Title: Young People, Agriculture, and Transformation in Rural Africa: An “Opportunity Space” Approach


Official URL: http://www.mitpressjournals.org/loi/itgg

More details/abstract: Over the last decade, both agriculture and young people have become increasingly prominent on African development agendas. Politicians, policymakers, and development professionals have confronted food price volatility, food insecurity, and the phenomenon of large-scale land grabs on the one hand, and the entrenched under- and unemployment among young people—the (youthful) human face of the phenomenon of jobless growth—on the other. It is perhaps not surprising that many have put two and two together, concluding that engagement in production agriculture (including crops, livestock, and fisheries) is an obvious (if not the obvious) opportunity through which to address the problem of limited economic opportunity for young people in rural areas. Associated with this view is the assumption that rural young people would be better off if they did not migrate to urban areas, thus avoiding exposure to risky and illegal behavior (sex, HIV/AIDS, drugs, crime) and potential entanglement in dangerous political activity.

Version: Final version

Terms of use: This article is copyright © MIT Press.
Youth and Economic Opportunities

*Produced in partnership with Making Cents International and the Citi Foundation*

---

**Lead Essays**

Arnest Sebbumba  Finding the Word for Entrepreneur in Luganda
Judith Rodin & Eme Essien Lore  Rethinking Youth Opportunity
Ángel Cabrera & Callie Le Renard  “Go to college...!”
Stan Litow  Innovating to Strengthen Youth Employment
Carl Schramm  University Entrepreneurship May Be Failing

---

**Case Narrative**

Jacob Korenblum  Frustration, Fearlessness, and Fortune
Martin Burt  The “Poverty Stoplight” Approach
Kevin McKague et al.  Reducing Poverty by Employing Young Women
Nell Merlino  Cracking the Glass Ceiling and Raising the Roof
Shai Reshef  Going Against the Flow in Higher Education
Fiona Macaulay  A World of Opportunity

---

**Analysis and Perspectives on Policy**

Nicholas Davis et al. | Trina Williams Shanks et al. | Ann Cotton
Michael Chertok & Jeremy Hockenstein | Akhtar Badshah & Yvonne Thomas
Jamie M. Zimmerman & Julia Arnold | John Owens
Beverly Schwartz & Deepali Khanna | James Sumberg & Christine Okali
Introductory Essays

5 Guest Editor’s Introduction
Making Cents International and Citi Foundation

7 Investing in the Economic Progress of Youth
Jasmine Thomas

Lead Essays

13 Finding the Word for Entrepreneur in Luganda
Arnest Sebbumba

19 Youth Opportunity: Rethinking the Next Generation
Judith Rodin and Eme Essien Lore

27 “Go to college, young men and women, go to college!”
Ángel Cabrera and Callie Le Renard

35 Innovating to Strengthen Youth Employment
Stanley Litow

43 University Entrepreneurship May Be Failing Its Market Test
Carl Schramm

Case Narratives

49 Frustration, Fearlessness, and Fortune: How Youth-Led Startups
Are Redefining Entrepreneurship
Jacob Korenblum

Fundación Paraguaya

55 The “Poverty Stoplight” Approach to Eliminating
Multidimensional Poverty: Business, Civil Society, and
Government Working Together in Paraguay
Martin Burt

Special Issue for the 2013 Global Youth Economic Opportunities Conference
Hathay Bunano
77 Reducing Poverty by Employing Young Women: Hathay Bunano’s Scalable Model for Rural Production in Bangladesh
Kevin McKague, Samantha Morshed, and Habibur Rahman

Count Me In for Women’s Economic Independence
97 Cracking the Glass Ceiling and Raising the Roof
Nell Merlino

University of the People
109 Going Against the Flow in Higher Education: Deliberately Including those Previously Excluded
Shai Reshef

Making Cents International
125 Toward a World of Opportunity
Fiona Macaulay

Analysis
149 TEN Youth: Unlocking Enterprise Growth by Focusing on the Fortune at the Bottom of the Talent Pyramid
Nicholas Davis, Ebba Hansmeyer, Branka Minic, Shantanu Prakash, and Subramanian Rangan

Trina R. Williams Shanks, Lewis Mandell, and Deborah Adams

Perspectives on Policy
185 Sourcing Change: Digital Work Building Bridges to Professional Life
Michael Chertok and Jeremy Hockenstein

197 YouthSpark and the Evolution of a Corporate Philanthropy Program
Akhtar Badshah and Yvonne Thomas

211 It’s All About the Jobs
Jamie McAuliffe, Jasmine Nahhas di Florio, and Pia Saunders
227 Who Teaches Us Most About Financial Programming in Africa?  
**Ann Cotton**

241 Hope or Hype? Five Obstacles to Mobile Money Innovations for Youth Financial Services  
**Jamie M. Zimmerman and Julia Arnold**

255 Future Forward: Innovations for Youth Employment in Africa  
**Beverly Schwartz and Deepali Khanna**

267 Young People, Agriculture, and Transformation in Rural Africa: An “Opportunity Space” Approach  
**James Sumberg and Christine Okali**

279 Offering Digital Financial Services to Promote Financial Inclusion: Lessons We’ve Learned  
**John Owens**

**About Innovations**

*Innovations* is about entrepreneurial solutions to global challenges. The journal features cases authored by exceptional innovators; commentary and research from leading academics; and essays from globally recognized executives and political leaders. The journal is jointly hosted at George Mason University's School of Public Policy, Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and MIT's Legatum Center for Development and Entrepreneurship. Topics of interest include entrepreneurship and global development, the revolution in mobile communications, global public health, water and sanitation, and energy and climate.

Authors published in *Innovations* to date include three former and one current head of state (including U.S. Presidents Carter and Clinton); a Nobel Laureate in Economics; founders and executive directors of some of the world’s leading companies, venture capital firms, and foundations; and MacArthur Fellows, Skoll awardees, and Ashoka Fellows. Recently the journal has published special editions in collaboration with the Clinton Global Initiative, the World Economic Forum, the Rockefeller Foundation, Ashoka, the Lemelson Foundation, and Social Capital Markets.

**Subscribe at**  
http://www.mitpressjournals.org/innovations
Introduction to the Special Issue

This youth-focused double issue is the product of a shared passion to improve livelihoods and economic opportunities among the world’s 1.8 billion youth. The publication is particularly timely given the increased focus being given to programming, funding, and research on the contributions of young people in a time of economic volatility. As the economy shows signs of recovery, the International Labor Organization reports that the global rate of youth unemployment hovers around 13%, just below the jobless rate at the peak of the crisis—this still represents an estimated 73 million young people. Despite staggering unemployment, our concern is not the scale of the problem. Instead, we are encouraged by the scale of the opportunity before us.

With the support and collaboration of the Citi Foundation, Making Cents International will leverage this Innovations issue as well as the annual conference, funder meetings, “Apply It!” webinars, blogs, crowd-sourced solution events, and other tools to engage a global network of partners to galvanize dialog, collaboration, and knowledge-building toward a collective global agenda for youth. Through its Collaborative Learning and Action Institute (Co-Lab), Making Cents will promote and improve economic opportunities for youth around the world. This year, the Co-Lab aims to strengthen knowledge management in the field, enhancing the scope and depth, diversity, and quality of how and what our people learn. Co-Lab gives our stakeholders and partners a new platform to both add value and benefit from knowledge management that translates ideas into solutions.

The following collection of analyses, research, and remarkable stories is a part of our new vision. In searching for authors, we weren’t searching for all the answers. We looked across diverse sectors for authors who could connect disparate concepts, innovations, theories, stories, or research results that move the youth economic opportunities agenda forward.

To highlight a few authors, first and foremost, we hear the voices of young people describing the hard work, ambition, fortitude, and support needed from others to bring innovations to old problems. Arnest Sebbumba, a young farmer, takes us into rural Africa and reveals the choices, challenges and opportunities facing agricultural entrepreneurs in Uganda. Social entrepreneur and Founder of Souktel, Jacob Korenblum, shares the thrills and spills of navigating entrepreneurship and identifying new opportunities in conflict-environments.
Featuring best practices and innovations in youth employment, Jamie McAuliffe’s case study of Employment for Education demonstrates how the NGO created a youth jobs model that reverses conventional supply-driven education processes that often widens unemployment. Meanwhile, Michael Chertok and Jeremy Hockenstein, of Digital Divide Data, highlight a growing $300 billion business process outsourcing industry, and the economic potential of Impact Sourcing as a “game-changer” for scaling skilled jobs among youth.

Innovations aimed at increasing financial education, access, and inclusion among young people is critical. Research from Jamie Zimmerman and Julia Arnold of the New America Foundation chronicles various models that incorporate mobile technology into youth financial services programs, illustrating both the promise and, notably, high-cost and regulatory barriers to implementation.

Underscoring the critical role of the private sector, Branka Minic, Nicholas Davis, and Ebba Hansmeyer and their team approach youth capacity from the perspective of developing talent within the corporate workforce. Their model enables businesses to find and develop talent to fuel growth, productivity, efficiency, and innovation while providing young people with the skills and knowledge they need to more easily secure employment. Simultaneously, Akhtar Badshah and Yvonne Thomas of Microsoft, reflect upon the company’s core philanthropic philosophy—providing information and communications technology (ICT) training that empowers individuals with high-demand skills.

We extend our sincere thanks and appreciation to the authors who invested their time, energy, and expertise to produce this special issue, which both embodies and inspires a guiding theme of collaboration. And, in that spirit, we ask readers to consider how they might apply these lessons and innovations to their own work, and share their results with us. Many of these authors will be featured in “Apply It” learning events throughout the coming year at www>YouthEconomicOpportunities.org. We look forward to your participation.

Making Cents International and Citi Foundation

This youth-focused double issue is the product of a shared passion to improve livelihoods and economic opportunities among the world’s 1.8 billion youth.
Over the last decade, both agriculture and young people have become increasingly prominent on African development agendas. Politicians, policymakers, and development professionals have confronted food price volatility, food insecurity, and the phenomenon of large-scale land grabs on the one hand, and the entrenched under- and unemployment among young people—the (youthful) human face of the phenomenon of jobless growth—on the other. It is perhaps not surprising that many have put two and two together, concluding that engagement in production agriculture (including crops, livestock, and fisheries) is an obvious (if not the obvious) opportunity through which to address the problem of limited economic opportunity for young people in rural areas. Associated with this view is the assumption that rural young people would be better off if they did not migrate to urban areas, thus avoiding exposure to risky and illegal behavior (sex, HIV/AIDS, drugs, crime) and potential entanglement in dangerous political activity.1

James Sumberg is a Fellow of the Knowledge, Technology, and Society Team at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, England. He has a longstanding research interest in African agriculture and is the co-convenor of the Future Agriculture Consortium’s work on young people, agriculture, and food in Africa.

Christine Okali coordinates the gender and social difference theme of the Future Agricultures Consortium at the Institute of Development Studies. She has studied agrarian change and gender over four decades, with a particular focus on West Africa.


© 2013 James Sumberg and Christine Okali
innovations / 2013 Global Youth Economic Opportunities Conference 267
Most of the policies and programs that attempt to engage young people in rural Africa with agriculture are essentially variants of “making markets (and globalization) work for the poor.” Framed with the language of enterprise, entrepreneurship, and value chains, they promote farming as a business and the professionalization of agriculture. Many such programs and projects provide training and access to microcredit, technology, and other resources. They also commonly insist on various forms of group action, for example, to engage in new markets.

We suggest that, in promoting the idea that young people living in rural areas would be better off if they just buckled down to an agricultural life, policymakers and the development community more generally are taking a position for which there is little if any evidence or supporting research. Furthermore, as enticing as the link between agriculture and employment for young people may first appear, it must be recognized that it flies in the face of longstanding evidence, that in at least some situations, both rural young people and their parents hold farming and rural life in very low esteem. Indeed, investing in children’s education so they can get out of farming and move on to formal work in the public or private sector is a long-established strategy in rural Africa.

In addition to the dominant discourse around market-based solutions—an important part of the background of the repeated referencing of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial attitudes and behavior, with some initiatives promising to transform job seekers into job creators—is the current focus in the development community on “impact” and “scaling up,” and the imperative to deliver “impact at scale.” From an analytical perspective, this focus foregrounds questions about the nature of the expected development gains (How many jobs over what time period? What kinds of jobs? Jobs for whom?) and the role of or necessity for structural change in delivering these jobs.

A critical factor here is that many, if not most, initiatives are based on an undifferentiated view of young people. The language says it all: “the youth,” as if they all have the same aspirations, talents, opportunities, access to resources, networks, interests, and needs, and will therefore benefit from the same limited array of interventions. This clearly is not the case, any more than it is for other longstanding and equally problematic categories, including the poor, women, or small farmers. While it is obvious that policy and programs cannot be designed to address the unique circumstances of every individual, one of the most important lessons from the last two decades of poverty-focused development is that context and difference matter enormously.

Our argument is that entrepreneurship-based policy and programs that address the job challenges facing young people in rural Africa need to be much more firmly grounded than is generally the case at present. Specifically, in terms of expectations, design, and implementation, they must take explicit account of the highly diverse and changing rural economic and social realities within which young people find themselves (and indeed help to shape), in addition to the diversity of the young people themselves.
In the next section, we first identify four categories that we believe are useful when thinking about work from a development perspective. We then present the notion of “opportunity space” to provide insight into the factors affecting the work opportunities available to young people in particular rural contexts. Following this, we draw on insights from feminist and gender analysis to argue that policy and programs aimed at rural young people must focus more on what roles social relations and social difference play in determining which young people are able to take advantage of which work and entrepreneurial opportunities. The final section identifies a number of policy and program implications.

OPPORTUNITY SPACE

It is widely appreciated that work opportunities, whether in the formal or informal sector, differ with respect to the skills required, level of remuneration, risks to personal safety, social status, social identity, and so on. While all these are important, from a development perspective that places poverty reduction, social justice, and social transformation at center stage, they provide an inadequate analytical base. Here we borrow from the literature on social protection to suggest that work opportunities can be seen to fall into four categories: preventative, protective, promotive, and transformative (table 1). In the remainder of this article, we focus primarily on the latter two.

“Promotive” work allows real incomes and capabilities to be enhanced and capital to be accumulated. Much formal-sector work would fall into this category, but there are also examples from Africa’s agricultural sector. We have previously written about young men and women in Brong Ahafo, Ghana, who use intensive, small-scale tomato production to accumulate capital over a relatively short time (“quick money”). With hard work and some luck, after several seasons of growing two or three tomato crops per year, these young people were able to save enough capital to build a small house, get married, establish a small kiosk, or fund an adventure (e.g., to Libya in search of work). Strikingly, few saw their future as being in agriculture, although 10 years after our original study, many still had some involvement in farming.

“Transformative” work is similar to promotive work, but it also addresses issues of social equity and exclusion. Labor laws that regulate worker rights are the most common means of addressing equity and exclusion in the formal sector, and there are some examples—including the Self-Employed Women’s Association in India—of organized efforts to make the informal sector more transformative. For women, transformative work might be regarded as that which increases their social status and contributes to the achievement of gender equity.

While each of the four work types is important, we suggest that, for rural young people, and particularly from a developmental perspective, the focus must be on the promotive–transformative end of the continuum. It is important to remember that rural livelihoods most often include several different economic activities, which may be located at different points along this continuum.
We use the term “opportunity space” to refer to “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.” In the light of well-established patterns of both short- and long-term migration, it is useful to distinguish between near and distant opportunity space.

The near opportunity space available to rural young people is to a significant degree shaped by two sets of factors. The first of these includes the characteristics of the particular rural location, and specifically the quality of natural resources and accessibility of markets. The interaction of resource quality and market accessibility goes a long way to determining the kinds of economic activities that are likely to be viable in a particular location. It is important to note, however, that as far as agricultural production is concerned, the relationship between natural resources, market accessibility, and economic viability is not always straightforward. For example, the urban demand for perishable horticulture products can be so strong that nearby producers invest heavily to overcome natural resource limitations, such as soil quality or the availability of water. The intensive vegetable production plots that can be seen in and around many African cities illustrate this well. Furthermore, there is a dynamic aspect to the relation between the quality of the natural resource base, market accessibility, and economic viability that is driven,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protective</td>
<td>Provides relief from the immediate effects of deprivation. These opportunities are directly dependent on government or other relief programs, and often form part of a broad system of benefits designed to act as a social safety net. <strong>Examples:</strong> food for work, labor-intensive public works schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preventative</td>
<td>Forestalls (rather than directly relieving) deprivation <strong>Examples:</strong> low-productivity, small-scale farming; low-paying, insecure, informal-sector work; job-guarantee schemes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotive</td>
<td>Allows real incomes and capabilities to be enhanced and capital to be accumulated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>As for promotive above; also addresses issues of social equity and exclusion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1.** Four categories of work based on the transformative social protection framework.

270

**innovations / Youth and Economic Opportunities**
for example, by new technology or production methods or by investment in new transportation infrastructure.

The second set of factors that shapes the near opportunity space is both social and relational. Social difference (including gender, age, class, ethnicity, level of education, and marital status), norms and expectations, and social relations and networks frame accepted ways of being and doing, as well as the kinds of activities and engagements that are considered appropriate and those that are not. In many societies, for example, women are expected to focus on household food security and welfare, which may have implications—at least during the early years of married life or when they have children—for their interest in and/or ability to engage in entrepreneurial activities, especially when these activities involve working away from home. Social difference and social relations are critical in determining how easily and under what conditions key resources (e.g., land, labor, credit, and access to services and information) can be accessed; family relations, be they supportive or constraining, can be particularly important for young people in the early stages of building a livelihood.

It is within an opportunity space shaped by both geography and social factors that an individual young person gravitates toward certain available work opportunities and away from others. This process reflects personal (individual) interests, aptitudes, and attitudes (i.e., toward risk, travel, etc.), as well as chance. It is true that the factors shaping opportunity space as we have outlined them here do not account for the rare innovator or entrepreneur who is able to imagine and act on something within an opportunity space that is simply not visible to others. However, it is critically important that those making policy and designing programs for rural young people do not get so caught up in the rhetoric of empowerment through entrepreneurship that they begin to believe that large numbers of young people are, or will be, able to become entrepreneurs. In other words, when entrepreneurship is defined as “any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment,” it obscures the fundamental relationship between entrepreneurship, innovation, and job and wealth creation.

Our basic argument is that characteristics of the rural location on the one hand and social difference, norms, and relations on the other, shape the opportunity space for members of particular social groups in particular contexts. The resulting opportunity space can be analyzed in terms of depth, diversity, and dynamism, characteristics associated with the types and densities of work opportunities available to different social groups. In other words, for different social groups, some opportunity spaces will contain more, and more varied, prospects for agriculture-related promotive or transformative work than others, a fact that must inform policy and program design.

Before leaving the discussion of opportunity space, we note that many people in rural Africa, young people included, are involved in several different economic activities, either in parallel or in sequence. This phenomenon of livelihood diversification may manifest itself as a shifting mix of farm and nonfarm activities, both in the short term and over the course of a working life, and it draws attention to
different understandings of the notions of work and career. We also note that many rural young people, both men and women, will at some point exploit part of their distant opportunity space; for example, through temporary or longer-term migration. However, rather than cutting all links with the rural world and agriculture, a decision to explore (and exploit) the distant opportunity space can result in new capital, skills, information, and networks being incorporated into the rural economy. A longer-term view of the dynamics between the near and distant opportunity space, and between rural and urban areas, is therefore essential.

While it is certainly possible to identify examples of promotive work in rural Africa, these must be seen against a background of widespread and persistent rural poverty associated with protective and preventative work. However, to achieve impact at scale will require promotive work to become the norm. This implies real structural change, which is unlikely to be an overnight (or painless) process. In any case, at least as agriculture has modernized in other contexts and regions, the creation of large numbers of promotive jobs has not generally been observed. This picture changes somewhat if the focus shifts from production agriculture to the agriculture and food system more broadly, where urbanization, changing patterns of labor force participation, and rising incomes result in increasing numbers of formal-economy and potentially promotive jobs in areas such as transport, processing and manufacture, food retail, and catering.

Central to the arguments in this essay is the categorization of work presented above and the factors determining the presence (or absence) of opportunities at the promotive–transformative end of the continuum within particular opportunity spaces. In the next section, we extend this analysis by drawing on the considerable feminist scholarship around the concept of social transformation, and the need to challenge norms of behavior that structure advantage and disadvantage if the status and position of disadvantaged groups are to be transformed.

TRANSFORMATION, SOCIAL RELATIONS, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Important and longstanding bodies of scholarship address the particular social, economic, political, and psychological dimensions of youth, as well as the various challenges faced by young people as they begin to make their way in the world. However, young people in rural Africa do not figure prominently in this literature, and when they do appear, the focus is mainly on health, HIV/AIDS, and risky sexual behavior.

For this discussion, therefore, we draw primarily from feminist scholarship. This is logical in the first place because of the various ways in which age and gender intersect, and because the understanding of power and power relations that is at the heart of feminist and gender analysis provides insight into these interactions. Second, as we have already indicated, the experience and opportunities of young people are gendered, and feminist literature provides some critical insights into the implications of gendered life experiences that can inform the design and implementation of development programs.
But we need to focus first on the link between development and transformation, particularly as we start with the conception of development that has poverty alleviation and social justice at its core. Feminist scholars and activists use the term “transformation” to refer to a change in the status and position of women (described as subordinate) relative to men. Transformation comes about through individual but especially through collective action that challenges entrenched institutions and power relations. Women’s agency is placed at center stage, but it is recognized that their ability to act may be limited. In relation to work, the focus is on the relative terms and conditions of employment for men and women, but more broadly on the relative value attributed to work done by men and women in all sectors and domains, including unpaid domestic work. In this context, transformative work is as much about being in a position to exercise choice as about the work per se, and the struggle is against women’s “constrained inclusion” and “adverse incorporation” into labor markets.

This understanding of transformation contrasts with the narrower notion of women’s economic empowerment that is common currency in much development practice. Here the emphasis is on individual women having control of their assets and income; as such, economic empowerment is presented as individual self-fulfilment, with clear ownership rights incentivizing individual as opposed to collective action. The anticipated economic and social impact of this model of empowerment—including expectations that women will forgo their own needs and interests in favor of their children and household—are then used to justify state and development agency investment that promotes women’s economic activities. A focus on women’s empowerment thus becomes “smart economics.”

The major limitation in this conception of economic empowerment is the fact that men and women exist and act within a network of social relations, and, moreover, that to some extent these social relations (with spouses, siblings, parents, friends, kin group members, etc.) both enable and constrain action. Decisions are seldom taken or implemented by men or women in isolation, with no reference to joint interests and projects or to the interests and projects of others. Thus, a simplistic conception of individual decisionmaking and individual action can be dangerously misleading.

We find these contrasting views of transformation and social relations useful because young people, whether male or female, also depend on support from others—on their social relations and networks—as they start to explore the local opportunity space, enter the world of work, and begin to build their livelihoods. Assistance comes in many forms, and parents and/or the domestic unit is rarely its only source. For example, our work with young, male, cash-oriented tomato growers in Ghana demonstrated clearly that the success of their activities depended on sisters, mothers, or aunts preparing their daily food; on family or others providing (through rental arrangements or otherwise) access to scarce riverside land; and on working together with friends on one another’s plots at peak times. These young men were anything but atomized, isolated, or individualized economic actors. On the other hand, the fact that in many cases they were not encumbered by other
social relations and obligations—arising, for example, through marriage or childbirth—gave them additional room to maneuver. There is a sense that young people, and perhaps particularly young men, occupy a social space where the rules are relaxed, thus giving them additional latitude to experiment and explore.

Although we are arguing that social relations must be taken seriously when both analyzing opportunity space and promoting individual entrepreneurial activity, we are at the same time forced to recognize the importance of social difference in determining which individuals can make use of particular opportunities. This is especially important in relation to young men and young women, largely because of entrenched views of what is appropriate behavior for one or the other at different points in the transition to adulthood, and the way in which these influence policy design, implementation, and outcomes.

Ideally, we should be seeking to understand the work and income-earning decisions (of young people, adults, households, and families) in the context of their economic and social lives as a whole. This would then shift the focus toward a greater understanding of the interdependency and linked lives of men and women, both within households and families and across generations. While network approaches and life-course analyses are well established in the social sciences, to date they have gained little traction in development practice. This kind of approach would specifically help to highlight the changing ways men and women engage in agriculture, rather than working on the assumption that one size (e.g., professionalized farmer) fits all, and at all times. It would also force us to agree that neither transformation nor empowerment look the same for everyone, nor are they fixed or permanent states.

This brings us to the links between transformation and economic empowerment on the one hand and entrepreneurship on the other. What is the theory of change supporting entrepreneurship as a key development intervention for rural young people? We suggest that in practice the entrepreneurship agenda is less about transformation in the feminist sense of changing structures and power relations (although there are initiatives to engage young people in political processes\(^1\)) and more about the inclusion of rural youth in the current structures and power relations. While this might be construed as a staged approach that initially emphasizes promotive over transformative work, there is no indication that this is actually the case, or that transformation in the broader sense is even on the agenda.

There is a real risk that the rhetoric of transformation and entrepreneurialism (with images of innovation, new opportunities and markets, risk-taking, but above all significant job creation—and implying at least the potential for transformation) is being used to mask initiatives that in reality are much less ambitious. Our sense is that many of these are essentially about creating opportunities for self-employment and petty trade, which may not have much potential to be promotive, to say nothing of transformative. To confuse self-employment and petty trade in the informal sector with entrepreneurship is not helpful.

If this analysis is anywhere near the mark, there are important questions to answer about the potential nature and scale of the anticipated development impact.
(i.e., How much new work? Will it be promotive? Where will it be located? Who
will be able to take advantage?), about value for money, and so on. It also raises
questions about the potential effect on the challenges, processes, and dynamics
that worry policymakers and development specialists; for example, under- and
unemployment, the migration of young people from rural areas, aging farm pop-
ulations, and the progressive hollowing-out of rural communities.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we are left with the question of whether
small-scale agriculture (or agriculture of any scale or type) combined with
microenterprise provides a credible basis for economic empowerment or transfor-
mation at scale; if it does, where, under what conditions, and for whom is this like-
ly? More broadly, what does this imply for the jobs agenda across both rural and
urban areas?

POLICY AND PROGRAM IMPLICATIONS

The new policy and development interest that has coalesced around young people,
agricultural production, and work in rural Africa is clearly to be welcomed.
However, in this essay we have argued that if policy and programs are to be suc-
cessful they will need to be much more firmly grounded in life-course analysis and
an appreciation of the various ways that rural men and women might use agricul-
ture to serve their needs and interests. Such a social and economic analysis must
be context-specific and must address difference and diversity in relation to both
rural locations and young people. Critically, it also must highlight the social and
relational aspects of young people’s lives and worlds. We have suggested that the
notion of opportunity space provides a framework that can facilitate such an analy-
sis.

More nuanced analysis along the lines we suggest should result in policies and
programs that are better grounded in the reality of difference among both young
people and rural locations. It is also important to begin to trim the unrealistic
expectations generated by the rhetoric of empowerment through entrepreneur-
ship. At present there is little evidence about how, in what situations, or for whom
these programs deliver promotive or transformative work opportunities.
Furthermore, much more needs to be done to understand the likely effects of the
modernization of the production side of African agriculture on the availability of
promotive or transformative employment opportunities for young people in rural
areas.

While it is tempting to conclude that agriculture can and should be a central
part of the solution to the employment problems faced by the present generation
of African rural young people, we suggest that the real development challenge is in
relation to future generations. If the transformation of African agriculture, and the
agrarian economy more broadly, proceed apace, the critical questions over the next
couple of decades are these: How many and what kinds of agriculture and food-relat-
ed jobs will be created? Where will they be located? What knowledge and skills will
be required? What kinds of education and training programs will be needed? Now
is the time to address these questions systematically. While entrepreneurship will certainly have a place, the young people who engage with the agriculture and food sector will increasingly do so as employees of formal-sector businesses. Crucially, the sector’s ability to attract and keep young talent will depend on the degree to which these positions are at the promotive–transformative end of the work continuum. However, if demand for these types of jobs continues to outstrip supply, with the exception of reputational risk, there may be little motivation for the sector to move in this direction.

3. For example, Getnet Tadele and Asrat Ayalew Gella, “A Last Resort and Often Not an Option at All’: Farming and Young People in Ethiopia,” IDS Bulletin 43, no. 6, 2012. On the other, hand some have argued that young people are leaving agriculture not because of a lack of interest but because changes in agrarian relations result in them being denied access to land. K. S. Amanor, “Family Values, Land Sales and Agricultural Commodity in South-Eastern Ghana,” Africa 80, no. 1, 2010. Others suggest that where there are business opportunities, young people who are keen to will go into agriculture, and to innovate. F. Proctor and V. Lucchesi, Small-Scale Farming and Youth in An Era of Rapid Social Change. London: IIED and The Hague: HIVOS, 2012.
4. “Social protection describes all initiatives that transfer income or assets to the poor, protect the vulnerable against livelihood risks, and enhance the social status and rights of the marginalised; with the overall objectives of extending the benefits of economic growth and reducing the economic or social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalised people.” S. Devereux and R. Sabates-Wheeler, “Social Protection for Transformation,” IDS Bulletin 38, no. 3, 2007: 25.
11. Depth refers to the number/extent of particular types of opportunities; diversity refers to the diversity of opportunities both within the agricultural sector and across other sectors; dynamism refers to the rapidity and extent of change.
Young People, Agriculture, and Transformation in Rural Africa

14. For example, in the UK the agrifood sector broadly conceived is a major source of work; however, many of these jobs are not located in rural areas, and the sector is characterised by low-skill and low-pay jobs. C. Lloyd, G. Mason, and K. Mayhew, eds., \textit{Low-Wage Work in the United Kingdom}, Russell Sage Foundation Case Studies of Job Quality in Advanced Economies. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2008.


