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Intergenerationality, Gender and Youth Aspirations in Zambia: Shifting Agricultural Paradigms for a Sustainable Future

OLUWAFEMI OGUNJIMI, THOMAS DAUM, JULIET KARIUKI, REGINA BIRNER

University of Hohenheim, Inst. of Agric. Sci. in the Tropics (Hans-Ruthenberg-Institute), Germany

Abstract

Many researchers and policymakers argue that agriculture can help to generate the much-needed jobs for Africa’s growing population. Supporting this dominant narrative, several studies have explored youth aspirations towards farming. However, little is known about the factors and actors shaping youth aspirations, in particular the role of parents, and the role of gender differences in this regard. Shifting this paradigm, this paper follows a unique “whole family” approach, which builds on mixed-methods data collection from 348 parents (household heads and spouses) and corresponding adolescents (boys and girls) in rural Zambia to explore these hitherto neglected aspects. The study finds that parents strongly shape children’s aspirations – they are much more influential than siblings, peers, church, or media. While male youth are more likely to envision a career in farming (full or part-time), female youth are more likely to envision a non-farming-based livelihood. This reflects their parent’s aspirations and is reinforced by the patriarchal system of land and asset transfers through the generations. The multinomial logistic regression shows that farm satisfaction and the desired place of residence (rural or urban) are significantly associated with the likelihood of adolescent boys and girls envisioning a career in farming. Household characteristics such as the household method of farmland cultivation (animal traction), fathers’ aspiration, and mothers’ livelihood aspirations in agriculture for sons and daughters are statistically significant determinants of male and female youth’s livelihood aspirations in farming. The study recommends a “whole-family” approach, which takes into account the influential role of parents, for policies, programs, and projects focusing on the rural youth, and a stronger focus on gender aspects.

Keywords: Aspirations, gender, intergenerationality, intra-household dynamics, youth