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Youth Aspirations and Employment Prospects:

Evidence from youth-led participatory
research in Rwanda

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Key Messages:

- The main aspirations for young people in Rwanda include *acquiring formal education, owning business, acquiring good job and being financially independent*.
- Youth aspirations are gendered, with young Rwandese women still facing significant barriers, especially in the areas of education, financial inclusion and relatively low coping strategies as compare to men.
- To effectively support and empower young people to achieve their future goals, the government of Rwanda and its development partners need to actualize the inclusion of youth at all levels of development.

Background

Rwanda has a significant youth population (between the ages of 15 and 30) and facing a myriad of challenges and experiences in their quest for employment opportunities as a result of various factors, including historical context, social dynamics, education, economy, just to mention a few. The Government of Rwanda has placed empowerment for young people at the core of national development by enacting several policies and programmes to support the youth. These include: The Private Sector Development and Youth Employment Strategy (PSDYES), National Youth Policy 2015, National Strategy for Transformation (NST1, 2017-2024), National Employment Policy (NEP) of 2015, among others. The relevance of youth empowerment is signified by the fact that the policy efforts notwithstanding, youth unemployment remains relatively high, estimated at 21.7% (higher than 17.9% among the general population). In this policy brief, we discuss the findings of study on youth aspirations and employment prospects in Rwanda.

The research targeted Rwandan young women and men of ages between 16 and 30 years old, from both rural and urban settings. Data was collected from a total of 16 districts spread across the four provinces and the city of Kigali. The study was anchored on PASGR's Utafiti Sera¹ (Research-Policy) unique framework, that adopted a youth-led participatory research approach enabling the inclusion of young women and men in the research process right from the inception, collection preliminary views, development of study tools, collection of data, validation and dissemination.

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

Key Findings

Youth's main aspirations and hopes for the future

Young people's aspirations describe their hopes, dreams, and goals for the future. These aspirations often cover a wide range of areas, including but not limited to educational pursuits, career goals, relationships, personal development, social impact, independence, travel and exploration. Aspirations during youth-hood are often influenced by a combination of personal interests, family expectations, cultural values, and societal trends. The literature also shows that socio-economic, income and social class correlates to aspirations, with higher levels relating to higher aspirations, although these can be altered by the effects of beliefs and attitudes (Sewell and Shah, 1968).

The quantitative data from this study illustrated in Figure 1, show that most respondents consider themselves to be successful in life if they have created a good business (71% of the respondents), have acquired a good job (66% of the respondents) or when they are rich (53% of respondents). The findings show that both young men and women have agreed on the mentioned three aspects of successful life nearly to the same extent. Comparatively, young women appeared to aspire to aspects like providing support to the community, independence and freedom from the parents and happily married to a good a spouse as aspects of successful life at higher percentage compared to young men. The observed differences are associated to the dynamic processes through which aspirations are formed, shaped and influenced. Such dynamics include but not limited to economic context, social norms and customs, parental and peer influence, media, previous attainment and gender related norms, and relates to the local context.

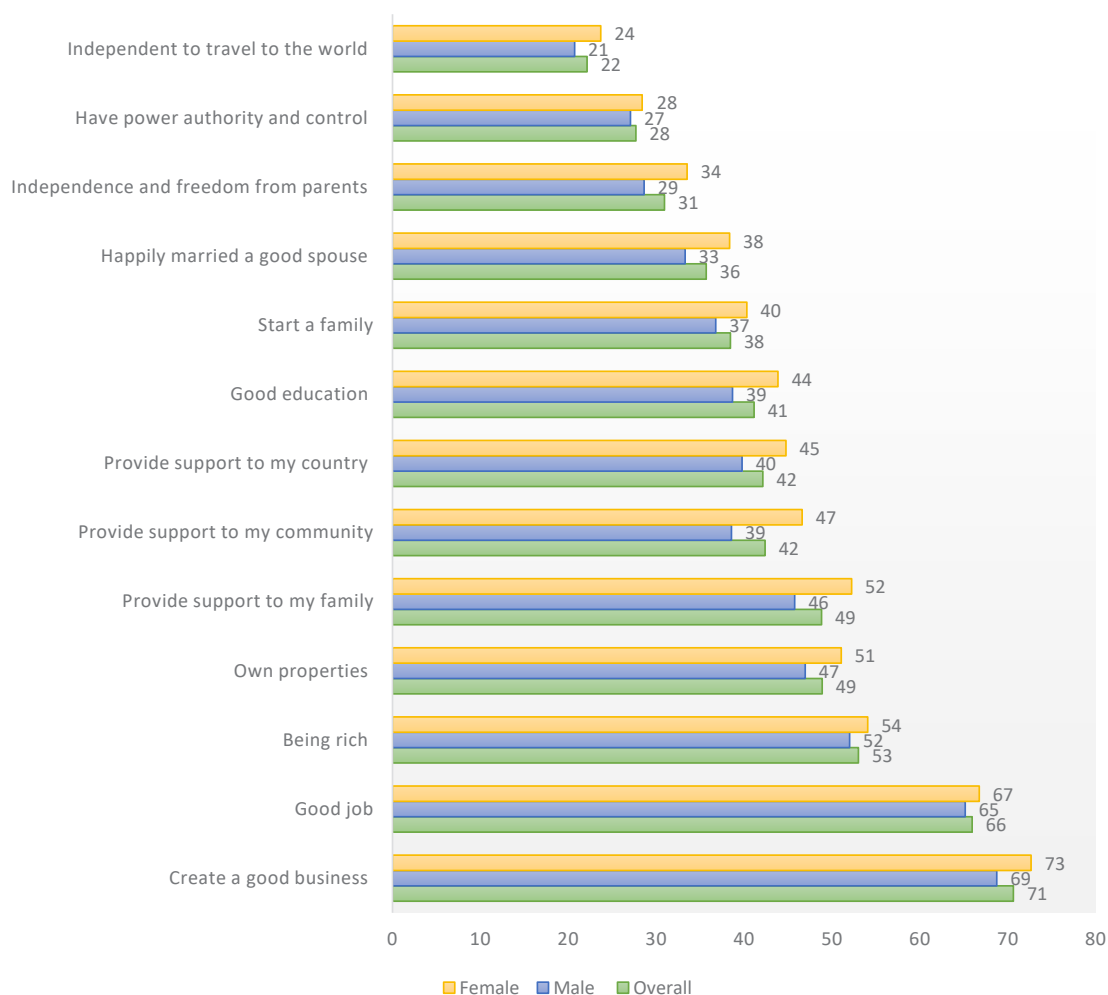


Figure 1: Respondent's Consideration of success in Life by gender

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

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

These results show that young men and women are being unenthusiastic to pursue an agriculture-based livelihood which corroborates findings of a stream of research on youth aspirations across different African continent (Leavy and Smith, 2010). This observation remains true for both rural and urban young men and women. Barriers include heavy financial investments, traditional

forms of subsistence farming and negative attitudes towards farming. These realities may impact Rwanda's initiatives to revitalize the agriculture sector, especially in efforts to make it more attractive for young people.

From the study, higher education is often framed in terms of broadening career opportunities and youths' abilities to support their livelihood in the future. But it is more than that. Higher education attainment can broaden opportunities for youth to feel respected, secure a sense of dignity, and be a force for social change. However, what matters most is having aspirations

for higher education because it can unlock youths' abilities to start taking the steps necessary to improve their lives and make a difference in their communities. In this regard, huge gaps still exist in higher education, ICT, STEM and TVET whilst a commendable progress in gender parity in access to education at primary and secondary schools has been achieved². Failing to ensure gender parity in these areas of education has negatively affects women's economic empowerment. This implies limited women's capital development and limited access to gains offered through higher education, ICT, STEM, and TVET in terms of decent employment.

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

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

From this study findings, key recommendations are the following:

Key Policy recommendations and uptakes:

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

² NISR (Statistical Yearbook: Education, 2021).

References

Sewell, W.H., Shah, V.P., 1968. Social class, parental encouragement, and educational aspirations. American journal of Sociology 73, 559–572.

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors from the AYAR- project surveys conducted by IPAR-Consult Ltd and do not necessarily represent those of the Funder (the Mastercard Foundation through PASGR) and the company IPAR-Consult Ltd.