



West African Rural Youth: What Realities and Prospects?

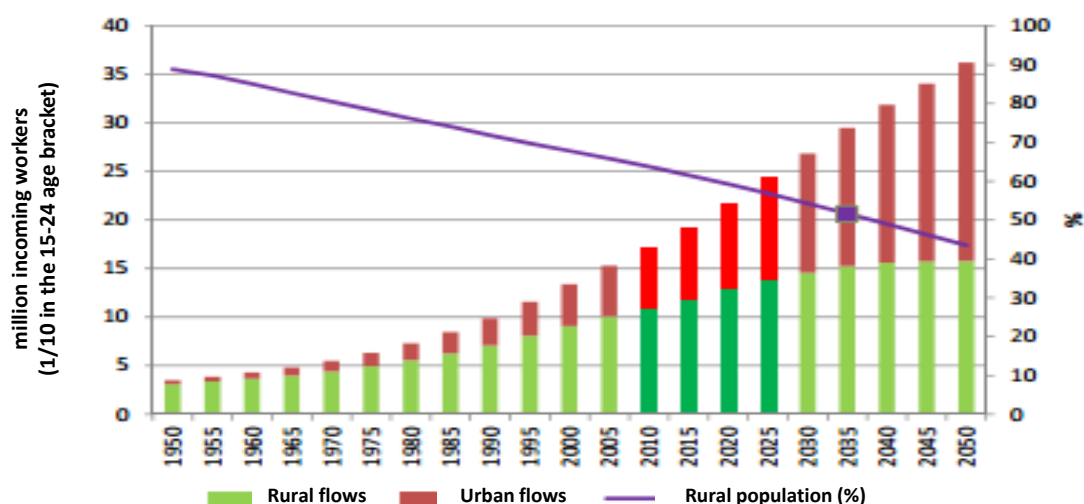
In recent years, more and more stakeholders have been taking an interest in the issue of ‘rural youth’ in West Africa. This body of work portrays a contradictory image of rural youths, who are shown as both an immense potential for countries’ futures and as a source of deep tension and instability (unemployment, under-employment, crime, etc.). Another paradox is that rural youths are facing difficult job prospects while at the same time small farmers’ organisations are worried about the continuation of their activities because there is no one to take over. This brief addresses the major issues evoked today when the ‘problem’ of rural youths is raised. The realities facing rural youths are diverse, but usually difficult. Faced with these constraints, what solutions are being considered? Agriculture is often touted as the main solution to the rural youth ‘problem’. Is it really? If not, what alternatives are there?

I. ‘Rural Youth’: A Demographic, Political and Definition Challenge

A. When and Why Did the Question of ‘Rural Youths’ Emerge?

The spectre of unemployment and under-employment. The recent interest in the ‘rural youth’ issue in Africa is partially tied to the results of forecasts of demographic trends and the job market. Because of the strong population growth, the number of workers entering the job market every year in sub-Saharan Africa should increase from 17 million to 25 million by 2025, reaching a total of 330 million. Two-thirds (approximately 200 million) will be in rural areas. Yet, agriculture is not very attractive, the industrial fabric is in its infancy, and education levels are generally low: the employment prospects for these young people entering the job market are limited. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 73 million jobs were created in Africa between 2000 and 2008, but only 16 million were for those between the ages of 15 and 24. Already today, some 60% of unemployed Africans are youths and, in most African countries, the youth unemployment rate is twice as high as that of adults [1, 2].

A political ‘problem’? The growing interest in the issue of ‘rural youths’ is partially tied to political worries about the risk of instability that these ‘disaffected’ youths represent. In France and the United States, rural youths drew the interest of governments and researchers during periods of social upheaval [3]. In West Africa, ink started to flow on the subject of rural youths starting in the 1990s with the conflicts and political violence in rural areas (notably in Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia) [4]. More recently, the development of terrorist movements in the Sahel has certainly fuelled States’ and their technical and financial partners’ interest in ‘rural youths’ who are important players in these dynamics. According to World Bank research, one out of two of the young people who join insurgent movements say that unemployment was their main motivation [2]. For Ibrahim Mayaki, Executive Secretary of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), youth unemployment is a ‘ticking time bomb’.



Graph 1. Annual Cohorts of Rural and Urban Workers in Sub-Saharan Africa (1950-2050) [1]

An agricultural challenge. Farmers' organisations are also taking up the 'youth' issue more and more. Paradoxically given the high rates of under-employment and unemployment, West African agriculture is facing difficulties finding replacement farm managers and mobilising workers for field work. In these conditions, farmers' organisations are wondering how to 'keep' young people in farming. ROPPA and its national platforms are creating or thinking

'We have a serious labour problem.'

of creating 'youth committees' to better understand young people's concerns and reply to them. In its strategy guideline paper, the herders and leaders of the Association pour la Promotion de l'Élevage en Savane et au Sahel (APESS) worry about 'carrying on activities'. As APESS's vice president wrote, 'if our children continue our work, we are saved; otherwise, we just don't know' [5].

B. Who Are the Rural Youth?

The definition itself is problematic. According to the United Nations Organization, youths are people between the ages of 15 and 24 years old. For the African Union, the definition of youths covers the segment of the population aged 15 to 35 years old. However, in West African societies, it is not rare for a married 45-year-old man to be seen as 'young'.

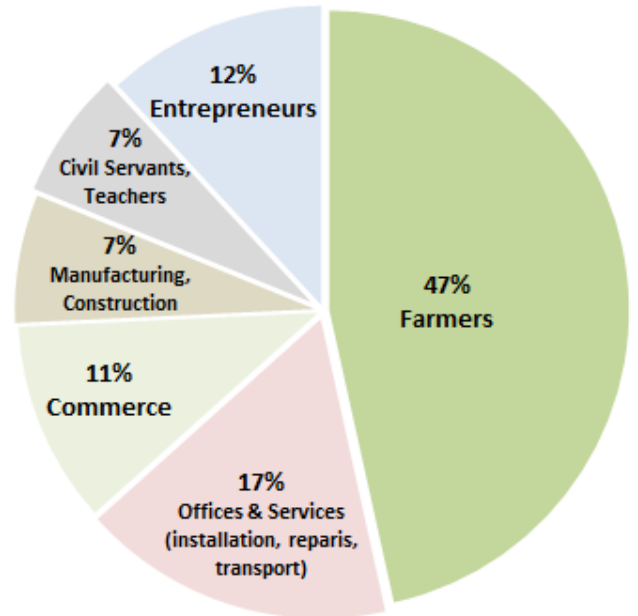
Youth is not a question of age. Indeed, the definition of 'young' for West and Central African men depends above all on social position. Men become adults when they are able to ensure their reproduction and that of their families on their own. Girls generally become 'women' after they are married, often before they turn 20. Being young is not a matter of age in the biological sense of the term, but a social and cultural construct in relation to other generations and in relation to access to the attributes and resources that give one a 'voice' [4].

Towards eternal youth? Some studies have shown that this transitional period that defines 'youth' is tending to become longer. An analysis conducted in three African capital cities (Dakar, Yaoundé and Antananarivo) shows that achieving the three milestones of entry into adulthood—leaving one's family of origin, entering the professional world, and getting married—is not as easily done as before because of worsening living conditions in these three African cities [6]. This lengthening of youth, associated with a state of irresponsibility, is a frequent source of inter-generational tension [7].

Rural vs. urban: an outmoded opposition. The definition of 'rural' is even more problematic. In West Africa, trajectories are neither linear nor fixed. Many young people born in rural areas leave for cities, either seasonally or temporarily. They are therefore not exclusively rural or urban. The massification of education, the diversification of rural activities, and the return to their villages of origin by city dwellers facing the urban economic crisis, particularly youths, has brought urban and rural modes of life closer together [4].

Rurality and farming are not the same thing. Often, rural youths are lumped together with young farmers. Yet, rural jobs have become considerably more diverse, and this diversification affects youths and women in particular. According to certain studies (see Graph), more than half of young workers in rural

areas work in areas other than farming in Africa. Most young people involved in agriculture, particularly women, have other activities at the same time (processing, small trading, etc.).



Graph 2. Main Occupations Held by Youths in Rural Africa [2]

The limitations and risks of a uniform definition. There is therefore not 'one' but 'several' types of rural youth. This category is neither homogenous, nor fixed, nor self-contained. Yet, discourse has a tendency to homogenise this population and its aspirations: 'young people no longer want to stay in farming', 'young people don't like physical labour', etc. This simplification is all the more problematic as it generally forms a basis for policy guidelines. A study devoted to rural youths in Europe and the United States thus stated that 'youth' is just a word that we spontaneously and unconsciously manipulate, as is 'rural', which remains a vague expression that everyone tends to use in function of his or her interests or preconceived ideas in order to accentuate or minimise certain observations [3].

More and More Visible but Still No More Voice

In recent years, rural youths have become more visible in the media, political discourse and social science research. They are still, however, a prototypical example of what sociologist Bourdieu calls an 'object class': other people produce discourse and studies on rural youth, who do not have control of their 'social image' [3]. Anthropologist Kojo Amanor thus shows how, in Ghana, an 'anti-youth' discourse emerged among landowner elders and heads of family estates: 'This discourse portrays youths as irresponsible, disrespectful, flighty and lazy, reluctant to help their elders with farm work and preferring to run away to cities.' This portrait of youth turned into national discourse, blaming the decline of agriculture on the aging of the farming population and young people's refusal to help their parents [4].

II. Rural Youths' Realities: Diverse and Often Difficult

A. Rural Youths and their Families: Misunderstanding, Tension, Exclusion

A break between 'youths' and 'elders'? According to surveys of herders' organisations, the first signs of a break between the generation of youths and their parents' generation could already be seen earlier, but this break has intensified. The herders who contributed to APSS's strategy guidelines paper thus emphasised the difficulty they had in understanding their children: 'it is impossible to have a meaningful dialogue with [our] children because of the education [influence] from the streets.' Some are aware of adults' share of the responsibility, as this Cameroonian herder and leader stated: 'those who don't have anyone to take over from them are partially to blame for it because fathers hire shepherds and do not involve their children enough in their livestock activities, and I think that the fact the number of herds is on the rise is telling because children who become independent buy cattle for themselves. So, you can't say that they don't like [herding] [5].

Position and work little recognised. The research on rural youths and their families focus mostly on relationships within family farms. Russian economist and sociologist Alexander Tchayanov stated, as early as the start of the 20th century, that family reproduction (economic and food) is ensured by structural and unrecognised labour, mainly done by women and youths. This is family farming's strength compared to other production structures based on wage relations, but it is also a source of growing tension [8]. Youths generally do not receive wages when

they participate in their families' agricultural activities, even though they may receive 'gifts' in kind or money. Yet, they have more and more needs and desires that require monetary income to satisfy.

Relations marked by the social and political context. The relations between youths and their families on farms are influenced by a certain number of elements, such as access to natural resources, how young people's labour is valued, the availability of farm labour, and the possibilities young people have to migrate or work elsewhere. In general, the greater the land pressure, the more these relations are complicated. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, the high intra-family tensions are explained in particular by the little interest that the political elites have paid to the development of family farming and consequently to the especially tense social and agrarian context [4].

Tensions worsened by the commoditisation of agriculture. The evolution of agrarian systems in Ghana shows that the spread of commercial plantations and sharecropping has led to an erosion of family solidarity and the exclusion of the poorest youths. As agriculture becomes commoditised and dependent on the use of expensive inputs to optimise profits, young people's access to land has come to depend on capital. Family belonging thus no longer guarantees young people access to land, which elders often prefer to sell or rent to people who have more resources [4].

B. Rural Youth and Agriculture: Difficulty Finding One's Place

Do young people like farming? The testimony gathered often emphasises young people's lack of interest in farming, seen as an 'inferior' activity. However, there are little empirical data on this subject and it is difficult to answer this question given the wide variety in situations. The image young people have of agriculture often seems negative of course. Agriculture's 'repellent' nature comes from several factors: the work is physically difficult, incomes are low, it is difficult to start out, and rural areas often lack minimal infrastructures (electricity, leisure), making living conditions 'austere'. Other testimony does however indicate that young people take up farming gladly when it is accessible and pays well [7].

Difficult access to land. Access to land is particularly difficult for young people who want to take up farming, either because there is little available land or because land is far from the village and/or requires considerable investment to become arable (notably when it is forest land). The customs in force also tend to give control over land to older men. Land grabbing and concentration make it even more difficult for young people to access land [7]. The difficulties accessing land are even greater for women because of inheritance law and customs.

A devalued activity. Education, notably secondary education, contributes to the 'de-qualification' of rural youth. Agricultural skills are neglected and agriculture itself is put down as a 'last recourse' reserved from those who do not succeed in school [7].

Financial services' weakness. Most rural finance stakeholders are reluctant to offer their services (loans, savings, insurance) to rural youths, who are seen as 'risky' (little or no guarantees). In this context, funds destined to grant seasonal loans to young farmers at rates lower than those applied by financial institutions have been created in most countries. But the reach of these funds is often limited. Most have limited lifespans and resources. Recipients are often poorly monitored, which leads to loan recovery failings and limits the ability to continue to grant loans to other young people [9].

'When I started farming, I thought it was demeaning for someone who had an education.'

C. Rural Youths Mobilised but Barely in Agriculture

Committed rural youths. Young people are highly mobilised. Many of them believe they have ‘better understanding of their environment’ and are more ‘open minded’, which they associate with schooling. Indeed, schools provide the ability to read and write and increase access to information, the media and the law. The media provide points of comparison that can help set aspirations. Travel outside the village—linked to more and more frequent migratory phenomena—helps provide young people with references that make them determined to improve living conditions in their villages. The rise of social media and communication technologies has increased the possibilities for discussion and mobilisation.

Political mobilisation. Rural youths are very mobilised collectively around politics. In the 1990s and 2000s, this mobilisation notably took the form of rural militias in Côte d'Ivoire, young combatant groups in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and political or religious associations in Benin [4]. More recently, young people played a key role in overthrowing Blaise Compaoré in Burkina Faso. Rural youths are also heavily involved in local development projects.

Mobilisation unique to the shifts in rural societies. Writings on the subject have long tended to consider that the mobilisation of rural youths was mainly ‘steered’ by what was happening in urban areas. Yet, studies conducted starting in the 1990s, following the conflicts and political violence in rural areas (Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone and Liberia notably) have shown that this mobilisation had agrarian roots. The positions and prospects of rural youth are part of a long-term political context; they are not merely the outcome of economic, political and social crises. The implication of rural youths in youth associations, watch committees and development projects shows their ability to take positions to have access to citizenship and public resources [4].

Little collective mobilisation in agriculture. The degree of organisation among young people in farming is, however, still relatively low. There are different types of young farmers’ organisations: some were created by the public authorities (the ‘Fadas’ in Niger, the Fédération Nationale des Jeunes Professionnels Agricole du Faso in Burkina Faso); others were formed on the initiative of young farmers’, often after leaving training centres (the Fédération Nationale des Jeunes Ruraux in Mali); and others have been set up by farmers’ organisations (ROPPA’s youth committees). All of these organisations are generally small in size and not very dynamic. According to a study by the Conseil National de Concertation et de Coopération des Ruraux (CNCR) youth committee in Senegal, this situation is caused by a certain number of barriers. In rural Senegal, the young people actively involved in the organisations are stereotyped as being ‘lazy’. They are the life-force of their families and have a better image in field work than in the activism of these organisations. Since they lack experience, they have a tendency to join existing organisations rather than create their own. They often have a hard time getting their demands heard in societies where it is seen as poor form for young people to question their elders. Thus, they are often kept outside decision-making bodies. Because of this difficult integration, they tend to lose interest in farmers’ organisations [9].

‘In farmers’ organisations, 90% of the people are old; young people practically don’t exist.’

Young and Female: Two Obstacles in FOs?

Few women are individual members of farmers’ organisations. The vast majority of those who join do so through women’s groups. After joining, they have difficulty attaining positions of responsibility. In villages, representation is by household. Women are generally kept out of positions of power and decision making when it comes to access to and control over the means of production [10].

Stronger involvement in criminal movements? As far back as the colonial and pre-colonial periods, young people were more involved in protest and resistance activities, and also in crime and warfare [4]. Today, terrorist groups recruit notably among the rural youth. For several years, Boko Haram in particular has been recruiting thousands of young Nigeriens and Cameroonians. According to Manassé Aboya Endong, Executive Director of the Research Group on Parliamentarianism and Democracy in Africa, it is easy for the terrorist group to recruit people in poor regions such as northern Cameroon where close to 500 young people are said to have recently disappeared: ‘These youths were fuel sellers or motorcycle taxi drivers, earning two euros per day on average. After the kidnappings and ransoms, they can earn 1 million CFA francs (1,500 euros).’¹

Youths and religion: ‘manipulation’? The involvement of young people in terrorist movements has pushed the issue of religion and youths to the fore. Religion has for several decades been a factor in mobilisation in West Africa. In Africa as elsewhere, these recent decades have been marked by intense religious proliferation reaching young people in particular, many of whom have converted to ‘independent’ churches and a type of Islam different from that which has existed in the region for centuries. As in other areas, young people are often described as forming a ‘rudderless’ population that is therefore easily for these new religious currents to ‘manipulate’. While there may be a degree of manipulation of young people, several researchers have also emphasised that religion is a useful

mode of expression for populations in their desire for social and political mobilisation. Surveys of young people involved in various Christian and Muslim groups in Senegal and Burkina Faso have shown that puritanical and absolutist dynamics are mobilisation instruments used by adepts to protest their social and political surroundings and the traditional religious order [11].

¹ <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/45350/politique/terrorisme-quand-boko-haram-recrute-au-cameroun/>

D. Migration and Cities: Often Key Stages in the Lives of Rural Youth

The importance of migration. Migration towards other rural areas or cities is increasingly part of rural youths' trajectories. It is often part of young peoples strategies to get started by allowing them to gather the funds to launch an agricultural activity. Migration is mostly national or regional. Between 2000 and 2005, inter-African migration involved 17 million people. This migration is one response to demographic stakes and has positive effects on the job market and the transfer of capital. And yet, it is increasingly difficult today with the current conflicts and insecurity in the Sahel [1].

Youths in cities. Young migrants head in part to urban zones. There, they work mainly in the informal sector, especially small

commerce and services (street vendors, cleaning women). According to a study conducted in Senegal, these activities are more poverty traps than real jobs able to allow young people to truly profit from their work [10]. Yet, cities continue as a whole to draw rural youths because they have the best services and infrastructures and offer better paid job opportunities.

'Ultimately, it's the best profession because we are free and can earn enough money.'

Rural migration. Simultaneously with migration flows of rural youths to cities, there are migration flows from rainfed farming zones to developed or irrigated farming zones, particularly during the dry season. Young people work in farming and sign contracts with local farmers that are generally based on salaried work or sharecropping [10].

A More Tranquil Generation?

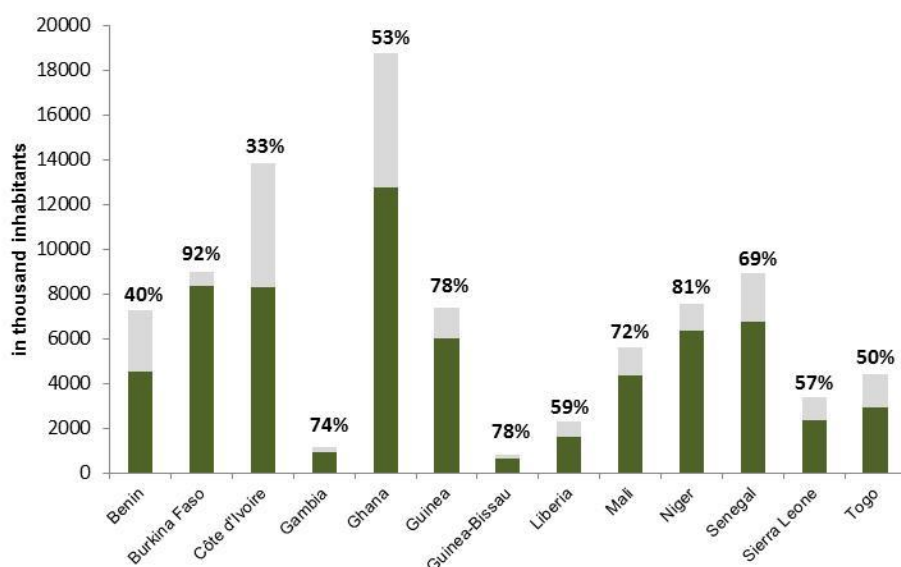
Bernard Lecomte collected a range of materials (interviews, publications) between 2010 and 2012 on rural youth in six West African countries and France. Sociologist Loïc Barbedette reviewed this research in light notably of the interviews he himself conducted with rural youth between 1971 and 1983 in West Africa. According to him, this comparison reveals steady traits unique to youth: tension with adults, discomfort with being dependent and aspirations to leave, desire to communicate with other young people, and difficulty making oneself heard and 'recognised'. The comparison also reveals new elements. Today, adults are no longer opposed to the departure of their children and are sometimes even opposed to their return to the village. They consult young people more and give them more importance. Young people have also changed. Some believe they can succeed in the countryside and set up there. They are more confident in the face of adults and dare take on responsibilities. These changes are said to be in part due to a weakening of the 'father society' linked to the occasional inability of some heads of household to support their families. Heads of household have thus become 'dependent' on the activities of their wives and children. Thus, it seems we are witnessing a reversal in the relation to the future of yesterday's youth and today's youth, who seem more relaxed about their future (http://inter-reseaux.org/IMG/pdf/Jeunes_ruraux_d_Afrique_de_l_Ouest.pdf).

III. Agriculture as a Solution to the Rural Youth Problem?

A. Agriculture: An Immediate Solution to Demographic Challenges

Bet on the dominant sector. Many stakeholders (NGOs, international organisations, research, farmers' organisations, etc.) state that agriculture is mainly where young people will be able to find their place in the years to come. As an average of 65% of the active population is working in agriculture in West Africa (excluding Nigeria where only 20% of the workforce is involved in agriculture), job alternatives in other sectors are in effect limited in the short and medium term [1].

Make agriculture accessible and attractive. These stakeholders agree on a series of crucial measures to allow rural youths to remain in farming: facilitate access to land, finance and suitable training and advisory schemes; improve infrastructures (roads, electricity, leisure) in rural areas; encourage young people to participate in the elaboration of programmes and policies; and foster higher agricultural incomes, which would make it possible to increase rural demand and rural diversification dynamics.



Graph 3. Agricultural Workforce (FAOSTAT)

How to modernise farming? Beyond these ‘consensus’ conditions, positions diverge as to which production model is best suited to ‘draw’ young people to farming? Some claim that agricultural ‘modernisation’ (understood as the Green Revolution model: mechanisation, improved seed, fertiliser, etc.) is necessary to make farming more productive, less difficult and more attractive for young people. This vision often leads to ‘disqualifying’ family farming and developing projects that aim to offer land to urban investors or start-up grants to young people from outside the farming milieu, such as is the case in Kwara State, Nigeria [12]. Yet, one is obliged to note that such approaches have often failed. While the performance and sustainability of agribusiness models are not proven, family farming has proven its economic, social and environmental performance when policy conditions are not too unfavourable [13].

Favour job-intensive systems. The ability of farming to provide jobs varies according to the type of agriculture. Some agricultural production systems—such as mixed crops and livestock farming with soil preparation—are labour-intensive (more than one worker per hectare), while others—such as highly motorised cereal crops—are less labour-intensive (one worker for more than 100

hectares). Generally speaking, practices that aim to increase production and per-hectare value added, reduce variability or improve fertility generate jobs. Agroecology has thus emerged as a production model with a positive impact on jobs. Yet, production practices must not be too difficult in order to be sufficiently attractive. A certain form of farm mechanisation could make farm work less back-breaking without necessarily cutting the number of jobs, and the time saved could be used for other tasks [14].

A pro-family farming debate. According to several experts, these different elements plead in favour of supporting family farming, which is the main purveyor of jobs in West Africa and is relatively labour-intensive. This does however require improving working conditions on these farms and working on intra-family relations, which have been little studied to date [8]. According to some, the existence of large-scale farms can simultaneously facilitate the marketing of and access to inputs and credit for family farms while offering job opportunities—either temporary or permanent jobs—to young people [1]. There is, however, some debate on the possibility of these two agricultural models coexisting.

B. What If the Solution Is Not (Only) Agricultural?

The mirage of industrialisation. Governments and international organisations have long promoted mainly industrialisation and shoring up of urban dynamics to launch a development process. Agricultural productivity is deemed too low and expected progress too slow to allow a rapid exit out of poverty. The solution for the rural poor—and therefore most rural youth—was said to be in cities. This position has been pushed less and less since the 2008 crisis. The absence of significant industrialisation despite the rapid urbanisation in sub-Saharan Africa in recent years has made this option little credible in the short term [1].

The land and economic limits of the ‘agricultural solution’. That said, more and more farmers’ organisations and expert groups emphasise the land limits with which agriculture is faced in a context of strong population growth. According to FAO data confirmed by general censuses and recent work by farmers’ organisations, 75% of family farms in sub-Saharan Africa have less than two hectares. Each average farm worker is said to have a market of only one non-agricultural worker for his or her agricultural and food products—explaining the low levels of average agricultural incomes. With the exception of a few specific production systems (periurban market gardening, intensive stock farming, specialised crops) well-connected to dynamic and well-paying markets, these farms have huge difficulties producing enough to pay their workers. In several zones, the high population growth and poor job prospects outside farming have led to a splintering of farms, some of which have shrunk to the point of

falling below the economic viability threshold. In these regions, it is difficult to imagine how agriculture will be able to offer jobs to all the young people entering the job market without simultaneously making farming systems precarious and deteriorating natural resources [13].

Accompanying people out of agriculture? In these conditions, some people are beginning to question the relevance of policies aiming to maintain a large swath of the agricultural population in survival conditions, probably preventing the emergence of viable family farming with production structures and factor endowments sufficient to generate decent incomes for workers. Agricultural policies should thus support in priority those family farms that have the capacity to generate sufficient revenue. For poor and very poor family farms—which are of course a reservoir of jobs but jobs that pay workers poorly—policies aiming to accompany a process of diversifying non-agricultural rural activities would be more relevant [13].

Create jobs upstream and downstream from farming. The main job reservoir would thus above all be upstream from production (supply of inputs and equipment, for example) and in downstream segments of value chains (processing and marketing agricultural products). In addition, this production environment is an essential condition for family farming to evolve. Accompanying the growth of small and medium-sized companies and industries should therefore be a priority in public policies [13].

C. Training: A Crucial but Neglected Stake

Training essential for professional integration. Education has advanced in recent years in West Africa, but not enough. School attendance rates are still low in Mali and Burkina Faso, with barely 40% of children aged 5 to 17 attending compared to 60% to 70% in Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. Secondary education is developing but not training aiming to prepare for jobs: only 9% of secondary school students are enrolled in technical schools or vocational training. These gaps hinder young people’s vocational integration strategies. In Senegal, for example, among unemployed youth,

46% are illiterate and 28% have only received primary schooling [10].

Little appropriate agricultural and rural training. Agricultural training courses were set up following independence in all countries in the region. Technical and little coordinated with realities in the field, these schemes were cut back considerably in the 1980s. Today, existing schemes are often limited in time (three to five years in general), have limited resources, and only

concern a small number of young people. As a whole, the agricultural models that are proposed are out of step with farming conditions. Most students leaving these schemes favour civil service and levels above farming (technicians and engineers to supervise cash crops). Thus, in Benin for example, only 10% of the 490 students trained in agriculture by the State in 2002 have set up as farmers [15, 16].

Connect training to professional realities. Positive evolutions can nevertheless be seen. Work-study schemes facilitate young people's entry into jobs. Several schemes work in conjunction with other rural stakeholders (professional organisations, integration platforms, financial institutions), facilitating the integration of young people [16].

Adapt training to rural youths' polyvalence. Agricultural and rural training must correspond to the specificities of farming as a career. The majority of farmers are multi-skilled (diverse crops, combined livestock and crops) and often have multiple activities (processing, carpentry, masonry, etc.) This implies including aspects related to rural crafts in training courses so that young people can earn incomes during the dry season. Beyond technical knowledge, lasting employment of young people also requires a

'We didn't train as farmers. We learned on the job.'

foundation of general knowledge (literacy, mathematics, management, civics, health, etc.) [15].

Involve families and integrate basic education. Families play an often indispensable role in young people's getting started, in terms of access to land, human, financial or material support, or equipment to launch activities. It is therefore important for the success of a new undertaking that training schemes involve young people's families [15].

Make these schemes sustainable and expand them. Today, training schemes generally concern few young people and depend on project financing. While a share of self-financing is possible (sale of products/services, sale of continuing education to companies, tuition from families/young people), it cannot be the only source of financing and generally does not exceed 10% of the total budget. Several paths are being explored to ensure the economic sustainability of schemes, notably by seeking 'hybrid' public-private financing modes: setting up national vocational training support funds, regionalising financing and implementation of vocational training, experimenting with local taxation conducive to youth integration [16].

IV. Conclusion: And Public Policies in All This?

Pro-youth policy commitment. For several years, the regional and national authorities have asserted their determination to tackle the youth issue. In 2009, the African Union launched the African Youth Decade. The governments of Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal have set up a national job policy targeting young people. The measures mainly concern training, the distribution of finance and microloans, and access to information on the job market.

Resources not up to the challenges. However, the programmes and resources deployed remain small. Actions are usually isolated and scattered. In most countries, the multiplicity of institutions in charge of promoting, financing and implementing youth job programmes, along with the lack of procedure harmonisation, hinders intervention efficiency. Often, poor financial management has contributed to the precarious and unsustainable nature of job creation programmes for young people [10].

In addition, national policies address young people in general, seeing them as a homogenous group. The few measures devoted to rural zones tend to only look at agricultural activities and leave non-agricultural activities and rural living conditions on the sidelines. Most policies are based on the premise—which has yet to be proven—that job opportunities will come from agribusiness [7].

These policies also tend to reproduce the 'shopping list' syndrome: they list all measures to implement (training, land, credit, information, infrastructures, services, etc.). Yet, it is essential to prioritise measures when resources are limited and above all avoid disconnecting the issue from the overall context. Indeed, rural youth challenges are deeply linked to the demographic, agrarian, economic, social and political transformations underway. The political participation of rural youths will therefore be crucial [7].

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