

Gendered aspirations and occupations among rural youth, in agriculture and beyond: A cross-regional perspective

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Abstract

Based on 25 case studies from the global comparative study ‘GENNOVATE: Enabling gender equality in agricultural and environmental innovation’, this paper explores rural young women’s and men’s occupational aspirations and trajectories in India, Mali, Malawi, Morocco, Mexico, Nigeria, and the Philippines. We draw upon qualitative data from 50 sex-segregated focus groups with the youth to show that across the study’s regional contexts, young rural women and men predominantly aspire for formal blue and white-collar jobs. Yet, they experience an aspiration-achievement gap, as the promise of their education for securing the formal employment they seek is unfulfilled, and they continue to farm in their family’s production. Whereas some young men aspired to engage in knowledge-intensive or ‘modern’ agriculture, young women did not express any such interest. Framing our analysis within a relational approach, we contend that various gender norms that discriminate against women in agriculture dissuade young women from aspiring for agriculture-related occupation. We discuss the gendered opportunity spaces of the study sites, the meanings these hold for allowing young women and men to achieve their aspirations and catalyze agricultural innovation, and implications for agricultural policies and research for development. Our findings show that youth and gender issues are inextricably intertwined and cannot be understood in isolation one from the other.

Key words: Gender norms, relational approach, aspiration-achievement gap, intersectionality, masculinities, opportunity structure

Introduction

In the Global South, concerns for food insecurity, a ‘youth bulge’, and youth unemployment have drawn attention to the youth-agriculture nexus. The challenge for agricultural policy and research, as framed in dominant development discourse, is that rural youth do not aspire to farm—leading to what some have called the ‘youth in agriculture problem’ (World Bank 2006; Benell 2007). Narratives underscore the need to entice youth into agriculture to counter ageing

of the farmer population, stalled labour markets, and high rates of economic migration (cf te Lintelo 2012; White 2012). Yet, despite the stated urgency of this ‘problem’, rural young men’s and women’s specific aspirations and occupational trajectories—rooted in norms that present them with gendered challenges and opportunities—are poorly understood (Sumberg et al. 2012).

Framed within a relational approach that highlights power relations and resource control across generations and genders (Wyn and White 1997), this paper explores occupational aspirations and realities for young women and men in (and out of) agriculture in India, Mali, Malawi, Morocco, Mexico, Nigeria, and the Philippines. As a point of departure, we recognize that the ‘youth’ is often (mis)conceptualized as a homogeneous and isolated group, rather than as socially embedded, differentiated actors who struggle to negotiate a space for themselves in societies that constrain young rural men and women in gender-specific ways (Chicago Council 2011; Leavy and Hossain 2014). Our study focuses on the occupational aspirations of young women and men and the gender norms and dynamics that underpin their experiences and engagement in agriculture and natural resource management. It draws on cases from the global comparative study ‘GENNOVATE: Enabling gender equality in agricultural and environmental innovation’, described below, which examines the relationship between gender norms, agency, and agricultural innovation processes.

We begin by laying the conceptual foundations for our analysis of rural youth aspirations through a gender lens. We then detail the methodology for the global comparative study, and for the sub-set of case studies on which this paper focuses. In the subsequent section, we present our findings in four stages. First, we show that, across the study’s vastly different regional contexts, young women and men value and are increasingly pursuing a formal education, with both similarities and differences in their educational trajectories. Second, we show that formal education shapes young rural women’s and men’s occupational aspirations, including those (un)related to agriculture. However, as we explain in a third instance, the promise of education for securing the formal employment young men and women seek is seldom fulfilled, and they largely continue to farm in their family’s production. Fourth, we demonstrate that gender norms that limit women’s opportunities to learn about and pursue new agricultural practices or innovations dissuade them from aspiring for agriculture-related occupations. In the ensuing discussion, we contend that youth do not passively recognize these norms, but actively negotiate, reproduce, and redefine them through their everyday lives. We discuss how these norms, and gendered opportunity space they inhabit, shape young women’s and men’s ability to achieve their aspirations and catalyse agricultural innovation.

Conceptualizing youth and their aspirations through a gender lens

Definitions of the ‘youth’ vary across disciplines, countries, and organizations. By and large, policy discourse in developing countries treats youth as a transition between childhood and adulthood, during which individuals experience sexual maturation and increasing socio-economic independence (World Bank 2006; Benell 2007). Yet, authors have problematized the idea of youth transitions, particularly in situations of poverty, where school and work, dependency and provision, criss-cross and manifest themselves in a non-linear fashion (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004; Sommers 2012; Morrow 2013). Others have rebuked the notion of a symmetry between biological and social development processes (Wyn and White 1997; Morrow 2013). So too has the depiction of youth as ‘in waiting’ to become adults been countered by

those arguing that youth are also members of society and in a state of being, not merely becoming (Leavy and Smith 2010; White 2012). Still, 'youth' are commonly treated as an undifferentiated group with essential, static qualities and with little agency (Wyn and White 1997). Accordingly, current approaches to addressing the 'youth in agriculture problem' focus on including more 'youth' in farming, much like the 'women in development' approach did with 'women' in the 1980s and 1990s (and, some argue, still does (Chant and Gutmann 2002)).

These critiques have urged a reconceptualization of the youth as a social construction, and a relational concept "which offers an approach to understanding the social meaning of growing up that can take account of the diverse ways in which young people are constructed through social institutions, and the ways in which they negotiate their transitions" (Wyn and White 1997, p.13-4). This approach situates young people's actions and ideas in relation to other social actors, and shifts the focus from young people as a homogeneous group to the power dynamics that structure intra- and inter-generational relations. Although still seldom realized, such an undertaking can allow other factors of social differentiation, such as gender, education or socio-economic status, to come to the fore in their intersection with age as structuring young people's positions in society (Langevang and Gough 2012; Achambault 2014). Indeed, as Hansen et al. (2008), and Langevang and Gough (2012, p. 243) remind us, youth is "clearly a gendered concept, with some young women experiencing youth only as a brief interlude between puberty and motherhood."

If the youth are a differentiated group, so too are their experiences, ideas, and aspirations. These aspirations are shaped by the complex interplay of factors across local, regional and even global scales. Two predominant streams of thought posit that aspirations: 1) are hopes and dreams, which may be untethered from realistic outlooks, or 2) are linked with expectations and realistic achievements (Leavy and Smith 2010). In the latter perspective, aspirations represent the "ability to identify and set goals for the future, while being inspired in the present to work toward those goals" (Quaglia and Cobb 1996, p. 130). The formation of aspirations involves dynamic processes of circumscription, by which one establishes the range of acceptable alternatives, and compromise, by which one identifies which of those alternatives is realistic given one's self-concept (i.e. awareness of one's own characteristics and abilities) (Gottfredson 1981; Armstrong and Crombie 2000).

Aspirations are embedded within an opportunity space that shapes occupational opportunities and their desirability based on prevailing institutions; i.e. the formal and informal rules, codes of conduct, and norms that define what is appropriate action, and structure human interactions (North 1991; Bruton et al. 2010). Drawing on earlier works of Sumberg and colleagues, Sumberg and Okali (2013, p. 262) define the opportunity space within which aspirations are formed 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." They distinguish between the near and distant opportunity space. The 'near' opportunity space includes place-specific socio-economic characteristics, such as local resources and access to markets, that allow certain economic activities to take place in the given locale. It also includes socio-relational factors, such as norms and relations across socially differentiated groups, that place value on particular activities over others, and influence the meanings associated with different occupations, for specific genders, in specific contexts (see also Langevang and Gough 2012). The 'distant' opportunity space exists beyond the local, and young people may exploit it through migration at different points of their life. Aspirations are not static, but may shift as changes in

the opportunity space redefine what is possible and desirable in the present and future (Mwara 2017).

Bourdieu's (1990) notions of *doxa* and *habitus*, combined, provide further analytical space for understanding how aspirations are formed through subjective and inter-subjective processes. Drawing on Bourdieu, Zipin et al. (2015) describe how one's culture, society, community, and family transmit values, provide role models, and impose rewards or sanctions for following or deviating from certain accepted pathways. *Doxic aspirations* are formed by dominant perceptions about worthy futures, propagated by current-day populist ideologies that circulate via the media and other channels in various areas of everyday life until they are taken for granted, or represent commonsense (*doxa*). *Habituated aspirations* are a function of one's self-concept and embodied dispositions (personal history and conditions), which are linked to family characteristics, socio-economic position, and community history (*habitus*) (Bourdieu 1990). These dispositions offer a sense of situated possibility, or of one's probable futures. Educational attainment influences one's self-concept and aspirations because it affects perceived and actual opportunities. Moreover, "notions of happiness, quality of life, lifestyle and satisfaction as ultimate life goals ... impact on educational aspirations and occupational choice" (Leavy and Smith 2010, p. 5). Young people's personal ideas about what constitutes socially acceptable and desirable occupations not only reflect, but also contribute to (re)defining the opportunity space. Hence, aspirations entail human agency to imagine, desire, and pursue *alternative* futures; a process which may necessitate capacitation to move beyond prevailing social tendencies (Zipin et al. 2015).

Gender shapes aspirations due to its influence on the "formation of self concepts and on perceptions of occupational opportunity space and status" (Leavy and Smith 2010, p. 9). Individuals are less likely to compromise on elements (such as norms) assimilated earlier in their development cycle (Gottfredson 1981). Gender norms, or common beliefs about how women and men should be and act at a given time and place, which are internalized at an early developmental stage, thus critically influence young women's and men's educational and occupational aspirations (Armstrong and Crombie 2000; Overå 2007). It is from this vantage point that we examine the differentiated aspirations of young rural women and men in our study sites, and their relation to agriculture.

Methodology

Site and participant selection

Data for this paper were collected in 25 villages, which represent a sub-set of the 136 case studies that comprised the global comparative study GENNOVATE. The study's 'medium-n' qualitative methodology, which entails bringing together a relatively large number of in-depth case studies (i.e. positioning the research in a space between traditional case study approaches and studies with a very large number of observations, such as large-scale surveys), was designed to enable comparative analysis while retaining emphasis on the contextual specificities of each case. The GENNOVATE methodology and conceptual framework are detailed by Petesch et al. (2018a, this volume) and Badstue et al. (2018, this volume), respectively.

Country and village selection for the global study were based on the principles of maximum diversity (or maximum variation) sampling, which allowed us to discover patterns for core

elements or dimensions that hold across our diverse sample, as well as unique or distinctive variations (Patton 2002). Heterogeneity was sought along two axes of relevance to the research question: gender gaps in assets and capacities, and economic dynamism. Gender gaps were assessed based on indicators such as proportion of women in local government and organizations, physical mobility of adult women, and women's membership in civil organizations; whereas economic dynamism was evaluated according to criteria, such as extent of infrastructural development, proximity to markets, and access to information and services from agricultural extension (see Petesch et al. 2018a, this volume, for additional information). In each country, cases were conducted in more and less economically dynamic rural settings.

The 25 village cases studies retained for this paper are situated across seven countries that span the five regions in the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) regional classification scheme: India and Philippines (Asia and the Pacific), Mexico (Latin America and the Caribbean), Morocco (the Near East, North Africa, Europe and Central Asia), Malawi (East and Southern Africa), and Mali and Nigeria (West and Central Africa) (IFAD 2016). In each of the study countries, three to four villages were selected to represent maximum diversity within the available country cases. The seven countries and the study sites present different development pathways and levels: infrastructure, such as roads; services, including schools and health centers; and access to information and communications technologies (ICTs), and to markets and economic opportunities. These constitute indicators of quality of life that can play a role in young people's decisions to remain in their village (Anyidoho et al. 2012). Yet, as in other rural areas globally (IFAD 2016), study sites are undergoing rapid transformations in these conditions in recent years.

Within villages, participants were purposively selected with the help of local resource persons. A first selection criterion was the involvement of most participants in agriculture and natural resource management, explained below. Among eligible candidates, participants were selected to reflect the range of educational experiences, socioeconomic groups, and marital status that are prevalent in their community across their age range. Although we recognize that 'youth' is a socially constructed category that defies a definition based strictly on age (Bourdieu 1980), to facilitate comparison across countries we sought participants predominantly between 15-24 years of age, which corresponds with the United Nations' definition of 'youth' (e.g. UNDP 2014). However, a few exceptions were made to accommodate younger women (13 or 14 years old) who already had children or were in a marital union, particularly in Africa, or those who were over 24 but were still regarded as youth in their communities. Overall, the age of male participants ranged from 14-29 while women were 13-35 years of age.

One focus group with young women and one with young men was carried out in each village, for a total of 50 focus groups. Average focus group size was nine participants for both young women and men. At least six of the focus group members were themselves directly engaged in agricultural or natural resource management livelihood activities; either in producing, collecting, processing, or trading goods. Hence, although speaking about the lives of young women or men from their village in general, the views of most participants are illustrative of this particular subgroup of youngsters. Nonetheless, many were also engaged in school, in caring for children as young parents or older siblings, or in non-agricultural livelihood activities. More than two thirds of the young women and men participants were students in primary, middle or high school at the time of the study or in the recent past. Although the young women and men who were away on

migration temporarily or permanently could not participate in the study, some participants had had migration experiences and returned to their village.

Data collection and analysis

The 50 sex-segregated focus group discussions were held in 2014 and 2015 across the seven countries: India (6), Malawi (8), Mali (8), Mexico (8), Morocco (6), Nigeria (8), and Philippines (6). Overall, 436 participants—221 young women and 215 young men—participated in the discussions, which were facilitated in the local language. Facilitators and note takers, who took detailed notes, were the same sex as participants. Research teams underwent rigorous training to ensure that the protocol was applied in a standardized manner across study communities to enable comparative analysis. The qualitative methods used included open ended questions and vignettes: fictional scenarios that offer a less personal, and thus less threatening, way to elicit perceptions on sensitive topics, such as spending patterns, women's decision-making authority, and inheritance matters (Finch 1987; Hill 1997). Questions centred on gender norms, practices and aspirations surrounding education and future occupations, livelihoods, capacities for innovation, economic opportunities, and family formation—and their interconnections in young people's lives. These methods were triangulated and complemented by private or public voting of participants on certain issues, such as the top two reasons why young men or women end their education, the number of women out of ten who can move around freely in their neighbourhood, or the perceived level of power and freedom young men and women have to make important decisions in their own lives on a five-point scale.

Aspirations may represent ideas that are concrete and easily articulated, or intangible and inarticulable, particularly as regards emergent future visions that may not fully conform with existing realities and concepts (Appadurai 2004; Zipin et al. 2015). Hence, Zipin et al. (2015) contend that there are challenges with exploring aspirations using only verbal methods, such as interviewing or group discussions. They suggest that capturing body language and using less conventional types of methodological approaches, such as those based on non-verbal, participatory visioning (e.g. through artistic creations), can help deepen analysis, while capacitating participants to imagine unconventional, 'emergent' futures. Moreover, the tendency among members within groups to aspire to a collective level of aspiration (Quaglia and Cobb 1996) imply that there are limitations to exploring aspirations within focus groups. In our study, we registered nonverbal communication in our field notes, such as expressions and gestures, but focused on verbal methods to facilitate comparative analysis. Although the focus group approach presents certain limitations, it offered fruitful grounds for discussions, agreement and dissent around reasons underpinning aspirations, occupations, and opportunity spaces in the village settings.

Data were translated into English or French and coded using qualitative data analysis software (NVivo10) following a mix of inductive and deductive methods. The coding tree expressed the GENNOVATE conceptual framework and common themes that emerged from systematic content analysis of datasets from global study cases in Bangladesh, Mexico, Philippines, and Zimbabwe. The central team of coders, whose involvement in GENNOVATE focused exclusively on coding, participated in a two-week long training to clarify the meanings behind each code and enhance inter-coder reliability. The authors of this paper—most of whom are the principle investigators for the 25 cases included here—qualitatively analysed the coded data

following a thematic structure closely related to the coding tree. Key themes, such as mobility, access to credit and information, and education, reflect the nature of the questions posed as well as threads in participant responses, which shaped the codes used to organize the data. While most of the analysis was qualitative, manual counts were also performed when relevant to show how pervasive certain social perceptions are across young women's and men's focus groups. When these counts are presented below, they refer to the number of *focus groups* in which a particular thematic response emerged, rather than the frequency of mentions by individual study participants. The 'medium-n' approach of the study offers possibilities for such 'wide' analysis, while allowing for deep analysis of the reasons why the observed patterns occur and how they manifest themselves in different localities (Scheffran et al. 2012; Selby 2014). All quotes provided below to explain these patterns are from focus group data, and the community names provided are pseudonyms.

Results

In what follows, we explore the educational experiences, hopes, and challenges of the rural young men and women who participated in our study. We examine how education figures in their narratives and contributes to shaping their aspirations in (and out of) agriculture. We then turn to the overlap and discrepancies between aspirations and realities, and to the gendered opportunity spaces, and social norms embedded therein, that influence young women's (lack of) aspirations in agriculture.

It is difficult to provide simple summaries for the diversity of norms experienced and expressed by study participants across the study communities. These norms, in their multiplicity, are dynamic and constantly renegotiated. They vary not only across but also within localities, as they apply more or less rigidly to women and men in different social positions. They are expressed in locally-specific ways, as stigmas against female witches in sub-Saharan Africa or affronts to family honour in Morocco or India. Yet, a number of strong patterns are discernible in our dataset. We present these below.

Educational experiences, hopes, and challenges

Discrepancies in education levels remain across countries, with Mexico and the Philippines showing the most highly educated youth of both sexes, followed by India. At least one woman participant had attended college in each of the study countries except Malawi; as was the case for one or more men participants in all countries but Mali and Nigeria. Both young women and men stressed the importance of education, but couched their explanations in both overlapping and different reasons. For young women education matters for being better caregivers, household keepers, traders, farmers, entrepreneurs, for being heard within their family, and for gaining autonomy. Young men considered that education matters for improving one's quality of life, farming practices, job opportunities, for gaining new skills and perspectives, collaborating among spouses, and avoiding 'vices'. As a young Nigerian man stated,

“Uneducated people will not be able to do anything meaningful in life. Even if you must be a farmer, education will make you a better farmer. If one does not go to school, he will

just be a slave to others who have the opportunity of acquiring an education” (Orile Anko, Southwest Nigeria).

Young men and women described education as a primary means to obtain a steady job and become financially independent, which was expressed as a main goal in life. Yet, they also recognized the difficulty of finding jobs, even with an education.

Findings from the different countries show that education levels vary across genders, and influence aspirations, life options, and expectations. On the whole, male and female participants believed that young women’s educational opportunities are inferior to young men’s. Yet, they considered that girls perform better and are more interested than boys in school, as boys are more interested in earning “quick money” (young women, Orile Anko, Southwest Nigeria). In Nigeria, for example, young men described the opportunity to earn an income as providing them a sense of power and freedom, and the inability to earn money as a reason for a low sense of power and freedom (Orile Anko, Nigeria).

Across countries, many young women lamented that they could not achieve their occupational aspirations because they could not complete their studies. For instance, a young Malian woman stated that, “before getting married, I wanted to become a doctor, but now I just do housework. I insisted on finishing my studies, but there was nobody to take care of my child” (Diakobougou, Southwestern Mali). In fact, women in five focus groups indicated that their realities prevented them from dreaming or having any special goals for their future to avoid disappointment; a statement echoed by young men in three groups (in Mali, Mexico, and Morocco).

By far, the top-cited reason for young men (24/25 groups) and women (19/25 groups) ending their education was poverty. As a young Filipino man explained, “If we don’t have enough money to support our education, our parents will ask us to stop schooling and help out in the field or find a job” (Bukal, central Philippines). In Southern Nigeria, a young man shared that, “Right from my childhood I wanted to become an accountant but due to financial problems I have had to drop out from primary three to start farming, and that is what I have been doing all my life” (Gbodomu, Southern Nigeria). In this way, participants describe farming as the fate of poor youth who cannot afford to pursue their studies. Several participants note that in a context of poverty, parents prefer sending sons over daughters to school, although “more and more parents do not make differences in investing in the education of their girls and boys [...] when the parents can afford it” (young women, Dandi, southern Mali).

For young men, marriage (5/25 groups) and a lack of interest in school (5/25 groups) were the next most important reasons for abandoning their studies. In fact, young men expressed a sense of power and freedom associated with being able to choose *not* to pursue their studies. In contrast, women gained such a sense when able to decide to continue their studies. Most young women who abandoned their studies reportedly did so unwillingly due to marriage (9/25 groups) or pregnancy (7/25 groups). That is, young women marry upon ending their education, or end their education upon marriage, with parents (rather than daughters) largely making decisions concerning this rite in their daughter’s life. Early marriages are commonplace across countries, with many parents preferring “to give their girls for early marriages so as to lessen their parental responsibilities” (young women, Kaduwa, Northern Nigeria), thereby “killing their future” (young men, Nkhopa, central Malawi).

Lack of parental support was another reason for young women (5/25 groups) and young men (4/25 groups) to interrupt their studies. A young woman from Malawi explained that,

“Uneducated guardians ... do not see the value of education. Some say ‘look at those who went up to form four. They have no jobs and are busy just like us in the farms. So what is the point of education if you are going to end up a farmer just like us?’” (Malengatanzi, Southeast Malawi). Parents thus convey the notion that agriculture is an occupation requiring no formal education, and the most likely option for their children regardless of their educational pursuits. With a few exceptions in India, Mali, Mexico, and Morocco, male and female participants named various norms related to marriage practices, family formation, mobility, and safety that underpin parents’ preferences for sending sons to school over daughters. The notion that daughters will leave the household and marry into another family discourages parents from investing in their education. Moreover, when schools are remote, parents fear for their daughters’ safety, and worry that they may become pregnant while away, or not come back once they leave home.

Hence, young rural women and men face significant, overlapping, but also distinct challenges in completing their studies. Across genders, education is described as generally unnecessary for those engaged in farming, and inaccessible for those who are too poor, with a preference for sending boys over girls to school in a situation of poverty. For many participants, particularly women, education is its own aspiration. It is also considered a pre-condition for achieving most of the occupational aspirations we discuss below.

Aspirations in and out of agriculture

Asked whether they had specific goals for the future when completing their studies, young women and men primarily cited formal sector blue collar and white collar jobs (Figure 1). Foremost, young women aspired to be teachers or to work as doctors or nurses. For young men, doctors topped the list, followed by police or army officers, agriculturalists, or teachers. A number of women and men dreamed of ‘getting a job’ or making money rather than of a specific occupation that would enable this. Many of the desired occupations were named by both genders, albeit in different frequencies. A few remained the preserve of one gender: for instance, only women aspired to be nurses, whereas only men dreamed of being engineers, veterinarians, drivers, or of pursuing agricultural-related professions.

Although young men did not aspire to farm using traditional, labor-intensive methods, they did not completely shy away from agriculture. In fact, aspirations related to agriculture were third most popular among young men. Their interest in agriculture included being an agricultural scientist (in India), securing a job on a ‘modern farm’ (in Morocco), assisting communities through agriculture (in Malawi), being an agronomist to apply “knowledge in farming learning centers in rural areas” (in Mali), having “everything needed to engage in farming” (in Malawi), and being a “great farmer” (in Nigeria). They additionally aspired to trade in agricultural supplies and products: dried vegetables, pipes and sprinklers, and agricultural inputs (fertilizers, seeds, pesticides)—all captured under ‘trade or business’ in Figure 1. As their above job descriptions suggest, these young men considered agriculture a desirable occupation when performed under ‘modern’ conditions. In contrast, when young women were asked to free list their desired occupations, none cited agricultural-related occupations. We explore possible reasons for this below, in light of gender-differentiated opportunity spaces.

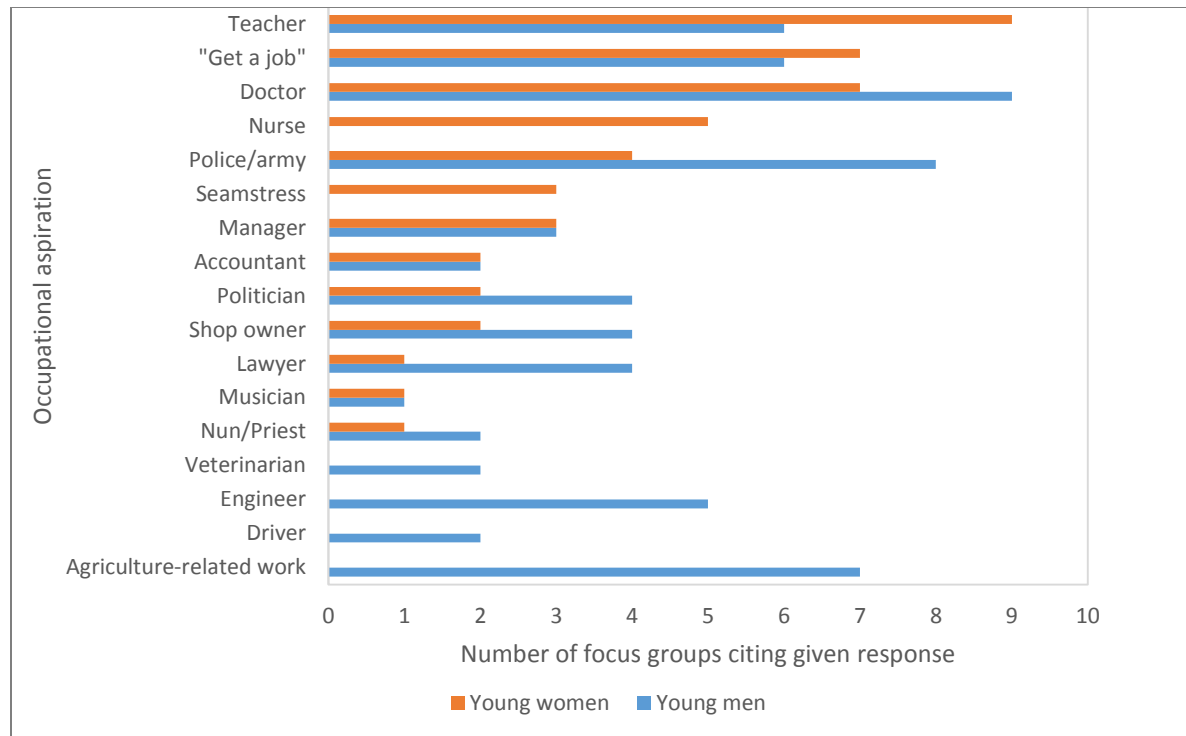


Figure 1. Occupational aspirations for young women's (n=25) and men's groups (n=25) across the study sites. Frequencies reflect the number of focus groups within which responses were cited.

When asked about appropriate occupations for their own gender group (i.e. what women and men *should* do upon ending their studies), both young men and women responded that they should start working for pay. In Mexico, Morocco and Nigeria, some young men as well as some young women believed that youths of their gender should continue to advance their studies. Across communities, young women were adamant that they should finish their education before marriage, as marriage or, implicitly, childbearing poses a threat to their completion of schooling and is thereby a potential obstacle to achieving their occupational aspirations. One young woman specified that young women “should be able to do all the professions in the world without restriction” (Sélingué, Southwest Mali).

The suitability of agriculture as an occupation for today's youth received mixed opinions. Some young men, such as a young Malawian participant, considered that young men should work hard in farming so as not to burden their parents (Sakata, central Malawi), and Moroccan men stated that young men should choose a professional training based on their interests, be it in agriculture, mechanics, or trade (Solh, Northern Morocco). As mentioned earlier, a number of young men even aspired for agricultural-related occupations *when performed under certain conditions*, which include adequate resourcing, and the use of modern scientific knowledge and techniques. In India, for example, young men endorsed the fact that, “Those who are not even able to secure a professional diploma would join the age old work of farming on their ancestral or acquired land *with new and latest techniques*” (Samrudhi, Northwest India). Yet, many others considered agriculture a fallback option and expressed dissatisfaction from having to carry out jobs, such as farming, for which a formal education is not perceived as necessary. Hence, a young Malian man believed that: “[young men] do agricultural work due to unemployment and poverty of parents.

Otherwise, they should in principle be doctors, teachers, and administrators (Dandi, Southern Mali). Another from his group expressed a common perception across groups that “the desire of every person is to exercise the professions in which they are trained”, rather than working in agriculture. In Morocco, young men considered that,

“Young people should learn a trade to earn a living. They have to work outside of agriculture since the farmland is increasingly scarce. In addition, the average farm size decreases at each legacy. Young people must be independent and autonomous” (Ait Amer, Northern Morocco).

The sense that farming is an activity performed under the remit of one’s parents rather than in an autonomous manner was widely shared. It stands in contrast with the perceptions of young men, such as the young Moroccan cited above, that they should become independent and autonomous.

Among young women, only two focus groups in Northwest India indicated that women who work in agriculture should do it “skillfully”, acquire knowledge and run a business (Krishik, Northwest India) and that home gardening is a legitimate way for women to earn money (Bhochetana, Northwest India). Others explicitly indicated that working in agriculture was an undesirable pursuit for women. There was a sense that “Young women should work in other things than agriculture and get married” (Douentza, Southern Mali), and that “graduates should be employed and work in big places with good salaries, but since there is no job, they go back home to help their parents” (Gbodomu, Southern Nigeria).

The distance between aspirations and realities

A different picture emerges when considering what most young men and women actually do with their lives when they are no longer students. When asked about their own principal occupation, the majority of men and women listed farming as a primary activity. This is in line with the study’s sampling strategy, which specified that a majority of focus groups participants should engage in agriculture or natural resource management. Yet, young women and men also described themselves as students, traders, and shopkeepers. Young women worked as shop assistants, housekeepers, hairdressers, or in the Philippines as sales promoters. Young men were involved in construction, carpentry, welding or mechanical work, masonry, and as drivers of small vehicles (e.g. motorcycle, tricycles). They also repaired computers, were artisans, took part in local politics, occupied private and government jobs, or labored in factories. Participants described their engagement in farm and non-farm jobs while helping their parents in the field, and for young women, in the household.

When asked what *most* young men or women from their village do when they finish school, nearly all groups cited farming. For young men, animal husbandry and migration were the second most prevalent response, named in nearly one third of the focus groups, followed by ‘work’ or ‘get a job’. In comparison, women barely mentioned migration, and when they did, they linked it to working as housemaids. Across countries, more than half of the women’s groups spoke of ‘marriage’, and nearly half spoke of ‘helping the family’. Trading, selling or keeping shop was cited more often by young women than men, whereas working in factories, for the government, as a mechanic, or carpenter, and a few other occupations were named less than a handful of times, only by and for men. Hence, in contrast to aspirations for formal blue and white collar jobs, participants of both genders primarily engage in agriculture and natural resource

management after studying; with young women in the study countries also performing household tasks either under their parents' authority or that of their husband, as new wives.

Despite this range of activities, participants described limited occupational opportunities for both genders across the study villages. In Mali, for example, a young woman stated that, "there are not plenty of choices [for women]. It is household chores, farming and/or trading. For young men, it is also agriculture, trading, and temporary migration" (Diakobougou, Southwestern Mali). Similar discourses were held in Morocco, Mali, Malawi, and Nigeria. Nine groups (five men's and four women's) in the Philippines, India, and Malawi, considered that some youths of their gender do 'nothing'. Across villages, young women and men discussed those youngsters who "are not doing anything productive" (women's group, Bukal, central Philippines), but—as stated in the Philippines—staying home eating, watching television, sleeping, "playing with gadgets", gossiping in the case of young women, or in the case of young men, going out with friends to play basketball, football and moto racing (young women, Agham, central Philippines). The promise of an education for securing blue or white collar jobs is seldom realized.

Gendered opportunity spaces for agriculture

Young women's reluctance to engage in agriculture, described above, can be partly understood in light of the opportunity spaces that restrict their access to agricultural innovations and opportunities. The majority of young men's groups (17/25 groups) and nearly half (12/25) of young women's groups believed that young women and men have unequal opportunities to learn about and try out new farming practices. Differences emerge between countries, with both genders in Mexico and the Philippines reporting equal opportunities, and both in Morocco reporting inequalities. Distinct perceptions across gender groups occur within the other countries, among and within villages. In the many cases where women stated that opportunities were, in theory, equal, their narratives illustrated the many ways in which opportunities actually differed. Young men and women referred to a range of structural factors that typically favor men's over women's ability to capture opportunities in agriculture.

Participants attributed some of these differences to gender-differentiated personal interests. For instance, in Mexico, young women explained young men's greater participation in agricultural trainings as a question of interest, associated with the fact that men are more often in the fields than women. One participant suggested that: "It is about how much you are interested because sometimes my dad invites me [to attend trainings] but we don't go (San Antonino, Southern Mexico). Similarly, in Northwest India, young women consider that women prefer to pursue other, non-agricultural opportunities, such as receiving a formal education, than to participate in agricultural organizations. As we demonstrate below, however, these 'personal interests' or lack of interest are couched in gendered opportunity spaces, including values and norms that constrain women's capacities and opportunities in agriculture.

'Men are (stronger and better) farmers'

Young women and men participants perceived an essential association between certain agricultural activities and masculinity. They expressed that men are naturally better suited to perform strenuous agricultural tasks than women, and are better farmers (e.g. young men,

Mwaghavul, Southern Nigeria). In Malawi, girls “cannot do certain things”, such as building a shed, sourcing fertilizer, or tilling the land (young men, Kamunbu, central Malawi). Likewise, in Northern Nigeria, young men consider that the “tedious jobs are meant for men while the easy ones are for women. Like land preparation: what do you expect women to do there?” (Gbodomu, Southern Nigeria). Young men in the same group added that: “farming is mainly for men, while women commonly have some other livelihood activities and only have farms to augment their income. So it would be foolish to hand over fertile land to women when what is available is limited.”

In the Philippines, young men are reportedly prioritized when it comes to building agricultural skills because of their physical strength, and because they are considered household heads. Young Filipina women considered that women do not participate in agriculture because it is mechanized, and it is men’s place rather than women’s to operate machines, whereas young Filipino men reported that men are better at managing farms than women. In Morocco:

“[Young women] can learn sewing, embroideries and hairdressing or anything feminine but the agricultural work is for men...and women have nothing to do with it. Here, it’s a shame if a woman interferes with agriculture, it’s like she deletes the existence of men. The woman might contribute in a slight way to agricultural activities: she only does the light work and prepares food for the men who work” (young women, Solh, Northern Morocco).

Hence, “By nature, the man takes his son when he goes out to the fields as he knows that he’s the one who will bear responsibility with him in the future”—especially if women marry out of their villages (young women, Ait Amer, Northern Morocco).

In other instances, women may be able to access trainings, but not to put their skills into practice. For example, In Mali, a young women’s group stated that even if women learn how to perform ‘heavy’ agricultural work, such as spraying of herbicides, they would not be expected to do it. Similarly, young women in India and the Philippines consider that although women can attend trainings, they are not expected to practice what they have learned, particularly if it requires the use of machinery, except in emergency situations. Yet, these Indian women from Samrudhi explain that women can perform new skills that require manual labour. In the Philippines, only families with no sons or where parents are too old to farm would allow their daughters to manage the farm and laborers who operate the machines. In sum, there is a prevalent perception across countries that agriculture, particularly when physically strenuous or performed under mechanized conditions, is a masculine domain.

Some young women in Malawi pushed back on these essentializing discourses, considering that, “If you are hard working, there is nothing that can stop you” (Malengatanzi, Southeast Malawi). In another Malawian village, young women attested to the dynamic nature of gender norms. They perceived a move towards greater equality as follows: “These days there is gender awareness. A woman can do the work that a man can do, and a man can also do a job that a woman does” (Sakata, central Malawi).

Norms restricting young women’s mobility and the gender division of labour

Socio-cultural norms restrict young women’s mobility to a greater or lesser extent across the study contexts. Among Hindus in the study communities of Northwest India, for example: “It’s

hard for young women to learn or try out new practices or to join agricultural organizations because women are not free to go anywhere alone and should not come in front of men in their community due to social restrictions (or purdah)” (young men, Krishik, Northwest India). Similarly, in Malawi, young men explained that parents do not generally allow their daughters to sell products at the market, as this exposure could put them in danger of harassment or seduction by men. Across countries, participants of both genders considered that mobility constraints particularly apply to young wives, and least so to widows.

Young men and women also associated mobility constraints to women’s domestic care responsibilities. In the Nigerian cases, where young women’s mobility is not as socially restricted as in India or Morocco, young men linked women’s limited opportunities to learn about and apply new agricultural practices to their heavy domestic chores. In Malawi, “Most parents feel that girls play a vital role in managing the home rather than being in [agricultural] groups” (young men, Sakata, central Malawi). Both young men and women describe women’s household responsibilities as onerous and an obstacle to participation in agricultural trainings, knowledge acquisition, and mobility.

Norms limiting women’s access to assets and credit

Participants perceived women’s limited access to assets and agricultural inputs as favouring men’s over women’s ability to apply new agricultural practices. In Malawi, young men and women noted that men’s greater access to income generating opportunities enables them to buy equipment and inputs, and promotes their ability to innovate in agriculture. Young men considered women’s inability to afford fertilizer and difficulty securing credit as barriers to their engagement in tobacco cultivation (Kamubu, central Malawi).

The household’s gender-based allocation of resources was considered another obstacle to women’s opportunities in agriculture. For example, participants in Morocco considered that young women are disadvantaged as land belongs to men, whereas in Nigeria and Malawi, when land and other resources are in short supply, parents prioritize boys’ access over girls’ (e.g. young men, Nkhopa, central Malawi). By comparison, in all countries but Malawi, livestock and dairy were said to offer women some opportunities.

Norms limiting women’s access to information

Women’s generally lesser access to agricultural information than men’s was a recurring theme. In general, there was a perception that young women are not given a chance to learn about and try out new agricultural techniques because “men are more competent and free to learn and come into contact with different organizations” (young men, Samrudhi, Northwest India). Men’s and boys’ access to new information is facilitated by exposure to knowledgeable people outside their community. In contrast, women in general are often not allowed to attend meetings where such information is shared. This is the case in Mundru, India, where: “In our village, sometimes meetings were also held, but sometimes there were only men who talk about many things. We are not allowed to attend these kinds of meetings” (young women).

Parents play an important role in facilitating or hindering their children’s access to information along gender lines. For example, “Parents will mainly train boys so that the boy in turn will teach

the girls some of the activities in tobacco growing” (young women, Kamunbu, central Malawi). In India and Malawi, young men insisted that it is hard for young women to learn about agriculture or join agriculture organizations because they need permission from household heads or guardians, who may not accept.

Social stigmas against breaking gender norms

Across the cases, stigmas associated with a breach in the normative gender division of labour apply to both women and men. These stigmas help explain why, even if women do attend trainings and learn new skills, they face significant barriers applying what they have learned. A fictional scenario (vignette) wherein spouses share some of the provider and housework responsibilities in their household stimulated discussions around gender norms. In the vignette, the wife pursues new opportunities to grow and sell vegetables at the market, while her husband supports her with household chores and childcare. The expected social consequences of this scenario, which challenges existing gender norms in the study contexts, were explored.

The young women’s groups mainly indicated that a woman who goes to the market to sell produce from her garden would be demonstrating admirable qualities. In the Philippines, all responses towards such women were positive, whereas in all other countries slightly more positive than negative perceptions were expressed, often within the same focus group. Positive perceptions include that such a woman is hardworking, helping her husband, contributing to the wellbeing of the family, diligent, and industrious. In contrast, negative conceptions are that such a woman is a prostitute, that her activities are a sign of being unloved by her husband, and that they negatively impact the social standing of her husband, or in the case of unmarried women, of her parental family.

Young men were more pessimistic about how a woman trading at the market would be perceived. Similar to young women, young Filipino men agreed that such behaviour would be seen as industrious, admirable and honourable. In all other countries, however, young men expected more negative reactions, such as characterizing women as controlling, disrespectful, neglecting their home and children, and instilling fear in their husbands. The most common concern expressed by both young men and women was that women traders would wrest control of household headship and damage their husbands’ reputation. An increase in a woman’s income was worrisome as her husband

“might seem like he has nothing to do, that he is just at home waiting for his wife to bring money. There can be a problem because the wife goes to the market to sell, so if there is an argument the wife will say she is the one who takes care of him” (young men, Kamunbu, central Malawi).

Such a woman could become unmanageable with her own wealth and possibly leave her husband for another man. In Mali, Malawi, Morocco and Nigeria, young men considered that such a woman would command a sense of witchcraft and promiscuity; sentiments that were not expressed outside of the African continent. Some men’s and women’s groups specified that such an act would be deemed acceptable only if women limit their mobility and activities to the local market.

A second part of the vignette focused on men who share in domestic work to support their households and their wives’ income-generation activities. Responses, particularly among the

young men's groups, brought to the fore the tremendous pressure on men to conform to normative masculinities. There were over three times more negative (77 responses) than positive (22 responses) sentiments towards men who contribute to household work, put forth by both men's and women's groups (Figure 2). Participants considered that men who carry out household tasks would be considered under the control, dominated or 'enslaved' by their wives, weak, foolish, and irresponsible. In Africa (Malawi and Nigeria), young men and women agreed that the community would view such a husband as having been bewitched. In fact, reactions were solidly negative towards such a man in Malawi, Mali, or Morocco. Among the men's groups, the most positive responses were from the Philippines, where participants from the three study communities mainly felt that it would be acceptable for the husband to carry out household chores.

Young women believed that reactions to men who contribute to housework would be slightly less negative. Except in Nigeria and Morocco, a minority of women in the other countries imagined that such a husband could have a good reputation, be considered broad minded, hardworking, supportive and loving. Moreover, although young women recognized social stigmas against such men, they did not necessarily agree with them. For instance, in Malawi, a women's group stated that, "ignorant people would say [husband's name] is silly, and that he was given a love potion so that he does whatever the wife asks him to do" (Sakata, central Malawi). Another observed that "Some people will say she [market woman] is a prostitute, but this is just because they are jealous" (Malengatanzi, Malawi). In contrast, young men's narratives seemed to endorse restrictive gender norms, as this quote from Nigeria illustrates: "She must have been using some charms on her husband, to control him while she has her way. Why will a man be taking care of the house instead of the woman doing it? It is not done!" (Gbodomu, Southern Nigeria). Responses from two young men's focus groups show initial signs of change in the Indian study sites, however. In Mundru, "Due to people's conventional thinking because of illiteracy, earlier people thought that it was not good for any woman to work as a seller, but now the situation has changed" (young men; echoed by young men in Krishik, Northwest India).

Perceptions about women who sell at the market do not necessarily reflect actual practices, however. Women do engage in market activities in most of the study contexts and men may (more rarely) contribute to domestic tasks. For example, women in Gbodomu, Southern Nigeria, have long been engaged as vendors of food, clothing and other goods in the local market. In the less gender restrictive context of the Philippines, participants estimate that most vendors at the market are women, and in Mexico's cases women represent between half and nearly all of the market traders. Although almost no women sell in markets in Sumrudhi, India, due to purdah, nearly all market traders in Krishik, India, are women. Even in the more restrictive Moroccan context, nearly one quarter of vendors in one study community (Solh) are women.

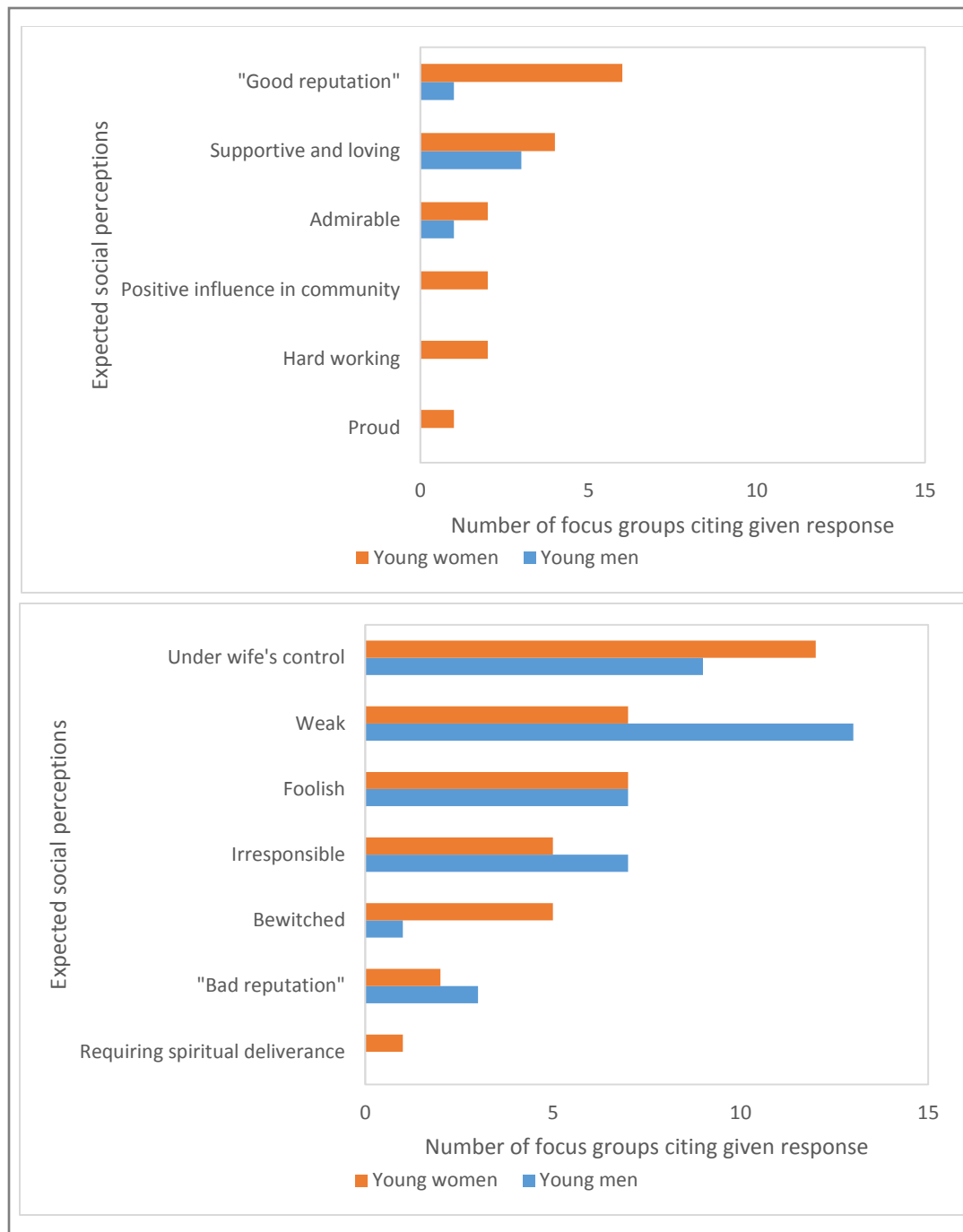


Figure 2. Young women’s (n=25 groups) and men’s (n=25 groups) positive (top) and negative (bottom) perceptions of men who contribute to domestic and care responsibilities. Frequencies reflect the number of focus groups within which responses were cited.

Discussion

Five key points emerge from our findings. First, rural young women and men in our study sites are, on the whole, not achieving their aspirations. For both genders, these aspirations largely pertain to formal, skilled blue and white collar jobs, which stand in contrast with the few formal (government or private sector) employment opportunities, and the predominance of the informal

sector in the study contexts (as also noted by White (2012); Leavy and Hossein (2014)). The distance between these aspirations and (social and economic) realities, referred to as the ‘aspiration-attainment’ gap, has been widely reported in Africa (Kritzinger 2002; Leavy and Smith 2010; Chinsinga and Chasukwa 2012) and other regions of the Global South (White 2012). For instance, in a 32-country comparative study across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe, the OECD (2017) finds a similar misalignment between youth aspirations and career opportunities. The study cites that although most students interviewed wish to work in the public sector, over 40% are unlikely to find such work opportunities.

The OECD’s (2017) comparative study also underscores that around 37% of young workers have experienced upward educational mobility compared to their fathers, and 45% have reached the same level of education as their fathers. In our study, too, the large majority of young women and men have pursued a formal education, which has shaped their skills, ambitions, and values. As reported in Ghana (Langevang and Gough 2012), images of successful adulthood deriving from educational achievements and professional employment can have an important impact on young people’s perceptions and (*doxic*) aspirations, despite shrinking opportunities for formal education and employment. These may help explain participants’ interest in education as a means for securing professions that, in fact, they recognize as being extremely scarce. The desire to pursue an occupation that draws on the formal education or training received—similarly reported in the OECD’s (2017) comparative study—contrasts with existing opportunities to put these skills and values into practice (see also Berckmoes and White, 2014).

The aspiration-attainment gap observed in our study also applies to the agricultural sector. Across study sites, a number of young *men* aspired to engage in the sector as professionals—agronomists, agricultural scientists—or using knowledge intensive techniques requiring modern scientific training. They also aspired for agricultural trade-related enterprises rather than farming *per se*. Our findings thus substantiate recent studies challenging the notion that educated rural ‘youth’ (generally a shorthand for young men in the literature) altogether reject agricultural livelihoods (Anyidoho et al. 2012; White 2012; Kristensen and Birch-Thomson 2013; Abdellaoui et al. 2015; Ameur et al. 2015). Leavy and Hossein (2014, p. 39) note that, “Agriculture could acquire status among young people to the extent that it was modern and cash-based rather than subsistence oriented.” We contend that certain agricultural occupations hold appeal for young men in our study not only because of their economic prospects, but also because they entail the application of knowledge acquired through formal education and training. Although those who aspire for agriculture-related occupations do not represent the majority of participants, they offer insight into the conditions under which the sector can hold appeal for young men: as scientific professionals, modern farmers, and traders.

However, the vision of a modern and knowledge-intensive agriculture contrasts with realities in many of the study contexts, where farming remains a low technology, labour-intensive, and low profit activity, especially for the poorest farmers. Participants associated this type of farming with a traditional way of life, helping one’s parents rather than pursuing own-account activities, and a low status. Hence, they considered it a fallback option for those who have ‘failed’ in their education or are unable to acquire higher-skilled occupations (see also Leavy and Hossain 2014). Narratives around what young men actually do in their village thus reveal a gap between a first aspirational (‘modern’ and specialized) agricultural scenario and a more easily realized but undesirable scenario based on traditional farming.

The second point is that although young women's and men's aspirations overlap, they also differ in important ways, including with respect to agriculture. As observed elsewhere (Furlong and Biggart, 1999), young men and women aspired for many occupations stereotypically associated with their gender group, such as teacher or nurse for women or engineer and police or army officer for men. In contrast to young men, young women expressed little interest in agriculture-related occupations, and spoke consistently of dreams of achieving high levels of formal education. They positioned educational achievements in opposition to (an early) marriage and associated domestic responsibilities, which characterize their rural realities. For many, farming was framed as a routine part of this rural way of life rather than a job per se that could offer them income and independence. As Leavy and Hossain (2014, p. 9) indicate, "For young women, in particular, there can be very strong motivations for escaping a life as subsistence farmer or farmer's wife (depending on the context and on how women's roles in agriculture are viewed)." Studies from the Maghreb similarly show that unlike young men, young rural women aspire for own-account activities that provide them with greater independence and social recognition than agriculture (Brossonbroek et al. 2015; Ftouhi et al. 2015).

The third point is that young women's particular disinterest in agricultural occupations is related to an opportunity space that discriminates against them in gender-specific ways. Reasons typically advanced to explain an inter-generational shift away from farming range from a 'pull' towards urban areas and the social and economic benefits they promise, to a 'push' out of farming due to scarcity of land and other productive resources, social stigmas, and high risks and labour costs associated with the occupation (White 2012; Leavy and Hossain 2014; Bezu and Holden 2014). Yet, the ways gender shapes these processes have garnered little attention. The gender inequalities participants described in this study are well documented in the literature on gender in agriculture. These include gaps in assets and agricultural inputs such as land, labour, credit, information and knowledge, as well as social norms and institutions that shape mobility patterns, divisions of labour, decision-making authority, and capacity to produce and innovate in agriculture (Deere and Doss 2006; FAO 2011; World Bank et al. 2009; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011; Farnworth et al. 2016). Yet, this literature is poorly permeating current analyses of the youth – agriculture nexus, which largely portrays rural youth as a homogeneous group rather than differentiated actors embedded in unequal power relations based on age, but also gender, and other social factors.

Cooper (2009, p. 81) contends that the 'mainstream political agenda' advances a 'deficit model' of youth wherein youth are themselves seen as a problem. In particular, this 'problem' is conceived in terms of individual deficiencies: poor attitudes to schooling, training and work; lack of aptitude and skills; and risky and anti-social behavior. Our findings show that, in general, rural young people do not have negative self-perceptions or poor attitudes, but regard their opportunity space as limiting. They recognize a range of norms that hinder or limit their ability to gain autonomy as farmers in their own right, as opposed to as 'helpers' on their parents' or—for women—husband's or male relatives' farms. These are typically more pronounced for young women, although resource constraints, such as a lack of access to land, also apply to young men's farming pursuits—as noted earlier by male Nigerian and Moroccan participants (see also Berckmoes and White 2014; Bezu and Holden 2014). Unlike young men who may outgrow some of these norms and constraints, however, young women do not become independent upon marriage, but fall under the authority of their husband. In our patriarchal study contexts, which are not representative of all places, gender norms thus continue to limit women's ability to

acquire the resources, information, and other support they need to successfully practice agriculture, even into their adult lives. By way of example, young women's lack of access to agricultural information is reinforced by various norms that exclude women from public spaces, and prioritize sons over daughters, men over women, as recipients of extension and other types of formal training. Such exclusion from trainings and meetings and perceptions that women are merely less knowledgeable helpers in their husband's production, are mutually reinforcing. In this light, young women's poor access to information is not merely a youth issue, but is critically mediated by gender.

Ripoll et al. (2017) stress the need to differentiate between what are specifically 'youth' issues and what are structural issues affecting rural dwellers more generally. For example, they contend that limited access to land and credit affect youth, but also other groups in rural areas (although, we qualify, to different extents). We argue here that young women's lack of interest in agriculture is not only a function of the stage they occupy in their life cycle, but of normative and structural constraints that affect rural women more generally. Greater attention to intersectionality—or how different social categorizations, such as gender and generation, intersect to create overlapping and interdependent systems of disadvantage (Crenshaw 1989)—is thus needed to position young women's interests and opportunities in agriculture, or lack thereof, within gerontocratic and patriarchal relations that offer them little autonomy and opportunity in most agricultural pursuits (Archambault 2014; Berckmoes and White 2014). In this respect, we echo Walby et al.'s (2012, p. 235) move to "specify the particularity that each inequality [i.e. gender and generation] brings to each instance". Our findings substantiate that youth and gender issues are inextricably intertwined and cannot be understood in isolation one from the other.

The fourth point is that efforts to embed research on youth in an analysis of gender and other power relations requires renewed attention to the social norms that (re)produce inequalities. Morgan and Harland (2009, p. 68) demonstrate that some spheres of life, such as "sex stereotyping in domestic roles", are more resistant to change than others. The rigidity of certain gender norms over others is also demonstrated in a review on normative change in 20 countries (Boudett et al. 2012), among other studies (Marcus and Harper 2014; Yu et al. 2017). In our study, young women and men considered the rigid distribution of roles and responsibilities as limiting young women's ability to learn and practice new skills in agriculture. Although they generally acknowledged women's participation in agriculture, both genders portrayed agriculture as a masculine activity, with adult men wielding the necessary strength, resources, and authority to decide in related matters. Through a process of circumscription, this normative framing—and the practical inequalities it implies—limits women's interest in what they perceive as a 'male' occupation. Perceptions that women who challenge existing gender norms will be considered shameful, promiscuous or witches, and that men who support them would be viewed as lazy or foolish compel both genders to conform to normative expectations. Yu et al. (2017, p. S52) argue that "once it becomes clear that a behavior is socially defined as typical for the other sex (which usually happens in adolescence), it is shunned out of fear of being ostracized." Hence, "prevailing gendered ideologies set the parameters for how young women envisage their own development. It is within such parameters that young women ... search for ways and spaces to gain life experiences that are socially and culturally acceptable" (Bossenbroek et al. 2015, p. 346-7).

In our study, young men's perceptions of gender norms were particularly rigid, as they expressed a pull towards customary idealized gender roles. Their expression of 'tough' and 'masculine'

characteristics reflect what Morgan and Harland (2009, p. 68-9) refer to as ‘protest masculinities’: when young men “make claims to power when there are no real resources for doing so”. This, in a context where young men are unable to achieve their occupational aspirations and remain subordinate to their elders. Deep-seated norms about gender roles and the taboos of breaking them create challenging conditions for men who wish to contribute to domestic tasks or support their wives outside and inside the home—particularly at a young stage in their life, when they are attempting to assert their masculinity (Yu et al. 2017). In many ways, young women in our study, too, modelled more restrictive norms than older adults. For instance, as mentioned earlier, study participants considered young women less likely to work for pay than older married women and widows; a pattern underscored in Petesch et al.’s (2018b, this volume) analysis of 79 GENNOVATE cases.

Finally, although gender norms shape people’s lives, young women and men do not passively accept and experience these norms, but actively endorse, resist, and reshape them. This process of negotiation is reflected in the number of women trading at the market despite norms discouraging this practice in certain contexts, in the narrative of a bold young woman who asserts that women should be free to pursue any profession in the world, and in those few young people who defend positive perceptions of men who contribute to domestic work before their peers. In a systematic review of gender attitudes in early adolescence, Kågesten et al. (2016) found that adolescent girls challenge norms to a greater extent than adolescent boys, and that boys face greater social stigmas in doing so. Likewise, in urban China, India, Belgium and the United States, a growing acceptability for adolescent girls to engage in activities considered masculine was unparalleled for young men exhibiting feminine behaviors (Yu et al. 2017). The discord in narratives around women who trade in markets reflects how norms for women’s economic roles in particular are in flux and contested in many contexts around the world (Boudet et al. 2012). In contrast, norms defining masculinities, be it with respect to agricultural or domestic roles, showed greater stability; a finding also noted in Boudet et al.’s (2012) global comparative study.

Conclusion

Drawing on the narratives of rural young women and men from Latin America, North and Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, we identified several patterns in rural young people’s occupational aspirations, opportunities, and realities. Young women’s and men’s desire to pursue formal sector employment and to apply their education and training were recurrent themes. Whereas some young men aspired for knowledge-intensive or ‘modern’ agriculture-related occupations, young women showed no comparable interest. Underpinning these aspirations are various gender norms related to agriculture, many of which showed strong convergence across our data set. We contend that these norms, which portray agriculture as a masculine endeavour, limit women’s ability to learn about and try out new practices, and restrict their agricultural opportunities, also orient their aspirations away from agriculture. Both genders face an aspiration-achievement gap and express disillusionment with an opportunity space that does not facilitate them realizing their dreams.

These findings have important implications for agricultural policy and research for development. Opening up pathways for young women in agriculture will require addressing the intersecting

inequalities they face on the basis of age and gender. Doing so may include measures such as explicitly including young women in technical trainings, facilitating their access to credit and other resources, but also tackling gender norms that maintain the invisibility of their contributions to agriculture and other ‘productive’ and ‘reproductive’ activities. This will require working not only with women, but also with men and masculinities, and publicly valorizing agriculture and women and supportive men role models. Laying the structural foundations for a knowledge-intensive and ‘modern’ agriculture is also needed to enable bright young women and men to shine in the sector. In this respect, the agricultural aspirations young men expressed reveal a diversity of agriculture-related endeavours that can be nurtured to appeal to young entrepreneurs or graduates. Understanding the factors that can attract *young women* to agriculture will require additional time and attention.

That said, breaking with much of the ‘youth in agriculture’ literature that emphasizes ways to retain or draw young men and women into agriculture, we propose a shift towards supporting young people to achieve their aspirations. We suggest that these aspirations can be pursued while catalyzing innovation in agriculture and natural resource management. Rural landscapes are changing with, among other factors, education, communications technologies, and migration. Young people’s power to catalyze agricultural innovation should be re-conceptualized to better reflect their aspirations, knowledge, resources, and the enthusiasm they bring to other ways of being and doing. Remittances or money earned beyond the village or farm can facilitate important investments in the agricultural activities of family members who remain on the farm or those of young people in their own agricultural endeavours (Ftouhi et al 2015). Young people may move in and out of agriculture over their life course, combining it with other activities, in parallel or sequentially, to generate capital to establish their independent lives and livelihoods (Okali and Sumberg 2012). We must, then, look beyond the farm and village in supporting young people’s efforts to achieve socio-economic and physical mobility (Anyiodoho et al. 2012).

In this light, encouraging young people’s engagement in agriculture “should rather be one element of a comprehensive employment and development policy which addresses the complex factors and relationships that influence young people’s access to meaningful employment” (Langevang and Gough 2012, p. 250). It is not possible or desirable to develop a one-size-fits-all solution to include youth in agriculture. A more productive approach seeks to expand the range of options and space for this diverse generational group to gain a sense of agency, security, and fulfilment in the rural and urban areas where they experience life and make a living.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank the many young women and men who participated in this research for sharing their time and insights. We gratefully acknowledge the local data collection teams in each of the study countries, without whom these comparative analyses would not be possible. The CGIAR Fund Donors funded this research, through a number of CGIAR Research Programs: Dryland Systems; Forests, Trees and Agroforestry; Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereals; MAIZE; RICE; Roots, Tubers and Bananas; and WHEAT. The CGIAR Gender & Agricultural Research Network, the World Bank, the government of Mexico, the government of Germany, and the CGIAR Research Programs on WHEAT and MAIZE provided additional funding to develop the GENNOVATE methodology. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation generously supported data analysis. Two competent teams led by Diana E Lopez in Mexico and Lucila Rozas Urrunaga in

Peru coded the case studies, and further research assistance was provided by Mariachiara Ficarelli, Viola di Cori, Lydie Laure Tajioni Mampusso, and Victoria Winsryg. We thank Patti Petesch, Carol Colfer, and two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of the manuscript.

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