



Technical Briefing

# From ‘Waithood to Hustling’: Africa’s youth quest for dignified and fulfilling work

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**pas****r.org**  
PARTNERSHIP FOR AFRICAN SOCIAL  
& GOVERNANCE RESEARCH

In partnership with





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# Introduction

**T**his brief documents aspects of African youth's aspirations and resilience in their quest for dignified and fulfilling work. It synthesises evidence from Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, and Uganda. The data was collected from young men and women aged 15 to 35 years in 2019.

## Key highlights

1

Although youth are the majority, they are marginalised from mainstream socio-economic and political pathways

2

African youth exhibit diverse aspirations that depict futures marked by stable jobs, riches and community support, among other indicators

5

Youth across Africa have variously innovated or adopted strategies for building resilience, including savings, furthering education and seeking mentorship

3

Despite dislike for subsistence traditional agriculture, youth who want to venture into agriculture prefer mechanized modern farming and agribusiness.

4

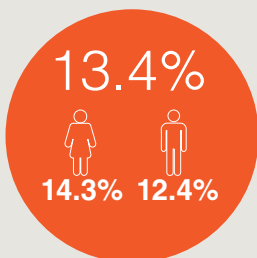
Youth are always actively engaged in income generating activities during the transition from school to employment. We refer to this period as 'waithood'.



# Facts About Study Countries

Youth Unemployment Rates<sup>1</sup> 2022

## Kenya



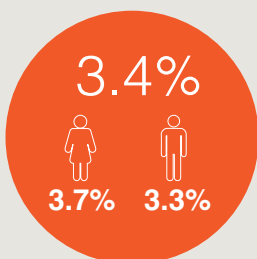
Youth (18-35 years) comprise **40.5%** of the population<sup>2</sup>

**72.7%** of the youth live in rural areas<sup>2</sup>

**83.9%** of the youth practice gambling<sup>2</sup>

**60%** of the youth (18-35) work in the informal sector<sup>5</sup>

## Senegal



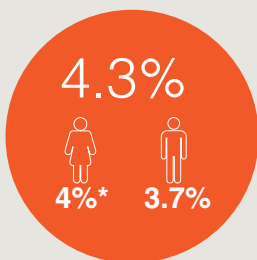
Youth (15-24 years) comprise **38.9%** of the population

**58.9%** of the youth live in rural areas<sup>2</sup>

**43.9%** of the youth (15-24) work in the informal economy<sup>6</sup>

Despite the low rate of unemployment, youth in Senegal face barriers in democratic inclusion, and political representation

## Uganda



\*2021 estimate

Youth (18-30 years) comprise **40.9%** of the population<sup>2</sup>

**83%** of the youth survive on the informal sector

**88.3%** of youth live in rural areas<sup>2</sup>

**59.5%** of the youth gamble<sup>2</sup>

## Ghana



Youth (15-35 years) comprise **39%** of the population<sup>2</sup>

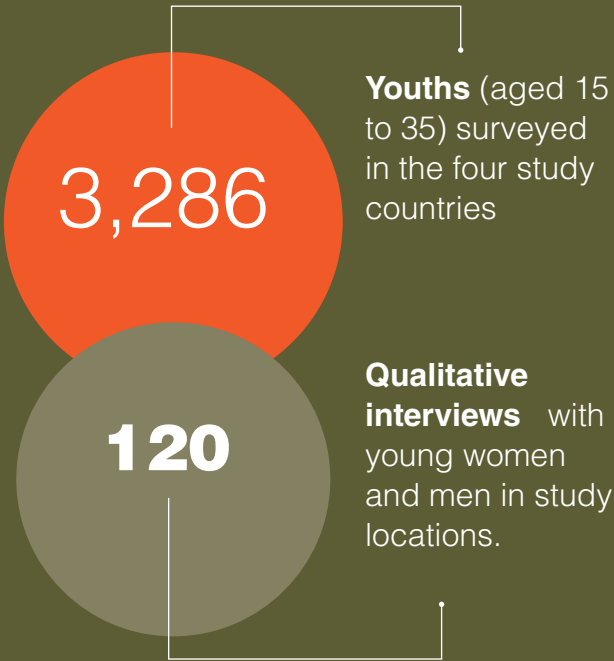
**52.5%** of the youth live in rural areas<sup>2</sup>

**70.68%** youth are into gambling<sup>3</sup>

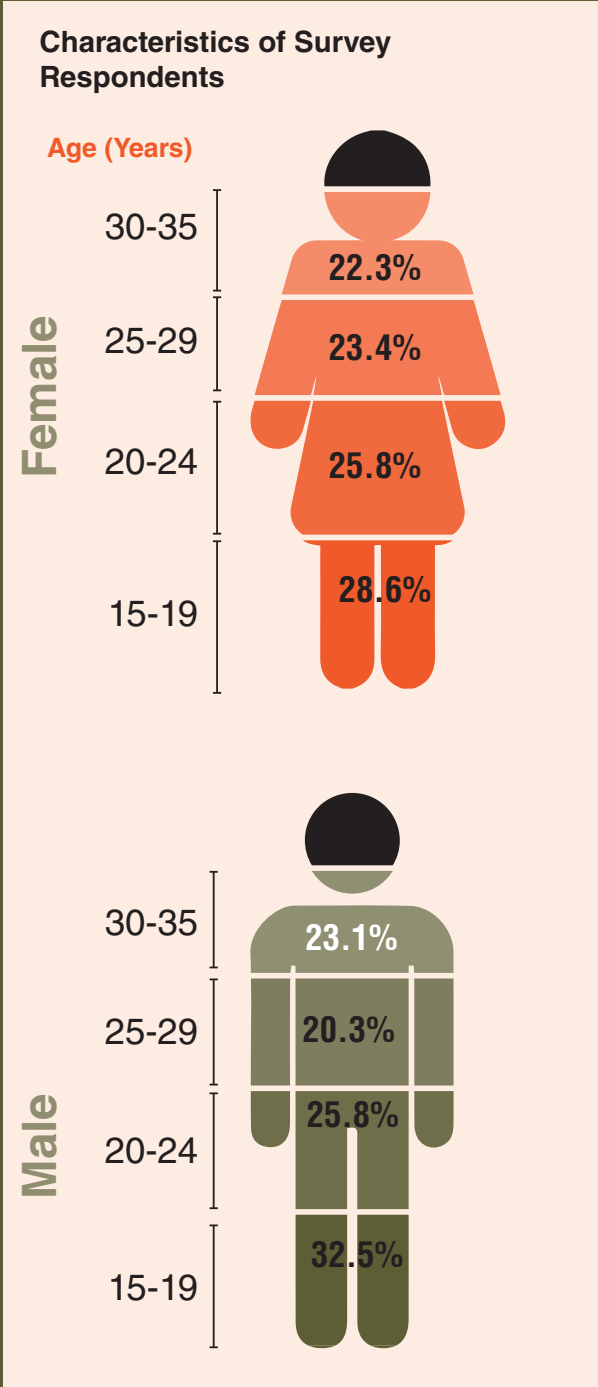
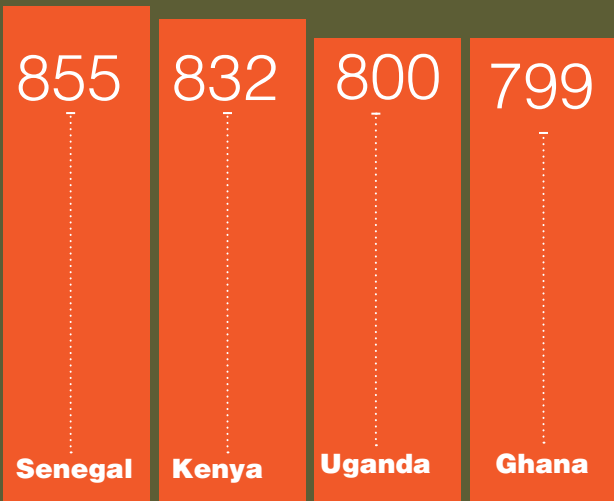
**81%** of youth (15-29) work in informal sector<sup>4</sup>

# Methodology

The survey respondents were carefully selected to represent various demographics of youth in Kenya, Uganda, Senegal and Ghana. The data was collected through a mixed-methods approach.

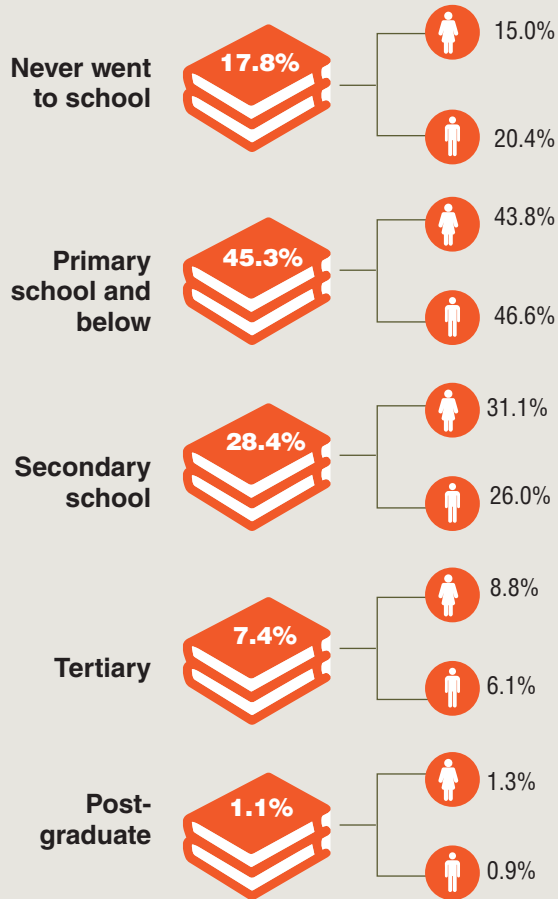


Distribution of respondents by Country

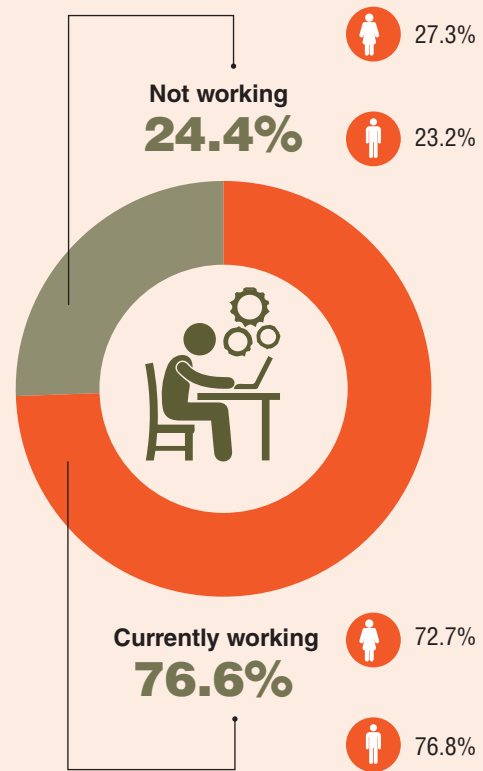


## Profile of respondents

### Education



### Employment



### Residence



Rural  
57.8%



Urban  
42.2%

Participants in the study were mostly female (52.7%), a majority of whom (57.7%) lived in rural settings. About 55.4% of the female youth were below 25 years old. The level of education was generally low, with 63.1% having attended up to primary school or having never attended school. Noteworthy, more females (21%) than males (15%) had never been to school. With this reality, the scope of ambition and resilience was constrained.

## ■ Dignified and Fulfilling Work

Youth across the study countries consider dignified work as employment that is meaningful and provides a sense of purpose, that offers good pay, and where employees have a safe and conducive environment for career and personal growth. Relatively, fulfilling work is considered by a majority of the youth to be work that offers freedom and provides opportunities for exploration and travel, work that is enjoyable, and offers diversity and experimentation. Ultimately, fulfilling work would result in a sense of satisfaction, purpose and personal accomplishment. In the context of aspirations, dignified and fulfilling work is considered as work that helps youth to attain their own aspirations as well as those of their immediate communities.

### Work is dignified and fulfilling when it:

- is reputable and valued by society;
- provides a sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment;
- provides reliable and sufficient income;
- makes young people feel respected, and;
- has workplace safety and freedom.

*A dignified job should not have negative effects on your life, in that you spend the money you earn to treat such effects.*

Urban Youth, Uganda

*A job with which we earn enough to satisfy our needs. And we won't have to beg or ask another person to solve our problems.* Rural Youth, Senegal

*When the society frowns against the job as not dignified, it means it does not command respect, and there is no job security. An occupation like prostitution, robbery, and drug dealing goes against societal norms and can lead to diseases like HIV/AIDS or serving a jail term.*

Urban Youth, Ghana

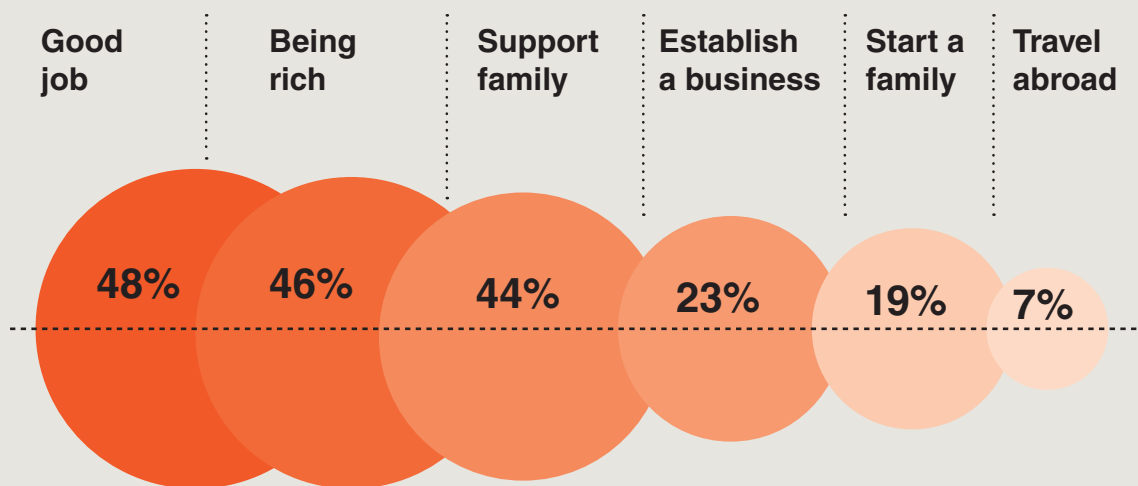
*So, I say when I get a job which doesn't put me under pressure and I get money to care for me and my family, when I have money, I have dignity.*

Urban Youth, Uganda



## ■ Diverse Aspirations

Youth in Africa have diverse aspirations that cut across the economic, social and political dimensions of life. These aspirations are linked to what youth consider as success in life – financial independence, owning land/house and supporting family and community. The aspirations include:



*My dream in the future if it's possible I want to have my farm so that I can get money to cater for my family, children, pay school fees...*

Rural Youth, Uganda

*"Youths want quick money, we want to invest where money is coming in fast. With government you have to wait until end month, so we opt for self-employment."*

Rural Youth, Kenya

*My dream is to buy a plot of land, build my house and be self-employed so I can earn money.*

Urban Youth, Kenya

*I cannot help other people to build their dreams, I want to build my own.*

Urban Youth, Ghana

## Aspirations by gender

There are also gendered dimensions to youth aspirations, with more females (20%) aspiring to higher education than males (18%). Males have a slightly higher aspiration for riches (48%) than females (46%). Both males and females share a common aspiration for gainful employment (48%).

20% Females aspire for higher education

18% Males aspire for higher education



### What do young men think about?

- Social status and popularity
- Money and financial stability
- Future plans and life goals
- Relationship and dating
- Career goals and development



### What do young men aspire to?

- Respect from others
- Financial stability and independence
- Developing strong networks
- Become a home or property owner
- Being providers and protectors to their families
- A meaningful and purposeful life



### What do young women think about?

- Family and children
- Fashion and style
- Education and personal growth
- Relationship and dating
- Friendship and social circles



### What do young Women aspire to?

- Finding love and a supportive life partner
- A promising career with equal remuneration and career progression opportunities
- A happy family with healthy children
- Making a positive impact on the society they live in
- Owning a home or property

## From ‘waithood to hustling’: Youth’s strategies for resilience

Most young people imagine a future where they can expand and diversify their current economic activities. These openings include pursuit for higher education, nominal entrepreneurship, professional salaried jobs, and investments in agriculture, although this was not very popular. The youth explore these options because they have limited access to productive resources such as land, capital, and market.

While they identified challenges accessing ICT, young people have also appropriated technology to improve their livelihoods and express themselves. For instance, in Kenya, ICT platforms such as MPesa have empowered the youth to transact and also to begin the basics of a saving regime through products such as Fuliza and M-Shwari. Across the study countries, youth also used technology to exercise agency in political and social-economic spaces.

From the foregoing, what was ordinarily defined as ‘waithood’ - period of transition from school-to-work characterized by active anticipation of the future by doing transitory economic activities while awaiting the ‘big break’ mostly in formal employment— is gradually transforming into more a permanent reality of life. This is due to the limited opportunities and the protracted delays in getting formal employment and achieving financial stability.”

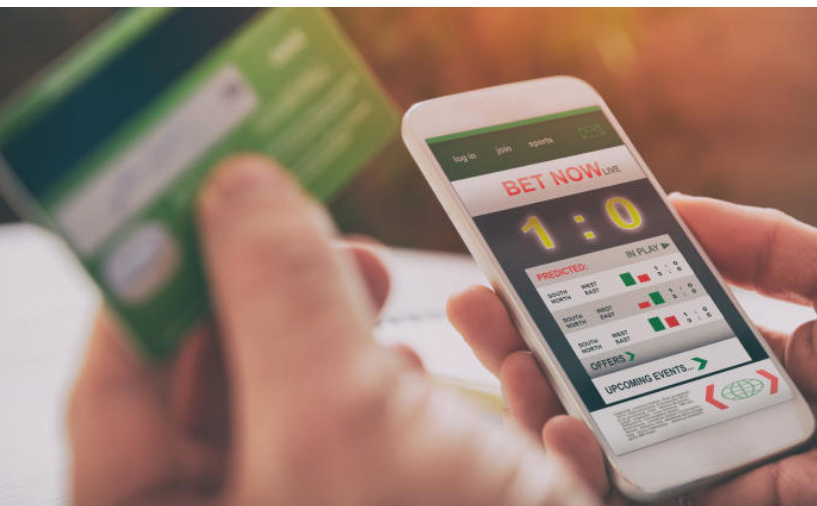


## About 65%

**of youth interviewed reported being able to improve their lives through hustling and taking action to make money.**

**A new concept commonly referred to by youth as ‘hustling’ has emerged. Since better opportunities take time to come, if at all they do, Africa’s youth engage in ‘hustles’ - doing any- or every-thing possible to achieve their aspirations.** Hustling is a means of survival in the informal economy with the hope of making a big break in the not-so-well defined near future. Although mostly prevalent among urban male youth, hustling is now considered a common reality among African youth across geographical settings and gender in Kenya, Ghana and Uganda.

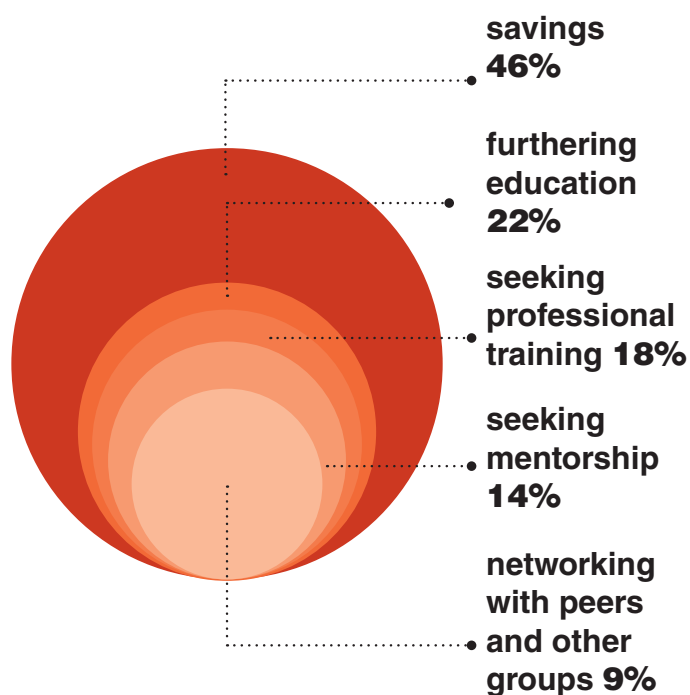
Rather than viewing youth as being in constant wait, hustling regards them as active agents of change, and recognizes their efforts in building their vision and achieving their desired future.



***We started with three people and decided to form a group. Now we have recruited people who are younger. We started to save money for issues like educating our children, relatives, and helping ourselves to live a better life.***

**Peri-urban Youth, Kenya**

Main resilience strategies reported by youth across the four countries include:



**We have a 'merry-go-round'; we contribute Kes 350 every Saturday then we divide it among ourselves at the end of the year.**

Peri-urban PWD  
Youth, Kenya

**Me I buy lotto tickets. The last time someone made [won lottery] GHC1,200; it is not small money. I wish that would work [win the lottery], but I want to be an electrical engineer.**

Urban Youth, Ghana

## Challenges that Youth Face

Youth also spoke about constraints to their aspirations. Topping the list were resource and information constraints, corruption and limited access to financial capital to start business. While majority of the participants in the survey had knowledge and skills in the use of ICT and the internet, **only 27% could access the internet, hence low awareness of existing opportunities.** Another key challenge was bureaucratic hurdles to accessing government funding for entrepreneurship projects

Young men reported systemic hurdles such as police brutality and political repression, while young women reported experiencing sexual harassment.

## Conclusion

This report has highlighted how young people make sense of their future and aspirations. At the core of this report is the message of youth yearning for dignified and fulfilling work which is not reflected in current youth employment interventions.

To build resilience and overcome their challenges, the youth identify the need for funding to support their businesses, opportunities for advancing education and facilitation to access job market.

Indeed, many youths in Africa have remarkable resilience. They leverage on technology to foster their ambitions and create business opportunities. Despite the commendable progress registered for and by the youth in Africa, concerns over access to opportunities such as funding, education and skills training persist.

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization. "ILO Modelled Estimates and Projections database ( ILOEST )" ILOSTAT. Accessed May 16, 2023. [ilostat.ilo.org/data](https://ilostat.ilo.org/data).

<sup>2</sup> UNFPA (2017). GLOBAL\_Revision of the World Population Prospects 2017. Accessed May 16, 2023. Available at <https://www.unfpa.org/wdata/adolescent-youth/SN>

<sup>3</sup> Statista (2022). Gambling among the youth in Africa. Accessed May 16, 2023. Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1305048/gambling-among-the-youth-in-africa-by-country/>

<sup>4</sup> INCLUDE Platform (2021). Youth Employment and Unemployment Challenges in Ghana: How does the media understand the issues? Accessed May 16, 2023. Available at <https://includeplatform.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Private-Sector-Youth-Employment-The-Role-of-the-Media-21.09.2021.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Republic of Kenya (2019). *Communication Authority of Kenya First Quarter Sector Statistics Report for the Financial Year 2018/2019*. Nairobi: Government Printer

<sup>6</sup> Brookings (2016). Senegal: Strategies to Integrate Youth Into The Labor Market. Available at [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/01\\_snapshot\\_senegal\\_diene.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/01_snapshot_senegal_diene.pdf)