

Are there Livelihood Opportunities for Us? Rural Youth Access to Land rights in Rwanda

Abstract

Rural populations in developing countries, including Rwanda, predominantly depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. However, factors such as growing population, declining soil fertility and increasing environmental degradation, agricultural commercialization, and global land grabbing have all heightened demands for land, making it hard for young people – potentially leaving them landless and without livelihood opportunities. The Government of Rwanda has set up various institutions, laws, policies and strategies to meet the need of young people by improving the agricultural sector and promoting off-farm employment. The argument espoused in this paper is that, even so, the expansion of non-agricultural opportunities has been very slow in rural areas and agriculture is still the basis for survival. If agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of the rural youth, what access do these young people have to agricultural land? What strategies available to the youth when the land becomes scarce? This study intends to reply to these questions by reviewing the literature related to the issue of rural youth access to land and by gathering the views of the youth through field work.

The empirical data from this study were collected through a mixed method approach including both qualitative and quantitative data collection tools in three districts Rubavu, Gicumbi and Bugesera during January–March 2017. Quantitative data were collected through a questionnaire with 150 youth from different background and qualitative data through Focus Group Discussions with members of youth associations and semi-structured interviews with youth leaders from National Youth Council Committees at the local level.

Researches focusing on the rural youth livelihoods are not new. However, the study of this in relation to the access to land in Rwanda is an area that remains under explored especially after the completion of Land Registration and Titling Program through which the majority of Rwandan populations got land titles. The scientific exploration of this topic is vital in informing and enhancing policies that intend to promote economic, social, cultural, intellectual and moral welfare of the Rwandan rural youth.

Key words: Livelihood opportunities, rural youth, access to agricultural land, Rwanda

Introduction

Young people constitutes the large share of the global population with rapidly increase in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) (Bennell 2007). Nearly 1 billion of the 1.2 billion people in the world between the ages of 15 and 24 reside in developing countries, and their numbers are growing far more rapidly than in higher-income countries (IFAD 2019) and projected to decrease everywhere except in SSA. It is estimated that around 55% of youth reside in rural areas, but this figure is as high as 70 percent in SSA and South East Asia (IFAD 2014). Like in other developing countries, youth make a large share of the Rwandan population. According to the 4th Rwanda Population and Housing Census (RPHC4), the population of Rwanda was 10.5 million with 62 percent of the population under 25 years of age and 78.7 % aged between 0- 35 years (RoR-NISR 2015). The recent figures show that overall youth population (16-30 years) makes up 26.6% of the total population of Rwanda (NISR 2018)

Despite the significant share of youth in the total population, youth development has remained at the margins of national development strategies in most countries. However, there is a resurgence of interest in youth, because it was realized that the precariousness of youth livelihoods result in severe negative political, social and economic consequences (Bennell 2007). Like is the trend in other developing countries, the Rwandan youth is predominantly rural and work in agriculture, where female youth are over-represented with 79% against 61% of male youth (RoR-NISR 2014). Hence, agriculture remains the world's single biggest source of employment (IFAD, 2010; World Bank, 2014). The creation of non-farm employment opportunities in rural areas evolves very slowly and the dependence of the rural people on the agriculture for their survival seems to remain so for a long time to come (IFAD, 2019).

Since the majority of rural youth depend on agriculture, land becomes a very important asset for them. Ensuring secure land rights has been a global concern and still is and significant efforts have been made in this area (Bayisenge, Hojer and Espling 2014; Bayisenge 2015). However, while property rights and economic opportunities are expanding for youth, land is largely seen as an adult privilege. Access to and control over land is one of the key challenges that young people face in many rural areas of the world (IFAD, 2014), especially since there does not seem to be much off-farm employment opportunities in the rural areas.

Increasing landlessness among the youth result in a number of challenges including chronic poverty, violence, starvation, discrimination, migration to urban areas, unemployment disappointment, marginalization and lack of self-esteem, which leads the youth to question their future possibilities. There comes the need to focus on the livelihoods of this specific category of the population. Policies and research focusing on the rural youth livelihoods are not new. However, the study of this in relation to the access to land from which the large majority of this youth get their survival is an area that has remained under explored especially for the case of Rwanda. In Rwanda, the Government has set up laws, policies and strategies and implemented a Land Tenure Regularization program with the main objective of ensuring secure land rights for all Rwandans (RoR 2013). However, socio-cultural factors expecting young people to wait adulthood before

asserting their land rights and other factors such as growing population, agricultural commercialization, and global land grabbing have also heightened demands for land, making it hard for young people to access land leaving them landless and without livelihood opportunities (Bennell 2007). In addition, new land laws have also removed in the law the provision on the obligation of parents to give *umunani* (ascending partition) and the latter was the main way through which youth could get access to land (RoR 2016)

This whole scenario motivated the undertaking of this study in order to hear from the youth themselves about how they experience their rights to accessing and controlling land. If agriculture is the main source of livelihood for the majority of the rural youth, this paper intends to explore the possibilities of accessing agricultural land that these young people have in the Rwandan case. Secondly the paper highlights challenges associated with landlessness as well as livelihoods strategies available to the youth when land access becomes insecure. The paper achieved these main objectives through the review of the literature related to the issue both from the Rwandan and global context and field work

Conceptual and literature considerations

Who are rural youth?

Youth is a concept that is differently defined. Its definitions are socially constructed and vary quite considerably between international organizations, conventions, and even across countries and disciplines. They have evolved depending on political fluctuations, economic and socio-cultural contexts (White, 2011). Most of the definitions are based on the criteria of age. Fussel (as cited in World Bank (2007) defines youth as transitional phase from childhood to adulthood through a process of intense physiological, psychological, social, and economic change, gradually come to be recognized and to recognize themselves as adults.

For the United Nations, youth refers to all individuals aged between 15 and 24. The 2007 World Development Report on youth expands the definition of youth to include all young people aged between 12 and 24 (World Bank 2007). African Youth Charter expands further the upper bound age ranges and defines youth as the individuals between 15 and 35 years of age. Definitions also vary across disciplines. Fussel (as cited in World Bank 2007) states that in the health field for example, youth is associated with the ages of physical maturation that begins with menarche for girls and more gradually for boys, typically between the ages of 10 and 16. In the social sciences youth is defined by the acquisition of various adult statuses, marked by events such as menarche, leaving school, employment, marriage, and voting, with the recognition that becoming an adult is a lengthy, self-reinforcing process, often extending into the twenties. For IFAD youth is a distinct stage of human development, a time of transition from dependence to independence and a time marked by critical decisions that affect the future of the individual and society. IFAD report further

argues that when this transition is successful, it results in a well-adjusted adult who is able to prosper and to contribute to the economy and society while an unsuccessful transition may result in lifelong poverty and social maladaptation, generating long-term negative outcomes for the individual, his or her family and society at large. Thus, since the stakes are so high, this period of life is universally a focus of intense concern (2019 p.50)

National policies on youth typically establish an age range for beneficiaries with variations between countries. Fussel (as cited in World Bank 2007) explains that the lower bound ranges from around 12 years to around 18 years while the upper bound ranges from around 24 to even 35 or 40 in some countries. In Rwanda, youth was defined as population aged 14 to 35 years until the new National Youth Policy (NYP) of November 2015 officially revised youth age groups and defined youth as people aged 16 to 30 years (RoR 2015). As stated in this policy, the GoR revised youth definition because of the need to keep in close conformity with regional and international bodies that Rwanda subscribes to as well as to harmonize the definition of youth and youth programs taking into account the current local policies and legal frameworks (NYP 2015).

Rural youth access and control over agricultural land

Though, rural reality is changing fast in many countries, agriculture remains the major source of livelihoods for most poor rural people in developing world (Moreda 2012; World Bank 2007) and it is vital in ensuring food security for the urban population (Nkurunziza 2006). Many studies have provided evidences showing land as an important determinant of livelihood in rural areas. Land is more than a material asset; it has both a symbolic and material value (Agarwal 1994; Rao 2007; RISD 2013). Firstly, youth access to and control over land is a factor of autonomy and provides them opportunities for maintaining their livelihoods. Furthermore, their land rights are intertwined with the pursuit of identity, community and cultural expression (Sait, Pedersen and Solberg 2004). Secondly, it constitutes a factor of empowerment central their decision making power within their families, communities and organizations (Misleh, 2014). Therefore, insecure land access affects rural youth not only economically but also their social and political power within their communities is threatened.

Despite the key importance of land to the survival of rural youth, access to land constitutes one of key constraints hindering youth transition from dependence to independence (IFAD, 2019). According to the same report from IFAD (2019) young people in rural areas who wish to become farmers have always faced the challenge of gaining access to land and three factors are highlighted. The latter include the rapid population growth, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, land is becoming less available, and plots are becoming smaller and more fragmented. Second, parents are living longer and are continuing to farm their land for a longer time, and they are therefore less likely to transfer land to their children when their children are entering the labour force. Misleh states that since nowadays life expectancy is increasing, land inheritance it is no

longer the transfer of land from adult to young generation but it is becoming the transfer of land from the elder to adult generations. And most of the time, youth do not have access through inheritance until they are adults (Misleh 2014). Children who want to farm can thus either work their parents' land, thereby delaying their transition to independence and their attainment of greater decision-making authority IFAD (2019). Third, new opportunities for agricultural commercialization continue to make this important asset very scarce thus increasing the competition around it (Bezu and Holden, 2014; Bennell 2007 and IFAD, 2019). As a result, young people are significantly less likely than adults to own land, and they are even less likely to have sole title to it. In sub-Saharan Africa, around 1 in 3 adults is the sole owner of a plot of land, while this is true of fewer than 1 in 10 young people (IFAD 2019, p.33).

It is important to mention that the landlessness among the youth does not always result from the limited size or inexistence of land within the household. It may also result from biased attitudes about the land rights for the youth. There is an expectation that youth gain access to land through adults, or wait for until they themselves are adults. They are considered as immature people who have to reach adulthood before getting access to and control over land (Sait, Pedersen and Solberg 2004). For some of the youth, their social and legal position as minors may effectively block their exit options, unlike the case for married couples, who may use non-cooperation to strengthen their bargaining power (Bezu and Holden, 2014). Older people, and especially older males, tend to dominate decision-making by controlling the means of production as well as of reproduction at all levels in traditional societies. This system of social stratification in which the old, typically the old men, dominate the young is referred to as 'gerontocracy' (Koktvedgaard 2008, p.50; Bennell 2007).

There may be different ways for the youth to get access to land. Yet, in many developing countries inheritance constitutes the main ways through which young people gain access to land. The norm is that, in many customary systems land rights are passed down from father to son. For daughter, marriage becomes an important way to gain access to land however these rights are characterized as usufruct rights (RoR-MINIRENA 2004; Polavarapu 2011). The challenge is that the ongoing sub-division of land through inheritance has resulted in fragmented and unviable land parcels and increasingly the youth are becoming landless (Bennell 2007; Bayisenge 2015).

Increasing landlessness among the youth results in a number of challenges. Young women and men living in landless households are more prone to poverty, violence, starvation, discrimination, migration to urban areas, and in turn to urban unemployment and social problems. This vulnerable situation is associated with disappointment, marginalization and lack of self-esteem, which leads the youth to question their future possibilities. As Bezu and Holden (2014) argue, youth can remain poor for the rest of their lives unless they have opportunities. This precarious situation may be also a source of tension among rural families.

The re-emphasis on the importance of land in ensuring the livelihoods for the rural poor, does not

intend to undermine the contribution of non -farm activities (Moreda 2012). Rural population is not solely depending on agriculture. Non-agricultural activities account for a large and growing share of employment and income by providing either an additional source of income to farmers or serve as the only source of livelihood to rural residents who lack key assets, especially land (Bennell 2007; Bezu and Holden, 2014). Bezu and Holden (2014) categorize the incentives that motivate employment or investment in the non-farm sector into two groups: push and pull factors. By push factors, these authors relate for example to the low performance of agriculture as well as incomplete markets for factors, such non-access to land, credit, and insurance markets. The pull factors emerge if earnings from non-farm sector become higher than earnings from farm employment.

The lack of significant investments in terms of technological and institutional changes in agriculture (Jama and Pizarro 2008; Nkurunziza 2006) makes this sector less attractive especially to the youth. Though youth have desirable qualities that can promote agriculture, most of them show a very low interest toward it (Kimaro, Towo and Moshi 2015). Rural youth are increasingly disinterested in smallholder farming, which they consider as dirty work (Bennell 2007). As copying strategy, rural youth tend to be relatively mobile, both nationally and increasingly across international borders (Bennell 2007). Rural areas with strong push factors but little local off-farm employment opportunity may experience high levels of outmigration. (Bezu and Holden, 2014). However rural youth is a significant engine for agricultural development. As Kimaro et al. (2015) states rural youth are potential labour forces characterized by innovative behavior, greater physical strength minimal risk of aversion, which is the important pillar for the agriculture development.

Overview of rural youth access to land in Rwanda

Rural households in Rwanda like in other developing countries depend on agriculture for their consumption and as a source of cash income to meet other household needs. Findings from a study carried out by the MINAGRI (2015) show that about 62% of the sampled households reported crop production as their most important livelihood activity (MINAGRI 2015). The same report indicates that 61% of the employed youth are self-employed and 67% of them are primarily into Agriculture. The serious problem is that most of the activities from this sector are of extremely low productivity, and involves precarious conditions, which can be considered as vulnerable employment or even unemployment (RoR, 2015). In order to assure their living, rural youth rely on different means of survival including livestock raising, unskilled daily labour and informal sale/petty trade but agricultural production remain the main means of survival. (MINAGRI, NISR and WFP, 2016, p.52).

Access to land is one of the areas that has marked important changes in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide against Tutsi. Significant progress in this domain were made through the elaboration of various land related laws, policies programs and strategies to ensure good management of land, security of tenure for all Rwandans (Gillingham & Buckle 2014; RoR- MINIRENA 2004) as well

as equal inheritance rights to all legitimate children without any discrimination between male and female children. This effort culminated into the implementation of Land registration and Titling programme (Ali Ayalew et al., 2011; DFID-Rwanda, 2011; Gillingham & Buckle, 2014; RISD, 2013). The LRT Program started in 2006 as pilot study and fully implemented until 2013. The last phase named *Consolidation Phase (2014 onwards)* related to the management of land transactions through the register is still on going (RoR-MINIRENA, 2008). It has been a very ambitious but also very successful systematic land registration programme. Indeed, by end July 2013 (the deadline for the closing of the LTR operations), 10.3 million parcels had been demarcated and 7.9 million certificates of titles had been provided where 24% of titles were given to women only, 14% only to men and 58.3% to married couples (RNRA 2016).

The analysis of these legal instruments, policies and programs altogether shows that the GoR has made a strong commitment towards ensuring secure land to all rwandans including the youth who form the majority of the population. However, the implementation of some of these good initiatives still face challenges. The majority of rural youth in Rwanda gain access to land through inheritance and *umunani* (ascending partition). In 2016, the Government of Rwanda adopted law No27/2016 of 08/07/2016 governing matrimonial regimes, donations and successions replacing the law n° 22/99 of 12/11/1999 supplementing Book I of the civil code and instituting part five regarding matrimonial regimes, liberalities and successions enacted in 1999. The new law brought changes in the management and rights on family property by the surviving spouse but also on the rights of the youth to the succession and *umunani* (ascending partition) from their parents.

In the former law, it was a requirement for parents to give *umunani* to their children when they attain the age of maturity, if parents failed to do so; children had rights to bring the case to court. In the new law, it is no longer an obligation for parents to give *umunani* to their children. It all depends on parents' willingness and capability to do so. Both laws have provisions around succession where all legitimate children of the de cujus, in accordance with civil laws, inherit in equal parts without any discrimination between male and female children. The majority of rural youth in Rwanda used to gain access to land through succession and *umunani*. Yet, recent studies have identified succession as one of the major challenges that the implementation of Land Tenure Reform Program in Rwanda faced.

Many conflicts are raising from sharing of land parcels within families especially when the land is small and the family size is large which is the case in many rural households (Bayisenge et al. 2014; Bayisenge 2015; RISD 2013). In addition, the Land Law in its article 30, prohibits the subdivisions of the plots of land reserved for agriculture and animal resources if the result of such subdivision leads to the parcels of land of less than a hectare in size for each of them (ROR 2013). According to this law, the majority of parcels in Rwanda cannot be partitioned because rural households own on average 0.72 of land and quite number of them have land which is below this size (MINITERE et al. 200; Bayisenge et al. 2014; Bayisenge 2015; RISD 2013). Looking at this

from a gender perspective, the implementation of gender equality principles in rural youth access to land becomes a challenge as the rights of women and young girls are more jeopardised when the land becomes so scarce.

Methods

The field work that forms the basis of this study was carried out in three districts Bugesera (Eastern Province), Gicumbi (Northern Province) and Rubavu (Western province). The idea was to have perceptions of the youth from different locations as the agricultural practices may differ according to location. The study combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Bryman, 2012; Creswell, 2009; Matthews & Ross, 2010; Padgett, 1998). The intent of using mixed methods was to learn about the magnitude of the access to land among the rural youth by using quantitative instruments as well as the perceived meanings that generated by qualitative methods. A quantitative approach helped to collect quantifiable data through structured interviews with 150 youth from different categories where 148 questionnaire were successfully completed. More insights into youths' experiences, perceptions, and attitudes were collected through semi-structured interviews with key informants and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with members of youth cooperatives. Key informants were youth leaders from National Youth Council Committees at local level.

For data analysis, quantitative data were analysed with SPSS, while the audio-recorded qualitative data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis. Findings were organized around themes identified through the review of the literature together with the new ones emerge through the data collection and transcription processes. Presentation of the findings was done by concurrently integrating and comparing both qualitative and quantitative information to determine if there is convergence, differences, or some combination in order to have an integrated interpretation of the overall results (Padgett, 1998; Creswell, 2009). For ethical reasons, participants gave their consent in order to be part of the study and wherever possible, the names of participants were disguised to ensure anonymity.

Realities from the ground (work in progress)

Profile of respondents

In order to have insights from youth with different background, the research has tried to diversify the respondents as much as possible.

Table1. Characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	53	35.8
Female	95	64.2
Age		
Between 16 and 20	48	32.4
Between 21 and 25	55	37.1
Between 26 and 30	45	30.4
Marital status		
Single	92	61.2
Married	47	31.7
Divorced	3	2.0
Separated	4	2.7
Widower/Widow	2	1.3
Education		
No formal education: illiterate	25	16.9
Some primary school (not completed)	38	25.7
Finished primary school	33	22.3
Some secondary school (not completed)	27	18.2
Technical and Vocational training	3	2.0
Finished secondary school	22	14.9

Source: Primary data, 2017

The findings from Table 1 show that 35.8% of the respondents are male while 64.2% are female. We collected data during working hours and most of the time we realized that mainly male youth went to look for jobs far from home and female youth stay working nearby their homes. This could be the reason of the gender imbalances in the number of the respondents. Regarding marital status, 61.2% representing the majority of the respondent are single, 31.7% are married while only a few number of the respondents are found in the categories of divorced, separated and widows. This seems to be logic because respondents were the youth between 16-30 years old, and it seems that a few people of that age get married. At that age, some are still in schools while others are looking for ways of surviving before thinking of getting married.

Considering education, nearly one out of 7 of the respondents has no formal education and is illiterate, a quarter managed to attend primary school but never completed while 22.3% managed to complete. Only nearly one third managed to go to secondary education and higher, with 18% who completed some years of secondary, 14.9%]] who completed it and only 2 % who followed technical and vocational training.

Livelihoods opportunities among the youth

Respondents were asked if they earn some income and a great majority of them representing 85,4% said yes to the question. Those who do not have job hence not earning any income explained that they are either looking for a job or are students. It was important to know how much they approximately earn a day. Three respondents out of four said that they earn less than 1000 Rwandan Francs¹ while one out of four earn between 1000 and 5,000 Rwandan francs. Further question was to ask in which sector they are employed in and in which activities they are specifically involved in. Findings show that agriculture and livestock occupy 62, 5 % of the respondents. These findings collaborate with the literature where it has been shown that the majority of rural population including the youth gets their survival from agriculture.

As a follow up question, it was worthy to know if the respondents have access and own land from which they deliver their survival. Findings from the study at hand revealed that 77.7% of the respondents said that their families own land. If the majority of the respondents came from families owning land, it was important to know how many among them have a piece of land on their own. Looking for such information is key as the literature says landlessness among the youth does not always result from the limited size or inexistence of land within the household but may where the practice is that youth wait for until they themselves are adults to be given land by their parents. On contrary, they are considered as immature people who have to reach adulthood before getting access to and control over land (Sait, Pedersen and Solberg 2004). In this regard, the study at hand revealed that only 29.6% of the respondents have a piece of land that they can call their own and decide upon. Furthermore, a quarter of those who work in agriculture, do not work on their own or their families' land but casually work for others and get paid (known as *guca incuru* in Kinyarwanda).

For 37,5 %those who are employed outside the agriculture sector, the majority of them do small business and others are involved in transport especially with taxi-bicycles and in construction work. This is especially because the study was mainly carried out in rural areas where it is not easy to find other means of transport except bicycles and motorcycles. Looking at qualitative data, it is found that transport of people by bicycles is common in all the three District visited. In Cyanzarwe Rubavu besides the transport of people the youth are also involved in the transport of the produce. Cyanzarwe is a very fertile area and during the harvesting season, youth get seasonal jobs of transporting vegetables of all kinds, potatoes, maize etc to the markets in Rubavu town and even to Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo. In Ririma Bugesera, the common kind of transport is for the youth to fetch water and bring it to people in their households and get paid. While in Rubavu the casual jobs that the youth do are mainly based on agriculture, in Bugesera it is mainly based on running small shops, or other kind of casual jobs not necessary linked to the

¹ 1000 Rwandan Francs is equivalent to 1.1822 US Dollar; and 0.9892 Euro (<http://www.xe.com/currencyconverter/>)

agriculture like working on construction site.

One respondent from narrated ‘in Ririma because of the dryness, we do not have enough rain, we just plant once a year’. This means that youth cannot get seasonal agricultural jobs which push them into looking for something else’ (Respondent from FGD3-Ririma). A portion of 2% of those who claim having a job work respectively in local administration, defense and in financial services such Airtel and mobile money for telecommunication companies.

Land acquisition among the respondents

The study revealed that nearly one third of the respondents said that they own their own piece of land. The following table shows the ways through which they have acquired such land.

Table 2: Means of acquiring land

How did you acquire this land?	Frequency	Percentage
Inheritance/Succession	11	25.5
Ascending partition/sharing (<i>umunani</i>)	15	35
Marriage	6	14
Purchase	4	9
State allocation	4	9
Other (Specify)	3	7
Total	43	100,0

Source: Primary data, 2017

The findings from this study confirm what other studies have found out that the majority of the youth gets land mainly from their parents. In Rwanda, it confirmed that the important way through which parents give land to their children is through *umunani* that represents 35%. The second means is through Inheritance/Succession where one respondent out four get land through this means while 14% of the respondents got land through marriage. Upon marriage, especially under community of property which is the default one², the household’s land/property is equally owned by the spouses. The rest of the youth who own land got it through purchase and state allocation representing 9% respectively. Others include respondents who informed that they have land that they cultivate but they keep it for someone else.

As the findings states, only a very small number of the youth manage to buy land. A respondent narrated ‘land is very expensive, you can even work for three years saving without being able to afford to buy just a piece of land’ (Key informant 1-Nyamiyaga). Since land is very expensive there are some who manage to save and rent land for a short period of time. They are those who

² Upon entering marriage spouses shall choose one of the following matrimonial regimes: community of property; limited community of acquests; and separation of property (Art. 2 of the succession law of 1999.)

also get a piece of land from their parents to cultivate and this practice is known as *Kwiharika*. In that case the youth have full decision making on the use of the land and the management of the produce but the ownership belongs to the parents and land can be claimed by the owner at time.

Almost all the respondents would like to get land, if they had means to get it. Through insights from qualitative interviews, respondents mentioned that land is very important whether be for the youth who managed to go to school or those who never go to school. Of course for those who haven't been to school the land is so much important than for those who attended school as emphasized by some of the respondents. But for others land is a very important asset in either case.

Factors of landlessness among the youth

Discussion of the findings

Way forward

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