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AFRICA'S YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE: NEW PERSPECTIVES

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The Side-Hustle: Diversified Livelihoods of Kenyan Educated Young Farmers

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Abstract Side-hustling – the engagement in diverse income-earning activities – has become a common phenomenon among Kenyan educated youth who are increasingly faced with formal employment uncertainties. In this article, I examine how aspirations and expectations of educated youth are formed within their opportunity space, involving their assessment of what is possible within their geographical, socioeconomic and political contexts, and given their own qualities and characteristics. Through the life stories of six educated young farmers interviewed in 2014, I show how side-hustling offered them an alternative livelihood strategy; a means for self-improvement; and a reconfiguration of their imagined futures. The article suggests moving beyond our deductive statistical analyses of who is employed and who is not; and instead utilising a youth livelihood framework which helps to understand how young people make meaning of themselves and opportunities around them in extreme socioeconomic conditions.

Keywords: Africa, agricultural livelihoods, entrepreneurship.

1 Introduction

The twenty-first century is marred with images of waiting youth (Honwana 2012) who have become marginalised through under- and unemployment and are increasingly disconnected from their life aspirations. Nonetheless, these youth are not just waiting; they continually develop new subjectivities that enable them to manoeuvre the changing labour markets. They choose to reconstruct their aspirations through a range of new social relationships (Durham 2007), multiple identities (Gough and Langevang 2015), new political formations (Honwana 2012), and entrepreneurial individuality (Thieme 2013). To fully comprehend youth responses to economic austerity, it is important to examine the nexus of the flexibility of protracted youthhood inspired by neoliberal reforms and resultant socioeconomic uncertainties, as well as other specific local changes.

In this article, I examine side-hustling in agriculture as one response by educated youth to economic austerity. I broadly view the side-hustle

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as that which young people do 'on the side' during their free time, on weekends or in the evenings, not merely to supplement their incomes but also as a capital accumulation strategy in preparation for other livelihood opportunities. These side-activities are conducted alongside schooling, while job-seeking (locally referred to as 'tarmacking') (Prince 2013), caring for the family, and even when employed.

The notion of side-hustling is important for understanding youth livelihoods in contemporary contexts for several reasons. First, side-hustling allows us to show what educated youth do when facing uncertainties about employment. Second, it suggests that youth employment should not be viewed through the lens of a single job. Thirdly, inasmuch as side-hustling is a supplementary source of income, it also fulfils other imaginations of young people such as attaining social markers of adulthood. Indeed, side-hustles illuminate how the aspirations of educated youth change when they anticipate or face livelihood uncertainties, and how they develop diversified career trajectories that potentially enable them to attain the desired social markers of adulthood, while also avoiding the stigma of being 'unemployed youth' (Prince 2013).

This article begins by providing an overview of youth employment and agriculture in Kenya. In Section 3, it contextualises side-hustling in the conceptual framework of opportunity space. Section 4 discusses the methods of data collection used. Section 5 presents six life stories of educated young farmers focusing on their variations of side-hustling. Section 6 analyses how side-hustling helps understand the everyday life of young people in terms of providing a livelihood strategy, shaping their identities and reconfiguring their aspirations. Finally, Section 7 concludes with implications for policy and recommendations for further research.

2 Youth employment and agriculture in Kenya

Although Kenyan youth¹ make up 60 per cent² of the working population (NCPD 2013), their contribution to economic development remains low, posing a great challenge to the sustained growth envisaged by government. For instance, in 2009, the *National Human Development Report* recorded a youth income index of 0.44, meaning a high dependency ratio and continued struggles for youth to earn a living (UNDP 2010). Even with an increasing number of young people completing primary and secondary education, only approximately 200,000 students per year proceed to higher learning institutions, with a small fraction of these completing university and securing employment afterwards (Njonjo 2011). This article is concerned with the role that education plays in configuring and reconfiguring the aspirations of young people in a context where the labour market offers limited formal employment opportunities for young people.

The idea that agriculture can provide significant numbers of jobs for young people is now accepted in most African countries. In Kenya,

it is part of a well-established policy narrative that supports informal sector work and self-employment in rural areas. However, this narrative is problematic for two reasons. First, it excludes educated youth who it is claimed reject rural-based occupations as dirty and demeaning, aspiring instead to white-collar formal employment. Second, it fails to consider the broader context of the Kenyan agriculture sector which has significantly changed since the structural reforms of the 1980s (Rono 2002). Even though agriculture contributes 25 per cent directly and 27 per cent indirectly to the country's gross domestic product (GDP), the national budget allocation to the sector remains at only 5 per cent of total expenditure (GoK 2013). As such, the sector fails to attract and retain skilled human capital capable of driving profitability and sustainability. Most youth are educated to leave the *maisha ngumu* (hard life) in the rural areas.

While some studies show that indeed young people in the past have been educated out of farming (White 2012), others argue that even with increased education, migration and urbanisation, many African youth will continue to live in the rural areas and thereby will rely directly or indirectly on agricultural livelihoods (Filmer *et al.* 2014). These studies underpin the youth in agriculture narrative that seeks to entice young people to become farmers by making agriculture 'cool', 'sexy' and 'lucrative' (AGRA 2015). Fundamentally, this narrative segues with neoliberal frames of entrepreneurship and has produced agribusiness – 'farming as a business' – as the new opportunity space for youth self-employment (Sumberg *et al.* 2014). In particular, agriculture is to be made attractive to educated youth through the combination of entrepreneurship and the potential to expand opportunities beyond the farm, including service provision, processing and marketing (Proctor and Lucchesi 2012).

While for some educated youth, agriculture could be an undesirable 'last resort or not an option at all' (Tadele and Gella 2012) or just boring (Lewa and Ndungu 2012), to others, agriculture provides quick incomes that facilitate a transition into other activities that promise social and economic gain (Berckmoes and White 2014). For instance, Okali and Sumberg (2012) found that young Ghanaians farmed tomatoes to build capital with which to meet other social and economic needs, attain economic independence, and then shift to other types of livelihoods. Fundamentally, the change in perceptions occurs when young people start re-imagining agriculture as an entrepreneurial venture facilitating their 'moving forward' and getting 'a total reward' (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010). What was once seen as a denigrated occupation, and not a first choice, becomes desirable because it allows investing in oneself and starting up something on your own (Gough and Langevang 2015). Here young people view themselves not as farmers, but as 'creative agents who try to seize the available opportunities to improve their positions' (Langevang and Gough 2012: 248). While the discursive frames of entrepreneurship and agribusiness camouflage the experience of under- and unemployment within precarious economies, they also set

the stage for side-hustling. This article will show how side-hustles allow young people to reconstitute themselves as subjects capable of offering products and services, which enable them to meet livelihoods needs, achieve elite distinction and transition into social adulthood.

3 Side-hustles and the opportunity space framework

Conceptually, side-hustles are different from hustling. Hustling has been described as the everyday survival strategies of marginalised young people to capitalise on every opportunity to earn an income or generate symbolic capital in extreme economic landscapes (Munive 2010; Thieme 2013). Munive's research with Liberian youth depicts hustling as a common phenomenon in African cities where young men and women work, for example, as load carriers, motorcycle riders, weekend farmers, petty traders or street food caterers. He argues that hustling is both a survival strategy to address material constraints, and a means of crafting an identity, creating a self-efficacious and meaningful existence. As Thieme (2013) observed among young men in the Mathare slums in Kenya, hustling can also be understood as a cumulative set of behaviours contesting existing structures of authority. Importantly, hustlers resist the identity given to unemployed youth by those in authority as being desperate and lacking opportunities; and instead view hustling as offering them a good life on their own terms, and enabling them to maintain a status in society even in difficult circumstances. Successful hustling reflects an individual's intentional strategies, ingenuity and social networks (Munive 2010; Thieme 2013).

Building on Thieme's and Munive's work, this article focuses on what my respondents referred to as a side-hustle – to pursue alternative livelihood activities on the margins of a constrained agricultural economy. A side-hustle might be income-earning in the present, or could lead to economic gain in the future. For the educated youth with whom I worked, side-hustling was seen as offering potential for upward social mobility (Mwaura 2016).

In the broader framework of youth employment and livelihoods, the inquiry of side-hustling is important because formal employment opportunities are severely constrained. There is, therefore, the need to understand how young men and women perceive and respond to this challenge. As work opportunities emerge (and others shrink), one's aspirations change and expectations are reformulated to reflect what is possible (Hardgrove, Rootham and McDowell 2015).

Sumberg *et al.* define opportunity space as:

... the spatial and temporal distribution of the universe of more or less viable [work] options that a young person may exploit as she/he attempts to establish an independent life. The opportunity space of a situated person is a function of global, national, and regional factors including institutions, policy, and demand; place; and social and cultural norms (2012: 5).

In this regard, young people's aspirations and expectations are determined by the existing broader circumstances, such as financial crisis, education, technology, migration, urbanisation, environmental change and social-cultural norms among others (Leavy and Smith 2010). Opportunity space can be analysed in terms of depth, diversity and dynamism, reflecting on one hand, the interplay of forces existing in the broader geographical, social-economic and political contexts in which these opportunities exist and on the other hand, the differentiated capabilities and dispositions of young people. The extent to which a young person is able to exploit a given opportunity is a function of their access to key resources; support from social relations and networks; information, knowledge and skills; attitudes (e.g. towards risk and travel); imagination, alertness and adroitness to judiciously exploit opportunities (Sumberg *et al.* 2012). In effect, opportunities range from last resort survival strategies to transformative livelihood strategies that result in real incomes, enhance capabilities, address social equity and exclusion, and offer livelihood diversification opportunities.

4 Methods

This article draws from my doctoral study carried out in 2014 and 2015 in Eastern, Western, and Central regions of Kenya investigating the changing aspirations and alternative livelihood options of educated youth. Educated youth were defined as those aged 18–35 years and with post-secondary education at degree, diploma or vocational certificate levels. I worked with a sample of 60 educated young farmers. First, I selected participants from social media platforms of young farmers who then referred me to other young farmers who met my criteria. Second, I utilised contact lists of organisations working on 'youth in agriculture' to reach out to young people benefiting from their programmes. Third, I attended various events on 'youth in agriculture' and selected participants based on their self-identification as farmers and their willingness to participate in the study.

The data collection process involved 60 open-ended interviews and field visits. I also followed the young farmers' online activity via social media to monitor any new information regarding their farming and other income-earning activities. I transcribed, coded and analysed the data using NVivo. This article presents the life stories of six young farmers to show how they pursued alternative livelihoods alongside or when seeking formal jobs. The six were selected on the basis of their mention of agriculture and other activities as 'side-things' they engaged in. I specifically analyse how these individuals perceived changes in the labour market and viewed the potential of their agricultural activities to provide the needed income, achieve elite distinction, and satisfy their responsibilities in society.

5 Life stories

The six individuals whose stories are given next belong to a generation born in the 1980s during a time of structural adjustment and economic liberalisation. By the 1990s, government spending cuts led to a

significant downsizing of the public sector. While educated youth of previous generations were socialised to expect white-collar employment upon graduation (Munene and Otieno 2008), this new generation finds few formal sector employment opportunities. Officially, although only an estimated 15.7 per cent of 25–29-year-olds (the age group coinciding with completion of tertiary and/or higher education) are unemployed, the rate of underemployment is very high, and it takes approximately five years for a graduate to secure a job (Njonjo 2011).

5.1 Wangechi

It is a side thing; I did it [farming, training young farmers, blogging, and writing farming manuals] for one year in 2013 close to full-time, because I had sponsorship from a women's organisation. Now that I am done with the fellowship, I am thinking of going back to work because I had actually quit my job to do this for a year. (Wangechi, female farmer, Central Kenya)

Wangechi (28 years old) was introduced as a strawberry farmer. When we met in 2014, she was leading a community-based organisation (CBO) in Kiambu County while undertaking postgraduate studies in one of Nairobi's public universities. In 2013, the CBO received a fellowship grant which enabled Wangechi to mobilise and build the capacity of young farmers in her county. She had successfully trained over 500 youth; developed one of the leading blogs on agricultural information and youth farming opportunities; and published manuals on modern farming practices. At the time of the interview, she had just completed the fellowship grant and was registering a company separate from the CBO through which she planned to continue offering the trainings for a fee and blogging, while she sought a formal job. However, Wangechi had quit strawberry farming after several failed attempts and had no intention of going back to farming. She viewed the trainings, the blogging and the publishing of farming manuals as her 'side-hustle' as she completed her postgraduate studies and searched for a formal job.

5.2 Wambaya

Wambaya (26 years old) was a telephone³ horticultural and dairy farmer in Western Kenya. He was also seeking a white-collar job while pursuing other entrepreneurial opportunities in Nairobi. After graduating in 2011, Wambaya had volunteered with several international organisations in Kenya, Ethiopia and Japan, but none of these experiences had led to a job. He then established himself as a freelance consultant offering online research training, volunteered with development organisations, and acquired new information and communications technology (ICT) skills. In late 2013, Wambaya invested in a greenhouse that was managed by his mother and a farm worker in Migori. He also bought two dairy cattle, which provided enough income through milk sales to pay the farm worker's wages. When I visited his farm, Wambaya's mother described her son as unemployed and viewed his investments in agriculture as security for when he would return to the rural areas after failing to find a formal job. During our interview in mid-2014, none of the farming projects were yet to turn a profit, and Wambaya had not travelled to

Migori. Nevertheless, he was determined to make agriculture a major income source and was already planning his next projects in fish farming and drip irrigation. His newly acquired ICT skills had enabled him to collaborate with a friend and invest in an online marketing business. While his goal was to use the profits from these ventures to expand his farm, he also intended to diversify into other enterprises: 'Like any other businessman will tell you, I will also invest outside farming. I want to diversify to cushion myself. Because you don't know what might happen in future.' Even though he referred to himself as a businessman, Wambaya was still seeking a formal job and intended to pursue a postgraduate degree the following year. Similar to Wangechi, he was using every opportunity in Migori and Nairobi to diversify his options and build capital in preparation for his desired future.

5.3 Cherunya

Oh my God, No! I was thinking of how I would become a diplomat, attend to political parties, and be fabulous. I did not imagine soil and stuff. It was never in my plan. But that happened during my transition when I got married... so I had to naturally blend into the culture. (Cherunya, female farmer, Western Kenya)

Cherunya (33 years old) was from a wealthy family in Western Kenya and educated at prestigious schools in Uganda and Kenya. Upon graduating, she worked with a policy thinktank in Nairobi where she expected to rise up the ladder into the diplomatic service. Nevertheless, on getting married, she acquired a new identity as a wife which meant 'blending into the culture' and so migrating to rural Kericho to assume the traditional roles of a Kalenjin wife. She cared for her ageing parents-in-law and like other housewives in her community, established a kitchen garden. However, given her knowledge and access to resources, Cherunya's kitchen garden included modern poultry rearing and a greenhouse, both of which were income-earning. She also opened a grocery shop in the nearby trading centre where she sold most of her produce. Despite assuming the traditional roles of a Kalenjin housewife, Cherunya also positioned herself in the community as a gender activist, soon establishing a women's empowerment group and becoming a local politician. While farming had not been her choice, Cherunya used her kitchen garden to teach the local women entrepreneurial skills, thereby achieving her goal of being politically active, while fulfilling her obligations as a housewife.

5.4 Musembi

After my internship, I tarmacked for like a year, that's when I was very busy with the farm. (Musembi, male farmer, Eastern Kenya)

Musembi (28 years old) was a diploma graduate, a development worker, and an online degree student living and working in rural Kitui, Eastern Kenya. Unlike other educated youth in his community who migrated to urban areas to seek formal jobs, after earning his diploma Musembi had returned to Kitui where he worked for a local organisation, enrolled for an online degree programme, and later married. He self-identified as a young

farmer growing horticultural and other crops on a piece of land inherited from his parents. He had started farming to 'finance the tarmacking' for a formal job after college, but even after he found one (it was seasonal and paid very low wages) Musembi continued farming as 'it supports me when I am not on contract'. The income from farming and the contract job enabled him to sustain his family and pay for his online degree course. Musembi was optimistic that the online course would help him find a well-paid job, but in the meantime, farming remained a significant source of income that shaped his identity as an educated man with responsibility to support his nuclear and extended family.

5.5 Joe

Joe (30 years old) was a full-time business journalist in Nairobi and self-identified as a young farmer, leasing five acres of land in Kajiado County in Central Kenya where he grew onions under a contractual arrangement with an international seed company. Our conversation started on the subject of his current occupation, business journalism; only later did it emerge that Joe had trained as a veterinary doctor but never practised:

I went to university because I passed with a good grade that could take me to university to earn a degree. But when I got there, I realised I was drawn to communications and not [veterinary] science. It was a long struggle... I didn't like it because we were doing it for a job... I don't really use it now... That's why we go to university; to identify what we really want to do... [So] when at the university I used to do a [radio] show on entrepreneurship and was encouraging young people to invest.

Joe realised his passion for journalism in his first year of university, but the administration and his parents did not allow him to change his area of study. He therefore went ahead to pursue veterinary science, but worked as a broadcaster at the university radio station for the four years. During this period, he developed an interest in business and planned his radio programmes around youth entrepreneurship. This experience landed him a business journalism job after university. From there he enrolled for a second degree in media studies. Even though he was aware that his progress as a journalist depended on his educational qualifications, Joe was disappointed that the education system had already failed to match his aspirations, or at least, enable learners to 'provide solutions to the society'. To get a pay rise or promotion at his workplace, Joe needed to earn a postgraduate degree and at the time of the interview, was considering enrolling.

Joe's drive was no longer in just becoming a journalist; he was now focused on wealth accumulation and promotion in the journalism industry, and success in his side-businesses were major parts of his plan. Only a few months into farming, Joe referred to it as a hobby: 'I am not a journalist on the weekends. I am in my wellies, my hat, and it's a lot of fun just like going to play golf.' However, he planned to eventually expand it into a large-scale farm for export purposes:

It [farming] is my pet project, and it is fun... It's a new thing, but it was not cool five years ago. If you look at it as a business, it's cool... This business needs to grow, because when you move into exports, you are talking big money. I am planning to go into farming for export.

Joe's income from journalism was split between supporting his family, saving for a postgraduate degree and investing in the farm. Similar to Wambaya, he viewed the current farming activities as experimental projects that would eventually grow into major investments.

5.6 Matei

Matei (34 years old) was educated in Machakos, Eastern Kenya, and lived and worked there for a development organisation. He identified himself as a successful young farmer and an entrepreneur: he had managed to purchase a plot of land, build a house, and marry. He had also inherited a piece of land from his father where he was farming sweet potatoes, cassava, mangoes and bananas. Alongside his formal employment, Matei was committed to earning extra income from his farm and other side-businesses (the nature of which he would not disclose). When I asked him why diversifying his income was important, he responded: 'I don't want my family to hustle', implying the need for him to move his family beyond survival mode. He also pointed to the fact that formal employment did not give him the independence he desired. Thus, agriculture and the other side-businesses were progressively opening up new opportunities for him to become financially independent while also accumulating capital.

His wife lived in Machakos town and refused to migrate to their newly constructed house in the neighbouring rural area. She argued that relocating to a rural neighbourhood would symbolise a meagre living, not in keeping with the expectations of society of an educated and modern family.

6 What's in a side-hustle?

Wangechi, Wambaya, Cherunya, Musembi, Joe and Matei are examples of how present-day educated youth in Kenya are re-imagining their futures and pursuing work opportunities in the absence of formal sector employment. Their transition from one activity to another shows how they seize contingent labour market opportunities while keeping an eye on possible future opportunities. Their strategies to remain employable yet entrepreneurially active are similar to the description of a side-hustle in a recent news feature:

A side hustle is a business people run while concurrently doing something else. The something else in many cases is a full-time job, so you operate your side hustle after working hours and on weekends. Or rather, that's what all employers would like to believe. Most probably, you sneak in a few logistical phone calls, emails, meetings, etc... The something else could be that you are in university or are a stay-at-home parent (Nduati Omanga 2016).

Indeed, side-hustling is how young people, given their differential capabilities, position themselves within and exploit the opportunity space. While Betcherman and Khan (2015) argue that youth livelihoods in agriculture reflect a variety of factors – including land tenure, lack of investments in technology and infrastructure, and limited profitability – the multiple identities of these six young farmers suggest a need to acknowledge that education changes the nature of livelihood opportunities for young people and in agriculture. Additionally, side-hustling is an indicator of the self-improvement strategies of young people and their continuous efforts to rework their work aspirations in a constrained economy.

6.1 A livelihood strategy

Side-hustling has become deeply entrenched in the Kenyan culture of work and it is fast becoming socially acceptable among young employed professionals, students and those seeking jobs and working in their first or temporary jobs. Journalists, teachers, civil servants, doctors and even politicians talk of side-hustles when informally sharing information about how they supplement their monthly income. Side-hustles shape one's identity as opportunities for self-advancement present themselves in a precarious social and economic context. *Ku⁴ – hustle* – is the new language and symbol for 'making ends meet' among the young people who use phrases like 'I also have a ka-farm⁵ back in the village' and 'I am thinking of my next hustle' to explain their supplementary income activities. While it is not class-based (even though class-based side-hustles exist), failing to side-hustle is construed as laziness or being too posh to earn extra income from presumably available economic opportunities. Nevertheless, side-hustles are often difficult, and can involve risk, loss and failure.

Among the educated young farmers, side-hustling exhibited the temporality and uncertainty of most agricultural activity as well as the possibility of having options beyond agriculture. Sometimes, as in Wangechi's case, side-hustles can be regarded as short stints of profit-making and ways of accumulating capital, contributing to attainment of social markers of adulthood. Even so, sometimes they are also opportunities of just moving around rather than moving up and away from the economic uncertainties and marginalisation that the young people face, for example in Musembi's case.

The choice of a side-hustle is determined by one's availability, expected gains, and access to necessary capital. The main goal is to earn an income. Those involved remain flexible to stop some or pick up new side-hustles as dictated by evolving challenges and opportunities. The educated young farmers I interviewed embodied an entrepreneurial identity that included a plan to maximise profits, adopt innovations, and improve the quality of their farm products and services, while coping with risk. This was the case for Joe, Wambaya and Matei. Many were also driven by a last resort instinct and an immediate need to accumulate capital that would propel their upward social mobility, to

support their families and to maintain certain distinctions in society. For example, Musembi's agribusiness provided the much needed economic and symbolic capital that helped him in his efforts to find a job; and Cherunya utilised her kitchen garden to empower women, hence creating the social capital for her transition into politics. These young farmers confirm previous studies indicating that, not only do entrepreneurs respond to static economic pressures, they also change and mould new opportunities in such difficult situations (Langevang and Gough 2012).

6.2 A self-improvement strategy

Side-hustling is an important marker of a young person's self-making efforts, allowing them to gain financial independence and social acceptability among peers and in society more generally. As formal employment is declining in number and in status, educated young people are choosing occupations that help them develop new subjectivities expressed as doing 'work for myself', hence drawing on the neoliberal ideologies of self-making (Durham 2007), competitive individualism (Standing 2011), and multiplicity of identities (Schwiter 2016). Matei and Joe's stories illustrate the creation of these new subjectivities.

On the other hand, side-hustling can also supplement formal jobs that young people find unsatisfactory due to their low wages, temporary contracts, skills mismatch, and sometimes lack of personal development opportunities. They turn to side-hustles to recreate work as something flexible and that allows them to exercise their agency. As a result, their everyday lives are characterised by creative use of space and time that allows self-improvement, re-working new identities, and re-imagining their futures. For instance, Wangechi, Musembi, Wambaya and Joe planned to pursue further education alongside their side-hustles to improve their skillset and remain competitive in their professional fields. In the absence of state social protection mechanisms, Matei, Musembi and Wambaya planned to utilise farming to accumulate capital – a valuable safety net if they lost their jobs. Musembi's formal job was contractual, and hence his farming activities provided an income when he was without salary, while furthering his education would, he hoped, position him for a well-paid job in the future. Similarly, Wambaya's ICT skills helped him operate online businesses, while Joe's journalism experience had landed him a job even without having the specific academic qualifications.

However, as in Cherunya's case, social norms and differences might block some opportunities while opening up others. Her hopes of becoming a diplomat were curtailed when she married and migrated to rural Kericho. Nevertheless, in this new location, given her education and access to resources, she was able to reposition herself and develop a new identity as an entrepreneur and gender activist. Similarly, even though Wangechi gave up farming strawberries, her experience of running a CBO had prepared her to consider establishing her own company through which she would continue offering the same services

at a fee. This, coupled with her postgraduate education, was her way of remaining competitive in the labour market.

6.3 A re-imagination of aspirations

Aspirations are an individual's desire to obtain a status or achieve a goal in the future (Hardgrove *et al.* 2015). They are developed and evolve in certain contexts that are influenced by social and relational factors (such as family background, peers, gender and norms) as well as the interplay of forces in the contemporary context spanning globalisation, urbanisation, migration, engagement in diverse labour markets, and connectivity offered by technology. For instance, while Wambaya had not succeeded in finding a formal job, his ability to start up other income-earning activities enabled him to reconfigure a future where he could have a sustainable livelihood. Likewise, while Cherunya had never imagined herself becoming a farmer; when tradition demanded that she live as a Kalenjin wife in a rural area, she found herself using the very traditional roles to re-imagine her future as activist and politician.

Even though side-hustling might be depicted as reflecting disenchantment with the education system and economic conditions, educated youth are using their education to develop alternative life trajectories. Joe's experience as a radio presenter helped him develop an interest in entrepreneurship which informed his drive to accumulate wealth. While journalism was his passion, he now aspired to accumulate capital which he associated with rising up the ranks in the journalism industry and investing in his side-businesses.

These examples of side-hustling also challenge existing notions of a good life (urban and employed), and instead portray the possibilities of a decent life even in the rural areas. Matei described disenfranchised urban job seekers as 'very many clean people coming from towns; but they have a lot of nothing, with a big phone, just for Facebook. Yet they are broke'. While migrating to urban areas offers educated youth a chance to acquire certain symbols of modernity such as a smartphone and new clothes, often these youth continue to struggle to find decent employment, and remain as vulnerable as those in the rural areas.

On the other hand, some young people brought up in urban areas are going to rural areas and assuming rural lifestyles, while keeping a close connection with their urban social networks – Joe and Cherunya are good examples. The rural space takes on new meaning when it offers opportunity for economic gain and social acceptability.

7 Conclusion: does a side-hustle employ?

This article illustrates several nuances with regard to youth employment. First, that educated youth, whether formally employed or not, earn a livelihood from more than one activity. The life stories of these educated young farmers depict their embodiments of multiple identities in response to opportunities emerging from the liberalised yet uncertain Kenyan economy. They are acting as self-disciplined citizens who, despite their disillusionment with unemployment, do not wait for the state to

take action. Rather, they have been socialised to take responsibility for dealing with their own problems and thereby also, defining on their own terms what is productive and respectable in society.

Second, while traditional conceptions of youth employment cover the informal and formal sector, they fail to explain instances where one sector is used as a safety net for the other. They also fail to inform us about the haphazard transitions of young people between formal and informal sectors that affect the existing categorisation of youth work opportunities. In the absence of formal work, young graduates become informal sector workers, not out of choice, but because opportunities open up through their education and other factors such as geographical positioning and social contexts. They use their limited capital to start farming, sometimes with an intention of transitioning into other income-earning activities or into a more established agribusiness. These somewhat unknown and unpredictable transitions should inform the basis of continued inquiry into youth livelihoods, especially in how we translate the information needed to guide the contribution of statistical analyses of the categories of youth work. Fundamentally, the concept of side-hustling begs further research questions on whether youth under- and unemployment should be addressed from the viewpoint of youth poverty, social organisation and public morality, urbanisation and rural depopulation, political unrest, or merely as a problem of effectively utilising the youthful workforce to contribute to national income and reconstruction of the country.

Third, the stories of the six young farmers challenge the popular assumption that those who are educated take up skilled jobs while those with little or no education end up in informal, unskilled and semi-skilled work (Bennell 2010). Educated young farmers are seen to retain their educational identities, while also acquiring and utilising a specialised skillset (often entrepreneurial and innovation-based) needed to succeed in agriculture. As a result, they may help transform the sector by introducing new technologies, by finding new ways of managing risks, and thus changing the opportunity space in which others might engage. Whether engagement by educated youth in agriculture will really help to address the youth employment challenge remains to be seen, but this possibility should not be discounted.

Fourth, efforts to diversify youth livelihoods through the agriculture sector engages with ongoing debates on the demographic dividend. There is a narrative that new and younger farmers are needed who will bring new ideas, energy and technologies into the sector. Nevertheless, the side-hustling described in this article portrays a sense of temporality about young people's engagement with the sector that should raise questions about this narrative.

Finally, a recognition of side-hustling should be brought into youth employment policy. Side-hustling challenges orthodox conceptions of employment and the youth employment challenge, as well as the

standard set of policy responses. It would be a mistake to see side-hustling as a vindication of youth employment policies that place the burden of job creation on the shoulders of the young people themselves. While side-hustling can be read as young people's struggle against adversity, more than anything else it reflects the failure of the state to uphold its end of the intergenerational bargain.

Notes

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- 1 The Kenyan constitution defines youth as those aged 18–35 years.
 - 2 Seventy-eight per cent of Kenya's estimated population of 46 million people are aged below 34 years (NCPD 2013).
 - 3 Meaning he transacted most of the farm activities over the mobile phone with his mother and a farm worker.
 - 4 Swahili for 'to'.
 - 5 'Ka' here means something small and on the side.

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