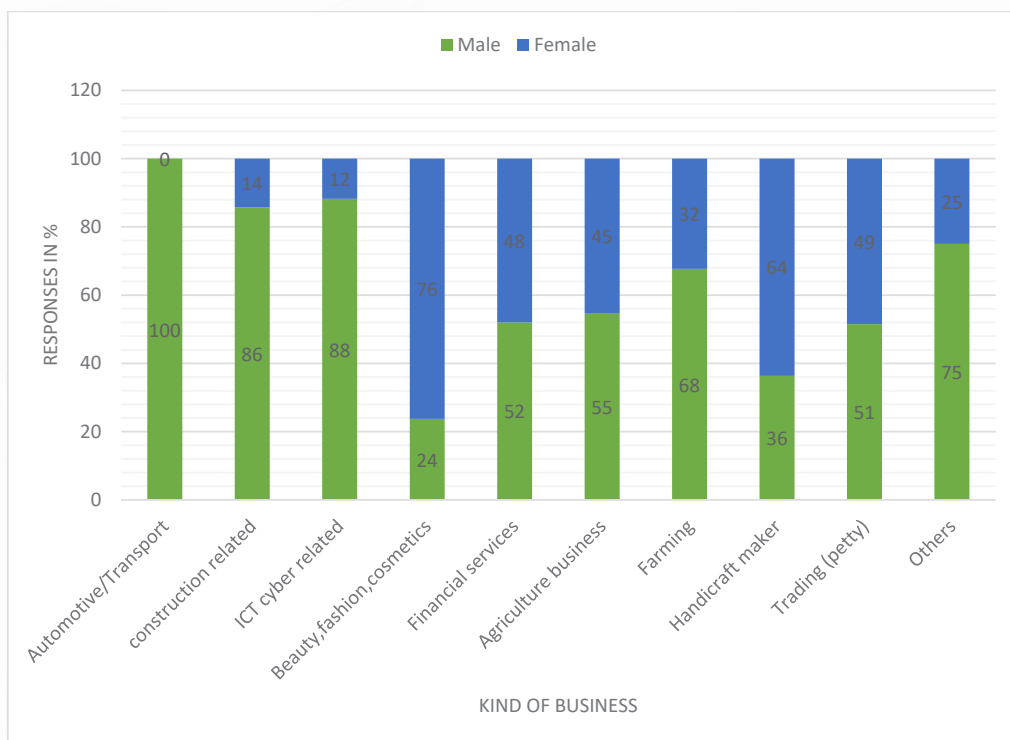
Figure 8: Business run by respondents



Source: field data 2022

It can be noticed in below Figure 9 that It is seen that automobile/transport, ICT, and construction related; are businesses mostly dominated by young men (100%, 88% and 86%). While beauty related, handcraft maker and trading are businesses mostly dominated by young women(76%, 64% and 49%). The gender difference in some types of employments such as transport, construction, and ICT cyber related, can be attributed to the lower representation of young females in STEM, TVET, and higher education as previously mentioned.

Figure 9: Kind of business the respondent does run by gender



Source: field data 2022

Rwanda as a country seeks to alleviate poverty by implementing various programs to support young people in finding and keeping a job, thus contributing to its economic growth. In march 2020, the first case of COVID-19 pandemic was identified. The country introduced several measures to prevent its spread, but they led to a significant loss in jobs, including among young people, and thus harmed economic growth. Additionally, the advent of COVID-19 pandemic affected young men and women’s aspirations in different ways. In this regard, the current study analyzes the pandemic impacts on young men and women aspirations in order to have insights on resilience measures and adaptation strategies (to be discussed in the section 5). The results showed that 84% of the respondents were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. To further shed light on what aspects were affected, the study shows that 86% of the respondent were economically affected, 35% of the respondent’s education and training aspirations were affected, 23% of the respondent’s socio-cultural norms were affected, 13% of the respondents’ civil responsibilities were affected, and 7% of the respondents’ migration aspirations (see Figure 9). These findings corroborate with the findings of the qualitative data as stated in the

following:

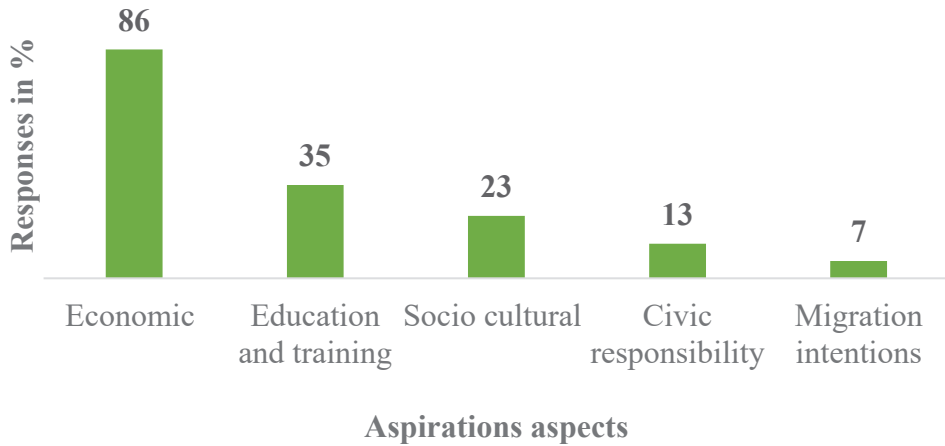
“Loss of jobs which increased rate of unemployment since some sectors of employment let go a certain number of employees. While others closed their businesses for good” (FGD, Ngoma),

“Young people became hopeless inline of employment because they couldn’t know when the pandemic will end, there was no development among the youth because they have lost their works. The young women god early marriage” (Female FGD, Gakenke),

“the pandemic has hit us hard where joblessness and financial uncertainties were very high. As young people, we were worried about how to cover the gaps and get back into normal life” (Male FGD, Karongi),

“Lack of employment, business have closure, youth were depressed fearing from getting Covid-19, income has reduced considerably” (IDI, Kayonza).

Figure 10: Aspects of Respondent's Aspirations Impacted by Covid-19



Source: field data 2022

In general the aspiration that have been more impacted by COVID-19 is the economic aspect(86%), followed by education(35%), then social culture aspect(23%).

The effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Young men's aspirations were not similar to these of young women's aspirations or they were not hit at the same extent. Figure 11 shows that Young women aspirations in education and training (52% vs 47% females and males respectively) in addition to their socio-cultural aspect (53% vs 47% females and males respectively) were more affected than these of their young men's counterparts.

Figure 11: Aspects of Respondent's Aspirations Impacted by Covid-19 by gender



Source: field data 2022

The gender disparity in those aspects can be related to teenage unplanned pregnancies that to a higher extent affects young ladies than it affects young men. The lockdown measures that were put in place to refrain COVID-19 spreading exacerbated this situation. In most cases, when a young lady gets pregnant in an unplanned situation, what follows is to quit school in order to take care of newborns. This adds burden to the teen mothers' family and in most instances their male counterparts do not share such responsibilities. The qualitative data tells similar stories as in the following passages:

“The challenges faced by young men are not the same as the ones faced by young women, the most affected are young women, in need of money both boys and girls may opt for prostitution, but a girl may be infected by sexual transmitted disease and get pregnant, having someone to rise while you are still young is not a simple thing.” (Female FGD Bwera),

“Young women have been more strongly affected by COVID-19 than men because they have faced the challenge of being impregnated in an unplanned way, being contaminated by HIV or other diseases caused by sexual intercourse and this scenario has occurred just because of the hard situation they were passing through” (Male FGD Karongi),

“I think women had more challenge than men because, high number of pregnant women, so women had more challenges than men” (FGD Rwamagana).

On the hand, the pandemic affected young men's economy and their migrations aspirations more than it did to females. In this regards, it can be argued that travel restriction measures adopted during the pandemic period prevented young men who aspired to travel from their rural residences to urban areas for the sake of securing jobs.

5. Youth Resilience and Adaptability Strategies

According to American Psychological Association (2021), resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and

financial stressors. As much as resilience involves “bouncing back” from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth. In the current situations where youth need to adapt themselves during and post-COVID-19 era, youth become resilient when they are able to call forth their inner strength to positively meet challenges, manage adversities, heal the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and thrive given their unique characteristics, goals and circumstances. Thus demonstrating resilience increases young people's self-efficacy because they are able to see evidence of their ability to: face challenges competently; make productive decisions about addressing challenges, including when and how to seek help; think about and be accountable for their actions and the consequences of their actions; influence their development and well-being in a positive direction and internalizing the belief that their lives are important and meaningful. Thus, they can envision and conscientiously work with purpose and optimism toward future possibilities for themselves.

Young people sail across an increasingly delicate and unsure employment market. They have to assemble and use psychosocial resources necessary to adapt to a dynamic career landscape and employment opportunities. It is noteworthy that the qualitative findings of the study revealed that the Pandemic outbreak provided a narrow window of opportunity was availed to young men and women in Rwanda, however they mentioned that the opportunity was not equally shared among male and females. They is what they said:

“some opportunities were presented like working as youth volunteers to support the government to implement COVID-19 measures” (Female FGD of Rubavu district)

“Few got the opportunity to work as youth volunteers but not all of us got that opportunity, others we were all locked at home” (Girls FGD_Kigarama of Kicukiro district),

“There are also some youth who worked as volunteer, they also got some allowances” (IDI_NYC_Kinyababa of Bwera district).

“Both young men and young women they only got equally opportunities in the youth volunteer, but in other sectors the young

men are the ones who got the opportunities than the young women. For example, during the COVID-19 transportation of goods was only one which was allowed. So the young men who used bicycle or motorbike were the ones who got the opportunities most” (Female FGD of Nyabihu district),

“Young men because they are the ones who got jobs at Construction sites during the building of classrooms” (FGD 2 of Ngoma district).

Young men and women stated that they changed their social behaviour due to Covid-19 pandemic in terms of understanding and mindset. This was mentioned in various interviews with Rwandan youth. Here are some of their quotes:

“Before COVID 19 pandemic, as youth we were thinking that we are not responsible for anything, but for the moment we are thinking about our future. Now we have to leave behind the perception that being a youth mean just having fun. Instead we have to think about the future, we have to think about saving. This will help us in the future, as we had to consume all the income we had before, and after the experience, when we will get the job, we will save so that the same experience we had will not repeat” (IDI Burera)

“COVID -19 shaped young men and women by taking some responsibilities early” (FGD Rwamagana)

“It has changed their views of being job seekers to being job creators” (FGD Huye), “as the youth, we learned how to save and economize the little possessions we had because none could anticipate what might come after” (Female FGD Rubavu)

“The pandemic has shaped young women’s and young men’s understanding because it was hard to survive during the lockdown when you had nothing in your pockets. So, COVID-19 taught us about saving and working hard” (Female IDI, Rusizi).

“COVID-19 did teach the youth to save, before COVID-19 the youth used to relax than working, the ones who tried to find a job wanted the job which was a high class, but today they are even doing what they used

to call fake job. So in the future everyone will value and respect the job he/she will be having” (Female FGD, Nyabihu)

“It made the youth engage in informal jobs. For example, my brother had a job in Muhanga working in a tax park but when COVID-19 came in tax agencies were no longer working so he came back home and started doing an informal job in the construction industry” (Female FGD, Karongi),

“Yes, those who thought that they wouldn’t do informal jobs changed their minds” (IDI, Ngoma).

Young men and women have learnt some lessons during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Some adaptation and resilience measures for the young generation that arose from these lessons were to associate into cooperatives and engage into saving practices as below mentioned:

“The youth in our community, most of them are grouping themselves in cooperatives other in saving groups, this is what the youth in our community is doing in order to adopt the challenges paused by COVID-19” (Male FGD, Gakenke)

“They have opted to be in cooperatives, because they are bound to meet many advantages” (FGD, Kicukiro)

“The plans are that I’m trying to put together and start a small business, currently, I’m saving the best I can” (IDI _male_youth commissioner, Bugesera).

“The basic thing is the work, then savings and with the saving we make capital and start the business” (Female FGD, Gakenke).

It is worth mentioning that the major constraint interviewed young men and women face in pursuits of their aspirations is lack of capital as stipulated qualitative findings of this study:

“The first barriers are lack of confidence and lack of capital to start a business” (Female FGD, Nyabihu),

“As young generation we are facing the barrier of Lack of capital to start a business” (FGD, Rwamagana),

“The top barrier to achieving our desired jobs are poverty. Where there is poverty, there is no capacity to start a new business due to a lack of capital” (Male FGD, Karongi).

CONCLUSION

The overall objective of this project was to explore and interrogate the aspirations and resilience of young women and men in Africa.

The research used a mixed methods approach (quantitative and qualitative). Quantitative data was collected through a randomly selected nationally representative sample across the 16 districts of Rwanda; of 1599 young women and men between the ages of 16 and 30 years and from different demographic backgrounds.

Qualitative data collection was done through Focus Group Discussions, In-depth Interviews and Key Informant Interviews.

Data analysis has been done through descriptive statistical and analytical analysis for quantitative data, thematic analysis for qualitative data.

The findings on youth economic aspirations showed that the majority of young people we interviewed have attended at least secondary (48.1 percent) or primary school (43.3 percent). Employment rate is 44 percent. The government of Rwanda through the National Youth Policy define a youth as a person aged between 16 years and 30 years old.

In this study, young people themselves and the community consider a youth as person who is single. It has been realized that understanding or defining a youth goes beyond categorizing people based on age and life stage alone.

Most respondents consider to have a successful life if they have created a good business (confirmed by 71% of respondents), a good job (confirmed by 66% of respondents) and or when they are rich (confirmed by 53% of respondents). When considering the gender; both young women and men have more agreed on these three (3) above aspects of successful life.

Both young men and women are almost equally willing to venture into business.

The study further explored what kind of jobs Rwandan young men and women wanted to be part of. The findings show that the majority of the respondents (58%) intend to be working in trading sector in the future. This reflects what young men and women in Rwanda have mentioned about creating their own business as an indicator for a successful life. Additionally, 70.8% of the respondents confirmed that they preferred to be self-employed while 37.1% wanted to be employed

in public sector. The reasons for their choices of type of employment varied from how secure the job is (57% of the respondents), good pay (55%), good benefit (53%), a job that is supportive to families (51%), a job that avails opportunity to grow (47%), flexibility of working (45%) among others.

Young women and men in Rwanda consider as dignified and fulfilling work as a job where you are: handsomely well paid, secured, respected by employers, not exposed to risks, and not treated based on your gender. Disaggregating the results by gender, young women consider a dignified and fulfilling job as a job where mothers can work conveniently more fulfilling than their male counterparts (52 and 48% respectively). On the other hand, young men respondents' perspectives of dignified and fulfilling work dominate when it comes to a secured job, a well-paying job, a job that respect young people and a job that do not expose employees to risks.

The study has shown that male respondents are more optimistic to achieving their successful lives compared to their female counterparts.

It is seen that automobile/transport, ICT, and construction related; are businesses mostly dominated by young men (100%, 88% and 86%). While beauty related, handcraft maker and trading are businesses mostly dominated by young women (76%, 64% and 49%).

In general, the aspiration that have been more impacted by COVID-19 is the economic aspect (86%), followed by education (35%), then social culture aspect (23%).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Challenges that young people in Rwanda are facing in achieving their life aspirations need a youth responsive policy formulation and implementation. Additionally, there is need of information sharing and building the young people knowledge to create a common understanding based on the evidence emanating from the young men and women's own voices. From this study findings, the following key recommendations were formulated:

Recommendations for Mastercard Foundation's programmatic and strategic action

- There is a need to ensure continuous learning and improvement of young men and women's knowledge on financial literacy, leadership, managerial and networking capabilities.
- Strengthen funding mechanisms that support youth especially young women to access finance and in order to get rid of poverty.
- Given that resources are not sufficient, there is a need of strengthening the resources mobilizations and revision of investment plan to incorporate young men and women aspirations.
- Considering gender parity major challenges that remain in areas of tertiary education, ICT, STEM, and TVET education, there is a need to focus on increasing female enrollment and completion in these programs, promoting competence-based gender responsive programs by increasing the female dividend in trades with more labor market potentials.

Recommendations for MCF's programmatic and strategic action

- There is a need to put in place strategies and policies to facilitate young men and women's accessibility to cash in order to help achieve their future aspirations.
- There is need for the enactment of a law governing young people's non-state cooperatives and tontines as they face managerial problems that led to financial loss especially in the saving and credit groups which seem to be a common way of saving for most of the Rwandan youth.
- The Government of Rwanda needs to increase capacity building related to youth empowerment e.g. the Joint Programme on Youth which seeks to increase youth

(girls and boys) access to decent jobs in Rwanda; empower youth to fully engage in policy-making and civic engagement.

- The governments need to provide more strategies and political support that build income generating activities and assets for young people in informal sector to ensure sustained escapes from poverty. Increased income can lead to more savings in both tangible assets (e.g. livestock, land and housing) and intangible assets (e.g. education), which should improve young women and men's resilience in the face of shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Listen to young people's voices carefully and exhaustively: their aspirations, their challenges and how they cope with shocks, and how some issues can be addressed to have their problems solved.
- Capturing from youth their contribution towards their empowerment and the country's development in general, and not only limiting the young people to only coping challenges or barriers that they face but also giving them a room in youth related policy making. Furthermore, an enhanced collaboration and communication between policy makers, civil society, researchers, implementers, as well as youth themselves is imperative to achieve a sustainable development that leaves no youth behind.

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