

ISSUE BRIEF

RESILIENT GENERATION: SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE'S PROSPECTS FOR DECENT WORK IN THE DRYLANDS OF EAST AND WEST AFRICA

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Key messages

- Young people make up a large majority of the populations in east and west African countries. While this offers a boon for labour markets, it also presents challenges for governments and development agencies to provide decent, meaningful income-generating opportunities for young people.
- There is great potential to invest in climate-resilient, sustainable futures in the dryland economies and environments.
- Investing effectively, and reaping the economic and environmental benefits locally and regionally, will depend on engaging far more extensively and openly with young people in all their diversity: women, men and people with differing (dis)abilities and other traits. Specifically, there are vast, unmet needs and opportunities to invest in more locally relevant, climate-smart education, vocational and technical training and transitions into decent work for young people in the drylands. This is especially so for young people from pastoralist communities, whose access to educational and training services has been extremely poor to date.
- Development agencies and actors working in the drylands should intentionally seek to consult, partner with and support the leadership and decision-making agency of young people, particularly those from pastoralist backgrounds.



A young Borana woman with her goats in Borana, Ethiopia.
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Introduction

The eastern and western regions of Africa have a youthful population, with people under the age of 20 comprising more than one half of the population for most countries (World Bank, n.d.). This promises to be a boon for labour markets, but also challenges governments and development agencies to provide decent, meaningful income-generating opportunities for young people. The rural, predominantly arid and semi-arid areas of these regions – the drylands – certainly face these issues.

The drylands have been defined as areas with high climate variability; low soil fertility; sparse and mobile populations; geographies that are remote from and poorly served by development infrastructure; weak institutions and weak human capital; rich traditional and local knowledge; and ethnic and cultural diversity (Reynolds et al., 2007; Stafford Smith, 2008; Jobbins et al., 2016). These interrelated factors can lead to challenges in delivering services; poor access to markets; lower productivity; and a lag in human development (Reynolds et al., 2007; Jobbins et al., 2016). Climate change and other shocks, including conflict, continue to create new and emerging risks for rural livelihoods and young people's opportunities to secure decent, climate-resilient work (Wiggins et al., 2021; Levine et al., 2021; Gony et al., 2021).

Nevertheless, dryland regions offer economic opportunities that build upon the strengths of agriculture and pastoralism, including through livelihood diversification. This includes tourism, processing and service industries, renewable energy production (including solar, geothermal and wind power) and new and green technologies (Jobbins et al., 2016; PRISE, n.d.).

Until recently, there have been very few policies and programmes that have targeted education, skills development and employment support to young people in the drylands – let alone, in a climate-smart way.

Policy debates and programme design have also paid meagre attention to gender, age and poverty dynamics, and other intersecting social identities (such as ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability and geography etc.) that influence young people's experiences, ideas and aspirations. Traditional gender and social norms, roles and responsibilities continue to influence the livelihood options and income-generating activities available to young girls and disadvantaged groups, including access to and control over assets and resources (Vincent, 2021 forthcoming).

Scope of the study

This issue brief summarises key findings and recommendations from the full research report entitled *Resilient Generation: supporting young people's prospects for decent work in the drylands of east and west Africa* (Dupar et al., 2021).

The study:

- **reviews the factors that currently shape dryland youth livelihoods and work prospects** and their trajectories as young adults. The definition of 'young people' or 'youth' was 15-25 and up to 35 years. This includes not only young people's access to education, skills training and vocational guidance. It also covers the market environment, government policies and investment priorities; and the context of multi-hazard risks (including climate variability and change, Covid-19, etc.) that shape young people's options, or what Sumberg and Okali (2013) call 'opportunity spaces' for decent work;
- **examines the opportunities and provides recommendations for external actors to work with young people in dryland communities to broaden their 'opportunity spaces' for decent work**, and to do this in a way that is fully gender-responsive and socially inclusive of young people in all their diversity. This includes capturing lessons from existing project experience to inform dryland development initiatives;
- **focuses on young people, with a focus on those from pastoralist backgrounds** who are both active in pastoralism or have dropped out. The study takes a broadly regional approach, but with a particular focus on the opportunities for young people in Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan.

The research involved a review of: i) grey and academic literature; ii) existing policy documents; iii) programme interventions; iv) statements by young people in regional and international fora; and v) 18 key informant interviews with development partners, pastoralist and youth networks in the region.

What does decent work look like in the drylands?

Full and productive employment and decent work for all is a core component of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). Goal 8, 'Decent Work and Economic Growth' includes Target 8.5, which aims to achieve full and productive employment, decent work, and equal pay for all, including young people. Target 8.6 aims to

“substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training” by 2020 (UN, 2020).

Many work options merely enable young people to survive from day to day (as with casual labour, or low-productivity, smallholder agriculture). However, other options allow real incomes and capabilities to be enhanced and capital accumulated, which may even help to rebalance social injustices (such as gender inequalities) (Sumberg and Okali, 2013). It is these latter opportunities which this study characterises as ‘decent’ work. Decent work is secure, paid work that provides a steady stream of income and the opportunity to accrue assets (ibid.); it is dignified and non-exploitative.

In the drylands context, decent work must also be defined by its resilience and capacity to adapt to climate change, and its alignment with low-carbon infrastructure and programming, such as renewable energy expansion. The drylands are not static in this regard, but rather, a constantly dynamic landscape of risk and opportunity. Among other things, the drylands are exposed to increasingly frequent high temperatures and variable rainfall, as a result of climate change (IPCC, 2021; Gutierrez et al., 2021). Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan – as well as other governments of east and west Africa – have all ratified the Paris Agreement, which commits

signatories to “[m]aking finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development” (UNFCCC, 2015: 3, Article 2.1c).

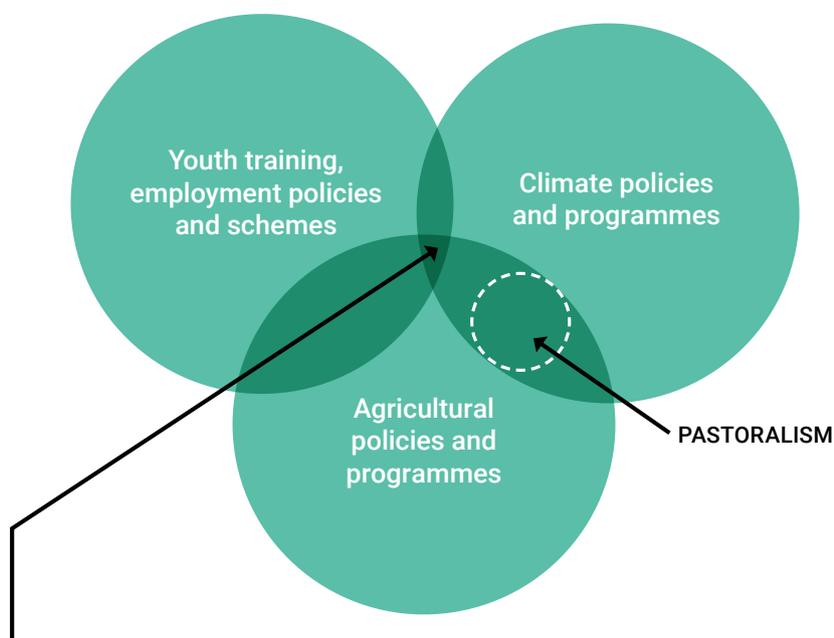
Young people’s opportunity spaces for decent work are also shaped by social and gender norms. Policies and programmes (as well as dynamic and unplanned fluxes of people and ideas over time) can play a role in expanding community acceptance of what livelihood options and income-generating activities are available to women and men.

Gaps in policy and programming for young people in the drylands

Youth employment is a stated policy priority for the African Union as a whole. There are a substantial number of policies for the provision of youth employment in the six countries studied.

There are varying degrees of integration between employment policies and the climate-resilience and/or low-carbon development agendas, across the countries studied. The region’s most populous countries, Nigeria

FIGURE 1: THE NEXUS OF YOUTH, EMPLOYMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE, AGRICULTURE AND PASTORALISM



The area where employment generation and support schemes (e.g. skills training, access to capital) overlaps with climate resilience/green economy overlaps with target youth (late teens to 25-year-olds) is very small. Most programmes occupying this area, as evidenced by this study, are targeted at youth in urban areas and/or have settled agriculture and its related agricultural value chains as their focus. The presence of rural and dryland youth, including those from pastoralist and agro-pastoralist communities, in this already small landscape is so minute and under-represented that they barely figure.

Source: Authors.



The people in the fishing village of Orimedu (Lagos State), Nigeria selling freshly caught fish. Photo: Arne Hoel/World Bank, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

and Ethiopia, have coherent green growth and/or green employment policies. Nigeria’s updated national climate plan, the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC; FRoN, 2021), has a major new section on the importance of investing in ‘green job’ creation and highlights the needs and potential of young people.

Ethiopia established its all-of-government Climate Resilience Green Economy Strategy in 2011 and has been systematically strengthening the governance mechanisms to integrate climate resilience in sectoral policies and programmes (FDRE, 2011; 2019; 2021). In the other focal countries, employment generation (including youth skills training) is less well-integrated with climate and environmental sustainability goals, at present.

Integration of the climate adaptation and land restoration agendas with economic development imperatives is an emergent trend in regional and national policies and programming, including in the NDCs and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), although these are not fully implemented yet (FDRE, 2021; FGoS, 2015; FRoN, 2021; Republic of Sudan, 2016 and 2021; TRoSS, 2021). There are a growing number of initiatives to promote employment in these areas, including governments’ interest in accelerating implementation of the African Union’s flagship, regional Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI, n.d.).

Exceptionally **few policies and programmes in the drylands have worked at the intersection of decent work, youth, climate resilience and pastoralism (see Figure 1)**. In the growing number of job creation and training schemes focused on settled agriculture, agroforestry and forestry (and related land restoration and integrated water management), there is a tendency to **have either a strong climate/environmental sustainability focus or a youth**

focus. It is less common for them to incorporate both aspects fully. National youth policies, where they exist, seldom promote climate-resilient livelihoods and rarely acknowledge pastoralists.

Strong need for greater evidence and engagement with young people

Young people from rural, dryland backgrounds, especially those from pastoralist backgrounds, are under-represented in policy processes, which means their needs, priorities, vulnerabilities and capacities are not taken into account within decision-making processes.

The general absence of disaggregated and intersectional data leads to **young people from pastoralist backgrounds being under-represented in policies and programmes**. Young women and men with disabilities in pastoralist communities remain almost invisible. **This makes it impossible to determine whether young people’s needs are being sufficiently addressed in their pathways into decent work, in the drylands.**

Pathways to decent work start with relevant education

Among young people from pastoralist and agropastoralist backgrounds, **educational attainment is likely to be stymied by lack of reliable or quality schooling**. Some of the countries studied have made provisions for teaching modalities that better suit pastoralist livelihoods (e.g. mobile schools and increasingly tailoring of school sessions to the seasonal cycles of the pastoralist calendar),

but these initiatives are not yet widely implemented. There is a pressing need to better document and share learning about pilot solutions. Educational curricula are generally criticised by key informants and in the literature as being urban-biased and out of touch with rural priorities (and pastoralism, where relevant). Curricula do not yet sufficiently integrate content on climate change, nor what it means for the rural places where young people grow up and the livelihoods upon which they may come to depend.

Policies and support programmes can open ‘opportunity spaces’

In any youth cohort from the dryland areas, including pastoralist/agropastoralist backgrounds, there will be a diversity of preferences for work. Young people from pastoralist backgrounds tell us they see their conventional choices as: i) staying in traditional livelihoods; ii) expanding economic opportunity within livestock and agropastoralist value chains (e.g. through microenterprise); iii) ‘dropping out of pastoralism’ and seeking alternative rural work; and iv) migrating to towns, cities and further afield for entirely different employment.

In addition to their own preferences, each young person will face different barriers and opportunities for work pathways including: their positions in family hierarchies and inheritance systems; age, gender, cultural expectations; the extent to which they can afford to migrate; and so on.

It is the task of programmes for youth education, skills and employment to navigate these issues sensitively. **Rather than being prescriptive about young people’s futures, policies and programmes can open the ‘opportunity spaces’ where young people can make informed choices** (Sumberg and Okali, 2013). Positive case study examples, such as from the Educating Nigerian Girls in New Enterprises (ENGINE) II programme (rural Nigeria) and BOMA project (east Africa) demonstrate how this can be achieved.

Work choices are shaped by availability of finance and land, which are typically gendered

Capital constraints, including land (tenure and access) and finance, are cited by key informants and in the literature as insurmountable constraints for young people who wish to make a living from agriculture or pastoralism, including conventional production or through value chain addition. Young people encounter age- and gender-related barriers to accessing and owning land and credit. Village savings and loans schemes can support

access to microcredit, but often provide insufficient sums to support young people’s requirements. It has been suggested that a way forward is offering asset-based loans to young people, with priority given to those from the poorest households, to reduce the need for external collateral and improve investments in productivity versus consumption (Presler-Marshall et al., 2021).

Recommendations

The overarching recommendation of this study is to establish more programmes that include an integrated approach to youth, climate, agriculture and pastoralism, and decent work. Our study has highlighted the large gap in programme interventions that address this nexus of issues and the great potential for investment (Figure 1). It is also important to expand the narrative around young people’s livelihood options in dryland regions.

This has two elements: young people themselves can be encouraged to think more broadly about what work choices to pursue, within and far beyond agriculture and pastoralism, i.e. their perception of the ‘opportunity spaces’ available. Critically, policy-makers and development practitioners can recognise and build upon the wide range of opportunities that are available to support economic growth in the drylands. This includes tourism, processing and service industries, new livelihood opportunities in urban centres (Jobbins et al., 2016; PRISE, n.d.), and mobilising investment for some of the priorities in countries’ NDCs, such as renewable energy production (including solar, geothermal and wind power) and new and green technologies, all of which would expand the actual ‘opportunity spaces’ or job prospects for young people. More specific recommendations for action follow below.

1. Strengthening the educational foundations for decent work, through:

- teaching basic literacy and numeracy in the context of applied learning that is relevant to the drylands;
- providing young people with a strong understanding of the basics of climate change and its implications;
- addressing the socioeconomic and culturally specific drivers for school absenteeism and drop-out, and helping young people to catch up;
- bridging gaps in access to information and communications that could help young people access continual learning;
- adapting teaching regimes to meet the realities of pastoralist communities.

2. Enhancing vocational training and guidance for young people in the drylands, by:

- asking young people what they think and ensuring extensive, disaggregated and intersectional consultation and documentation of young people's work and livelihood priorities in the drylands;
- supporting youth leadership and the integration of young people (across genders, age, abilities and economic status) in the design of projects and programmes for vocational skills training;
- responding to the distinct needs and priorities of different groups of young people;
- tackling gender discrimination and targeting the specific needs of girls and young women;
- ensuring young people's vocational skill training is climate-smart;
- providing services to young people (e.g. mentoring, work experience/apprenticeships, role-modelling) that expand young people's aspirations, their ideas about work and livelihood choices, their capabilities, incomes and ability to accumulate assets, and their transition into decent work;
- ideally, offering programmes and services for vocational training and transitions to decent work, including mentoring, peer-to-peer support spaces, etc., that run for several years; in order to extend guidance for young people through their education, training and early work years;
- supporting those who have dropped out of formal education, and ensuring all interventions are facilitated in a gender-responsive and socially inclusive way to support adolescent girls' and boys' choices around decent work.

3. Broadening young people's access to wider economic opportunities available in the dryland areas, including climate-resilient, low-carbon vocations, through:

- increasing the focus and investment by governments and development partners on the wide range of opportunities that are available to support economic growth and environmental protection and restoration in the drylands, beyond conventional agriculture and pastoralism. This includes mobilising investment for some of the priorities in countries' NDCs, such as climate-smart agriculture, pastoralism and value chains,

land restoration for productive use, recreation and tourism, renewable energy production (including solar, geothermal and wind power) and new and green technologies, all of which would expand the job prospects for young people;

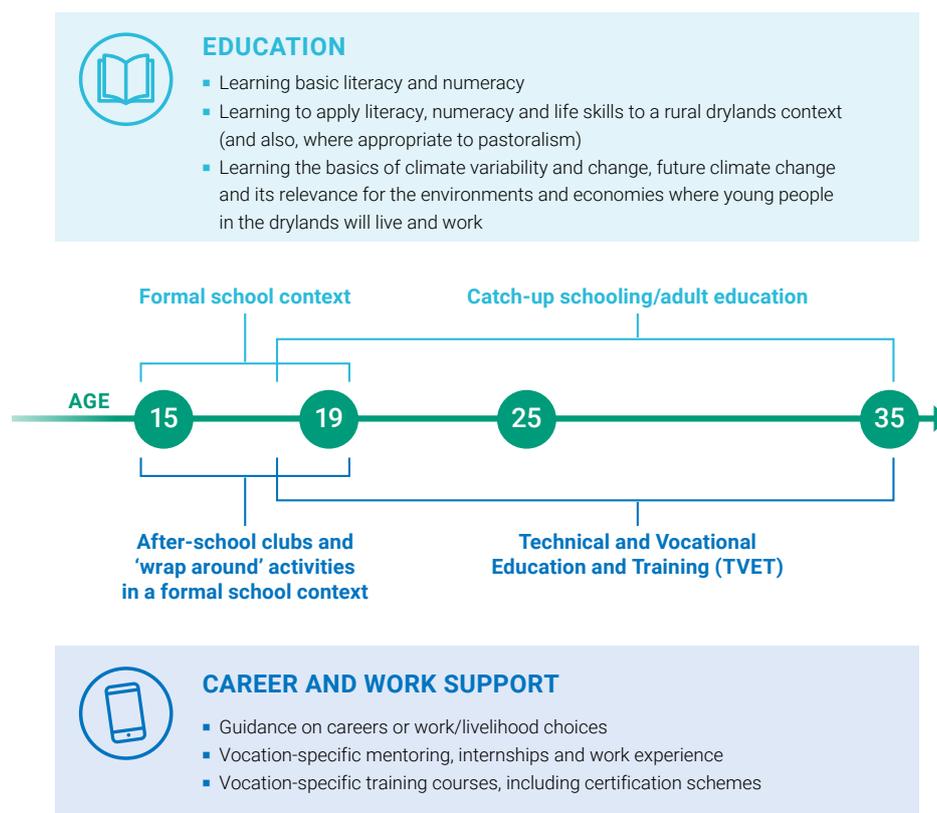
- strengthening labour market conditions (supply/ viability of jobs) and individuals' skills and qualifications for pursuing different work choices;
- matching the climate-resilient, low-carbon ambitions of governments with vocations that young people can aspire to and access.

4. Addressing the enabling environment to support young people to access and secure decent work in the drylands, by:

- ensuring markets are viable to support young people to develop micro- and small enterprises, generate income and accumulate assets;
- developing the infrastructure, including information systems and market intelligence, to understand and support resilient market systems in the drylands;
- examining how legal frameworks can support communities to access land, including through collective ownership, and how this could benefit young people;
- providing young people with access to capital/ finance and financial services, and ensuring access is inclusive of women and other marginalised groups.

Figure 2 illustrates the stages of a young person's life where support can be strategically targeted – from the formal school environment through vocational programmes and in the labour market context.

FIGURE 2: OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERVENTION TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE'S PATHWAYS INTO DECENT, CLIMATE-RESILIENT WORK IN THE DRYLANDS



Support interventions should be: non-discriminatory, avoiding gender stereotypes, tailored to (dis)abilities of individuals, sensitive to and supportive of the needs of young parents, and climate-informed.

Measures to address the enabling environment for the interventions can include: sensitisation and engagement with the broader community, including young people's parents, guardians and elders (and boys where gender discrimination must be tackled); engagement with public policy-makers, government and business people to support the implementation of enabling policies.

Source: Authors.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank all the people who reviewed, fed into and helped us produce this report (please see the main report for the full acknowledgements). Many thanks to the Supporting Pastoralism and Agriculture in Recurrent and Protracted Crisis (SPARC) Programme and the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) Programme for funding this piece of work; they are, in turn, supported by the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

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Funded by



Fund manager



This material has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.