

Rethinking Youth, Livelihoods, and Fragility in West Africa: One Size Doesn't Fit All

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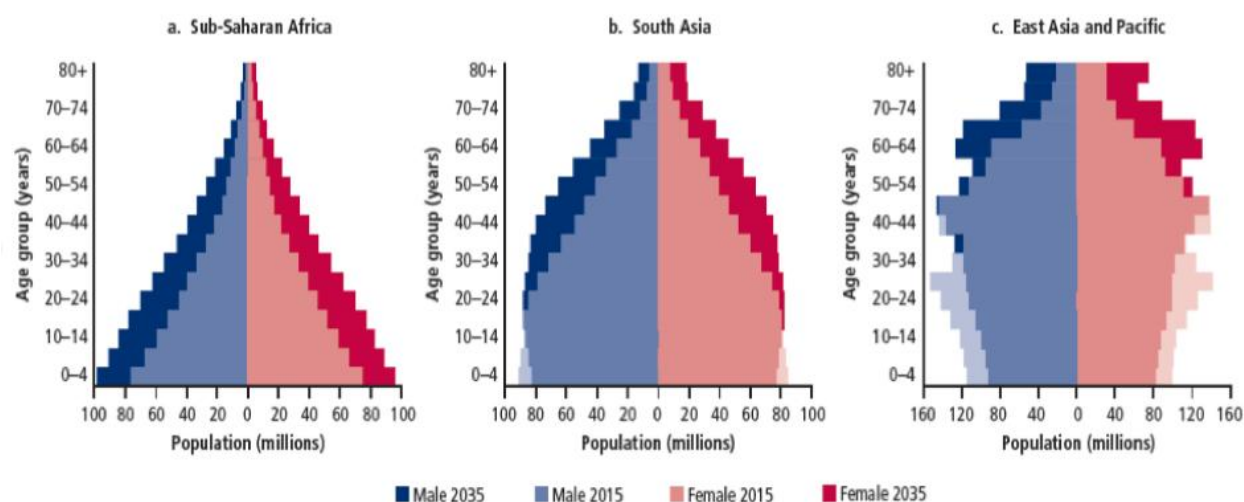
Abbreviations

AfDB	African Development Bank
ASM	artisanal small-scale mining
DFID	Department for International Development
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IEMS	Informal Economy Monitoring Study
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
UN	United Nations
UNDPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

1. Introduction: Why youth, employment, and fragility in West Africa?

Africa's population is young and growing at twice the pace of other continents (McArthur, 2014). Half the current population of sub-Saharan Africa is under 25 years of age, and each year between 2015 and 2035, there will be half a million more 15 year olds than the year before (Filmer and Fox, 2014). West Africa's demographics reflect this continental trend.¹ Between 1950 and 2007, the population increased from approximately 70 to 315 million (more than quadrupling) (de Verdière et al., 2009), with about one-third aged 15–24 years and 60 percent of the population under 25 years of age (de Verdière et al., 2009; Hervish and Clifton, 2012). The youth bulge in West Africa is expected to grow through 2035 and plateau around 2050 (UNECA, 2011) by which time the West Africa's population will have doubled to about 700 million people.

Figure 1. The structure of sub-Saharan Africa's population is different than that in other regions



Source: Filmer and Fox, 2014.

A youth bulge presents a series of development policy opportunities and challenges. For example, a youth bulge could result in a demographic dividend of improved productivity and economic growth² made possible by a large, young, and healthy workforce and a relatively small dependent population, assuming the costs of increased demand for basic public services (health, education, and so on) can be met. Despite the opportunities they represent and the fact that they constitute the bulk of the voting population, the needs and aspirations of West Africa's young people have little informed development agendas (Van Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom, 2013; Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi, 2013; Sumberg et al., 2014; Olaiya, 2014). On the whole, attention to youth issues reflects "more alarm than constructive engagement" (Sommers, 2007, p. 6). The alarmist response to the youth bulge in West Africa is triggered

¹ For the purposes of this study, the term West Africa refers to the fifteen ECOWAS member states unless otherwise specified.

² The potential of Africa's large working age population for global development is discussed in World Bank (2014).

by a series of poorly understood, complex, and interrelated societal dynamics.

Three significant societal dynamics have emerged and merged over recent years to complicate understandings of and policy responses to the youth bulge in resource-rich West Africa. First, high levels of economic growth have not been accompanied by job creation. The formal sector's limited capacity to absorb the growing youth population (Filmer and Fox, 2014) is linked to increasing inequalities and a growing and highly visible gap between the haves and the have-nots. Second, modernity and globalization have helped to transform the character of youth aspirations, increasing the gap between young peoples' hopes and realities and further entrenching intergenerational differences in all areas of life. Finally, the decade of conflict in the Manu River Basin and recent conflicts in the Sahel have weakened state institutions that are still just fifty years from independence. These institutions struggle to negotiate the complex and volatile dynamics of globalization, corruption, rapid urbanization, cross-border migration, drugs and weapons trafficking, natural resource management, climate change, and marginalization in global governance and the global economy. These dynamics and others pose specific threats to the peacebuilding, state-building, and development efforts of West-African states (Page, 2012; Heinrigs and Trémolières, 2012).³ Past and current threats weaken state institutions, in turn creating the space for further threats to evolve and bolster a cyclical process of institutional weakening and increasing fragility (World Bank, 2011).

In this context, simplistic linkages between the youth bulge, high unemployment, and fragility have gained traction and given rise to a youth policy agenda that targets urban male youth as the problem and emphasizes formal sector development as the solution (Van der Geest, 2010). However, a growing body of research highlights how this agenda and its associated programs have largely failed to deliver (Langevang and Gough, 2012; Olaiya, 2014; Van Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom, 2013; Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi, 2013; Kakwagh and Ikwuba, 2010; Ismail et al., 2009; Batmanglich and Enria, 2014). In some cases initiatives have exacerbated problems for young people, for example, by contributing to rather than alleviating youth unemployment (Sommers, 2007). The literature indicates some of the reasons why these interventions have failed. First, they are divorced from a nuanced and evidence-based understanding of young West Africans' diverse realities and aspirations, largely because of a paucity of data on the specific circumstances of different young people in the region. Second, they are driven by an urgency of action that has been sparked by the simplistic linkages drawn between the youth bulge, unemployment, and insecurity. Finally, they often frame young people in an instrumentalist fashion as the problem to be managed and/or solved without paying sufficient attention to how social, economic, and security dynamics at the country, regional, and global levels interact with and impact upon young people's lives in different ways. Despite thirty years of research on the nexus of youth, economic, and security issues, policy makers, civil society, and international development experts are still grappling with youth marginalization across the African continent (Olaiya, 2014). Specifically, they are grappling with how to understand the complexity of these dynamic, interrelated, and multidimensional issues in order

³ According to Reitano and Shaw (2014), the decline of human security and statehood in West Africa is driven by the assembly of five societal dynamics: political instability, humanitarian crisis, conflict, organized crime, and terrorism.

to advance the social cohesion necessary to end extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity in fragile and conflict-affected situations.⁴

This paper questions some of the core assumptions that underpin mainstream perceptions of the linkages between youth, employment, and fragility in West Africa, and proposes an alternative analysis. The study will use the language of livelihoods to reflect on youth employment experiences, as livelihoods take into account “the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living” (Krantz, 2001, p. 7) beyond traditional ideas of employment, and thus enable a deeper, more sophisticated understanding of the realities of many young West Africans. The paper argues that a nuanced understanding of specific groups of young people and their livelihood activities in their specific social, cultural, political, and economic context is necessary to understand how young peoples’ lives intersect with fragility dynamics. In doing so the paper aims to highlight that the relationship between youth, unemployment, underemployment, livelihoods, and fragility is far more complex than is often recognized and should not be exaggerated or taken out of context. Policy and programming strategies that seek to improve young peoples’ situation and improve state resilience need to be highly tailored to precise groups of young people and the identified risks that their livelihood activities pose in the specific context.

The first part of the paper revisits and challenges dominant assumptions about youth, employment, and fragility in West Africa and proposes an alternative way to frame young people, their employment situation, and the risks these pose for security and fragility. The second part examines five prominent livelihood activities relied upon by young people in West Africa and examines how these can either support or undermine peace, state-building and inclusive development. These activities are motorcycle/Okada taxi riding, artisanal/small-scale mining, street trading, hairdressing/barbering, and drug trafficking. In each section, regional dynamics are examined alongside specific examples drawn where data is available from Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, and Nigeria.⁵ Insights from other countries in West Africa are also included where relevant. Finally, the paper draws some broad conclusions and proposes a series of recommendations with a view toward supporting policy makers and programmers to better understand and catalyze the diverse and transformative potential of young people in West Africa.

2. Revisiting core assumptions

Who are West Africa’s “youth”?

The first issue to clarify is to whom we are referring when we use the term “youth.” Youth is a socially constructed category and as such neither refers to a fixed age group or a homogeneous social group. As a label it is therefore limited in its utility for tailored and responsive policy making. Table 1 summarizes a

⁴ Recent studies by several international organizations and governments address some of these issues: Filmer and Fox, 2014; ILO, 2013; UNECA (2011); Hervish and Clifton, 2012; Gyimah-Brempong and Kimenyi , 2013; USAID, 2013; and Commonwealth, 2013a.

⁵ Countries selected balance anglo and francophone experiences, and diverse conflict and fragility dynamics.

series of age-based definitions of youth used in policy making and programming across West Africa—the summary highlights how agreement is consistent neither within nor across institutions.

Table 1. Age definitions in Africa

Organization	Definition (age range in years)	References
United Nations	15–24	General’s Report to the General Assembly, A/36/215, 1981 General Assembly Resolutions, A/RES/62/126, 2008 Commission for Social Development Resolutions, E/2007/26 & E/CN.5/2007/, 2007
UN Economic Commission for Africa	15–39	African Youth Report, 2011
Commonwealth Secretariat	15–29	Commonwealth, 2013b
African Union	15–35	African Youth Charter, adopted by the Seventh Ordinary Session of the Assembly, African Union, Banjul, Gambia, July 2, 2006
ECOWAS	15–35	ECOWAS Youth Forum, 2003
Nigeria	18–36 18–35	Second National Youth Policy Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009 National Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action, Abuja, Nigeria, 2001
Ghana	15–35	National Youth Policy of Ghana, August 2010
Mali	15–40	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Côte d’Ivoire	15–35	Ministry of Youth, Sport and Leisure

The differences between definitions of youth by age are rooted in different ideas or markers of when children become youth, youth become adults, and adults become elders. These life-course-based

definitions assume that people evolve and develop in the same way through a linear series of experiences. In West Africa age-based definitions of youth include young people aged 15 to 40 years, a much wider group than the UN global definition (15–24 years). The wide age range in West Africa indicates that young people are suspended in a “space where they are neither dependent children nor autonomous adults” and may never become “social adults,” meaning they may never attain the social goods and status associated with adulthood such as a secure income (stable job), valuable skills, and secure shelter (Jeffrey, 2010; Honwana, 2012, p. 23).

In reality, young peoples’ transitions to adulthood are not unidirectional or linear. Rather they can be chaotic and distorted; subject to fragmentation, interruptions, and reversals; and are vulnerable to shocks and disasters. “Youth” can also take on different meanings depending on gender, urban/rural setting, or socioeconomic status; a rural girl of 13 may be considered an adult, while an urban, unemployed man of 35 a youth. The wide age bracket used to define “youth” in West Africa indicates significant social, political, and economic upheavals that disrupt and constrain young people’s trajectories towards adult status.

In a study of seven West African countries, a series of obstacles confronting the progress of young West Africans towards adulthood were identified by Ismail et al. (2009):⁶

- Difficulty accessing quality education and lack of formal and vocational education
- Unemployment, underemployment, and inappropriate training for the opportunities of the job market
- Involvement in violent conflicts, as some countries are plagued with political unrest
- Drugs and substance abuse
- Poverty
- Inadequate opportunities to participate in political and socioeconomic decision making
- Lack of technological advancement
- High vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS and waterborne diseases such as typhoid fever

It is clear that youthhood is diverse, and transitions to adulthood are neither homogeneous nor linear. Rather, transitions to adulthood are mediated by the interaction between young peoples’ identities (age, class, gender, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, family position, education level, urban/rural location, and other differences) and the wider context of formal and informal social, economic, and political institutions (including the strength and breadth of their social networks) of the environment in which they live and seek their advancement. Furthermore, the agency and decision-making power of young

⁶ Studies by Olaiya (2014), Honwana (2012), de Verdière et al. (2009), and Ashford (2007) reinforce these findings.

people as they encounter and navigate the choices and events that shape their life trajectories and impact their life outcomes introduce a further complication to analyzing youth and transitions to adulthood.

This nuanced understanding of young people and their transitions to adulthood highlights the need for policy and programming concerning “youth” to be highly tailored to specific groups of young people in specific environments and targeted to the specific outcomes sought by policy makers and programmers. For example, in rural Mali, an intervention designed to promote migration among young people as a strategy for improving employment prospects and transitions to adulthood produces different results for men and women, as the intervention interacts with individuals, local cultural values, and institutions. In Mali, the migration of young men is seen as part of a family livelihood strategy; it strengthens family status and is socially recognized as part of the traditional rites of passage to adulthood for men, whereas female migration is stigmatized and understood as part of a personal project (Hertrich and Lesclingand, 2013),⁷ Thus, in the context of rural Mali, any intervention designed to promote migration as a strategy for both men and women’s transitions to adulthood needs to address local attitudes toward female migration.

What is the nature of “youth unemployment” in West Africa?

In West Africa, most young people and wider society only recognize a job as a skilled position that offers an individual and family status and a sustained and sufficient source of income (Van Gyampo and Obeng-Odoom, 2013; Kakwagh and Ikwuba, 2010). The idea of a job, often referred to as a “serious job” (Esson, 2013), is characterized by a contract, a regular salary, social security and income tax, perhaps some benefits, and providing a level of security that more informal income-generating activities do not provide. It is estimated that only 16 percent of young people across sub-Saharan Africa as a whole are employed in waged jobs in the formal sector with the associated benefits (Filmer and Fox, 2014). In Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, and Nigeria, between 31 and 33 percent of 15–24 year olds participate in the formal labor force (Hervish and Clifton, 2012).

These statistics suggest very high levels of unemployment, but in reality many young people are employed. Few young people in sub-Saharan Africa have the luxury of idleness and the vast majority work to feed, shelter, and clothe themselves, often simultaneously contributing to family welfare. The “unemployed” majority are either employed on small-scale family farms (62 percent) or in household enterprises (meaning work in the informal economy) (22 percent) (Filmer and Fox, 2014). Young people from both urban and rural areas work in the informal sector, which is expanding across the continent—informal enterprise accounts for 40–75 percent of GDP and employs anywhere from 50–80 percent of the available workforce in different countries (Jütting et al., 2009). The informal sector is thought to account for around 60 percent of all urban “jobs” and to have provided 90 percent of all new “jobs” created during the 1990s (Brown and Lyons, 2010; Charmes, 2012). In rural areas, the agricultural sector

⁷ It is also worth noting that in many contexts, socioeconomically marginalized men are stigmatized as dangerous, lazy, and stupid. Challenging the stigma attached to different groups of young people is an important component of interventions that aim to target their situation.

absorbs many young people as informal farm laborers, and statistics for rural youth indicate that non-farm informal activities are on the rise (Van der Geest, 2010).⁸

Young people who work in the informal economy often describe themselves as unemployed. This is despite the fact that they may work 80 hours a week and earn a wage, and despite the fact that the informal economy is recognized to play an important role in development and progress. It is “the main driving force behind the construction and organisation of towns. It builds houses, makes furniture, produces and processes foodstuffs, repairs cars, runs markets organises savings, provides culture and entertainment (restaurants, bars, theatre and music groups) and even healthcare” (de Verdière et al., 2009, p. 70).

The sense of failed professional advancement experienced by young people who work in informal activities is rooted in the mismatch between employment aspirations and reality. Data from Ghana illustrate some of the challenges encountered by young “unemployed” and “underemployed” Ghanaians as they seek to achieve their aspirations. A survey found that a lack of relevant work experience and means to get relevant work experience is highlighted by young men, and that young women more often sought to set up their own enterprise but lacked capital, space, and were concerned about competition from cheap imports.

Table 2. Aspirations of unemployed youth in Ghana, 2001

Options	Male (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Proportion of unemployed youth who want to work but are unable to because they lack the right work experience, yet they also lack opportunities to improve their chances of gainful employment	41.7	22.5	33.7
Proportion of unemployed youth who want to set up their own enterprises but are unable to do so because they lack capital, space, and face competition from imports vis-à-vis indigenous value-added products	30.5	50.3	38.5
Proportion of unemployed youth who want to better their grades to continue their education and seek for formal sector jobs	9.9	6.2	8.3
Proportion of unemployed youth who want skills training and retraining apprenticeship, or job attachment programs to enhance	16.3	19.1	17.4

⁸ Rapid urbanization and concerns about security have focused research and policy agendas on urban young people. In Africa, however, the number of young people living in rural areas is more than half of the total youth population, and in absolute numbers is increasing even as the proportion of young people in rural areas is decreasing (Sumberg et al., 2014).

their chance of getting paid or being self-employed			
Proportion of unemployed youth who want to travel overseas to seek employment	0.7	0.4	0.7
Proportion of unemployed youth who want to reintegrate into family or married life to get settled	0.4	1.2	0.9
Proportion of unemployed youth with other hopes and aspirations	0.5	0.3	0.4
Total	100	100	100
Sample Size	524,028	378,830	903,437

Source: Amankrah and Nsowah-Nuamah, 2003.

The employment policy challenges indicated by these findings are less about job creation per se and more about ensuring the right training (academic and professional) for the demands of the labor market, and ensuring the availability of the right support for young people to pursue entrepreneurial activities. However, with insufficient action on these issues, young people in West Africa are frustrated.

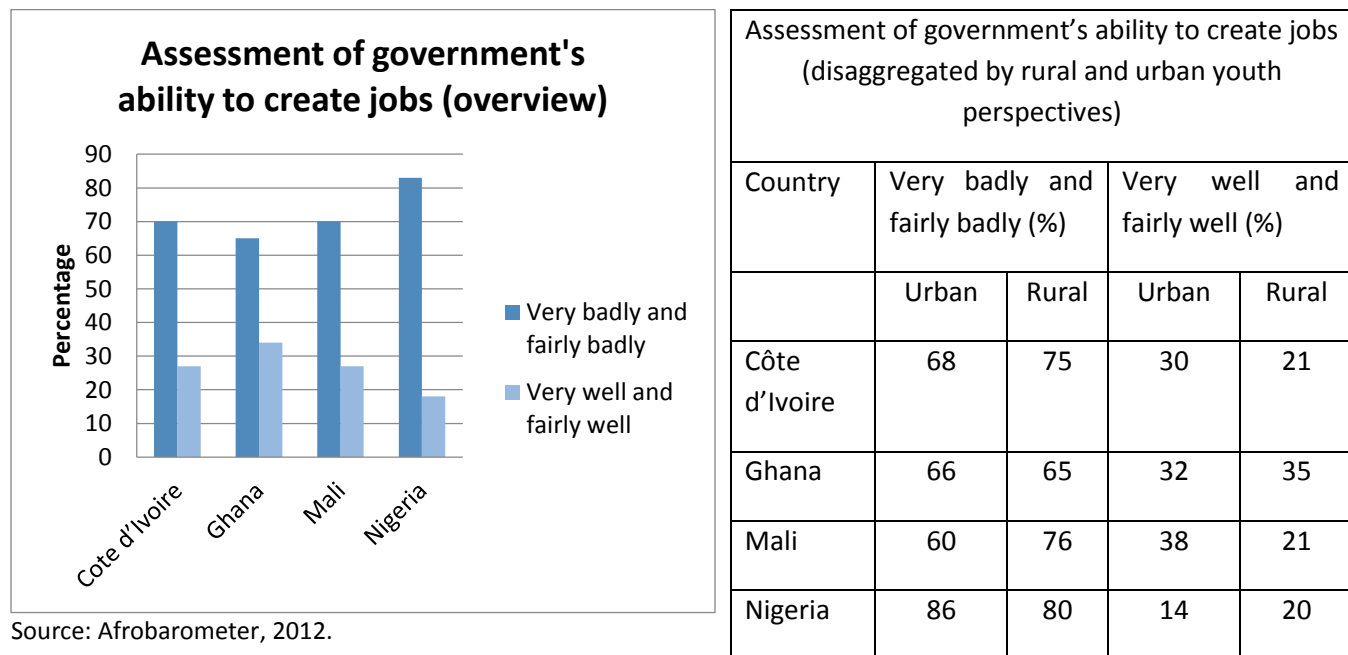
While West African governments have adopted a discourse of youth empowerment and employment, youth perception surveys indicate government actions in these areas do not inspire young peoples' confidence. Afrobarometer surveys (Afrobarometer, 2012) show that well over two-thirds of young people aged 15–29 in Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, and Nigeria felt their governments were not doing well and had little confidence in their ability to effect job creation. Nigeria fared the worst, with the least confidence in government's ability to create jobs, while Ghana did the best. Rural youth in Côte d'Ivoire and Mali were particularly disappointed with their governments' performance on job creation, suggesting an urban bias in employment-related initiatives (see Figure 2).

The sense of broad-based disillusionment with government among many young people in West Africa is reinforced further when we look at government performance in particular policy areas relating to job creation. Much emphasis has been placed on reinvigorating agriculture as a livelihood strategy among young people, reversing the trend of young people withdrawing from agriculture, yet without really understanding their aspirations and what might attract them to the sector (Leavy and Hossain, 2014). Similarly, investment in the education sector has not been matched to the demands of the economy and labor markets.

Strategic investment in education across Africa has shaped expectations that an education leads to greater economic opportunities (UNECA, 2011; Hervish and Clifton, 2012; Esson, 2013). In Ghana for example, education is thought to be the dominant channel through which a "better world" or "good life" can be attained (Esson, 2013; Langvang, 2008). For many young and old, education leads to the formal sector "serious job," however this trajectory is increasingly falling short on delivering across Africa. Successful completion of tertiary education no longer provides a failsafe entry into formal sector

employment—in Zambia for example, higher education is associated with lower employment rates (Locke and Lintelo, 2012).

Figure 2. Assessment of government’s ability to create jobs



In Nigeria, there is an oversupply of graduates. All university graduates are required to do national service for one year and when it ends, they are often left with high expectations and limited prospects. Two anecdotes articulate the frustrations and experiences of young Nigerian graduates:

<p>“With over eighty universities in Nigeria today and an average of one hundred and sixty thousand graduates each year, the country is now bedeviled with severe graduate unemployment, since there seems to be a mismatch between graduate training and the world of work. Thousands of graduates that are turned out every year end up roaming the streets for years without any hope of securing paid employment even after sacrificing one year to serve their fatherland through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme. The resultant effect is the fear of a revolution which may consume all if care is not taken as these jobless graduates have become very desperate and willing to do anything including armed robbery in order to survive” (Kayode Ajayi et al., 2008, p. 77).</p>	<p>“Kunle, a masters student at the University of Lagos finds himself operating the popular Okada [motorbike taxi] in Lagos. He said: ‘I am a graduate of Geography, from Bayero University, Kano, and after my Youth service, I couldn’t get any job, I tried to help myself by taking up a teaching job in one of the private schools, but the salary was meagre, the payment was irregular. I found out that operating Okada as business is a lot better. Seven months after starting the Okada, I was able to enroll for my Masters degree at UNILAG” (AllAfrica.com, 2012).</p>
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In Ghana, the Afrobarometer Survey (Afrobarometer, 2012) found that young Ghanaians felt that the top three most pressing problems for government to address (and the top three greatest needs of Ghanaians) were employment, education, and health.⁹ At the same time, some young Ghanaians based in rural areas are leaving school (if they are enrolled) and moving to urban centers where they perceive there to be more opportunities to realize their aspirations (Esson, 2013). In this case, education is not seen as a valuable prerequisite for a successful life, highlighting a mismatch between aspirations and realities. While there is potential for frustration and anger expressed in these examples from Nigeria and Ghana, they also reveal a powerful transformative capacity among young people who are adapting and adjusting to their circumstances in new and hybrid ways, and in doing so produce new expressions of culture and identity (Philips, 2013; Ferguson, 1999).

In Mali, some rural-to-urban migration is enabling the achievement of aspirations and producing a new “youth culture” constructed around the idea of the “urban adventure.” Upon returning home, young men enjoy a stronger position in the family based on their experiences, and the acquisition of skills and material means which lend them status and recognition as an adult. The main outcomes found for young women include the acquisition of knowledge and skills, which include learning the national language, interpersonal skills, and domestic skills. The effect of these experiences is that the decision by subsequent generations of rural young people to migrate to urban areas is increasingly informed by this “youth culture” (Hertrich and Lesclingand, 2013).

These examples from Nigeria, Ghana, and Mali¹⁰ demonstrate how frustrations can produce creativity as well as anger and disillusionment. While not explicitly analyzed in the above examples, social networks are alluded to as important factors in many of the creative strategies young people have developed in difficult circumstances. Research by Philipps (2013), Hoffman (2011), and Vigh (2006) has identified how some young men in urban areas have been able to draw on “old/rural/tribal” networks and use these strategically, redefining and renegotiating them in the urban sphere to their advantage when needs arise. Other young people who migrate to urban centers can find they have to create social networks, which can be challenging and lead to marginalization, frustration, anger, disillusionment, and exposure to risks (Ferguson, 1999).

What are the links between youth bulges, employment, and fragility?

In West Africa, the tendency to frame “youth” as a threat stems in part from the role young people played in the decade of brutal violence in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Characterized by some as a “crisis of youth,” the media portrayals of rebel militias and the existence of child soldiers, combined with deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, led a link to be drawn between contemporary youth agency and disorder (Olaiya, 2014). The concept of youth is often interpreted as “angry young men”, and continuing this association, “youth agency” is more often associated with anti-social or politically

⁹ Fieldwork for Round 5 was conducted in Ghana in May and June 2012. The survey interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians, and a sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. See Afrobarometer, n.d.

¹⁰ See the livelihoods section on barbering and hair dressing for a similar example from Côte d’Ivoire.

disruptive behavior than the creative and productive contribution youth make to progress and positive change (Sumberg et al., 2014; Philipps, 2013; Hoffman, 2011; Vigh, 2006).¹¹ In the West African context, the prospect of a youth bulge and the combination of economic growth with high levels of unemployment (exclusive growth) combine to produce a “panic” narrative in which a mass of unemployed, dissatisfied/angry youth pose a collective threat to peace and security. The perception of threat escalates where conflict dynamics and weak institutions already produce insecurity and fragility. By treating youth as a homogeneous mass, the panic narrative ignores the different needs and interests of different groups of youth and their individual agency. It assumes youth act en masse in the same ways. Furthermore, the panic narrative assumes youth are unemployed and idle, and that their dissatisfaction will drive them to violence. As such, the narrative ignores the important role of wider socioeconomic and political actors in youth violence. The narrative places the blame for violence on youth rather than acknowledging the wider needs and interests served by their mobilization. Evidence of this simplistic panic narrative can be found in the publications, strategies, and plans of a range of peace and development actors (for examples, see UNDPKO, 2010 or AfDB, 2014) and contributes to the failure of programming responses that focus on youth alone as the problem without acknowledging the instrumentalization of youth by other groups in society. The repetition of the panic narrative gives it undue credibility and legitimacy. It also creates a rift of misunderstanding, tension, and distrust between decision makers and youth. Where leaders and decision makers are much older than the youth for whom they make decisions, the misunderstanding, tension, and distrust take on the character of intergenerational conflict. In this way, the panic narrative itself contributes to conflict and fragility.

Theories for understanding young peoples’ involvement in West Africa’s decade of violence have evolved with the growing but still limited body of research on the subject. Peters (2011) and Richards (1996, 2005, 2006; Richards et al., 2004) highlight how young people involved in conflict in Sierra Leone and Liberia agree that the lack of education and jobs, and the failure or unwillingness of the ruling elite to help and include rather than exploit and exclude, were part of what caused them to join the war as fighters. Failed expectations plus the instrumentalization of youth by political actors combined for their mobilization. Building further on this, David Keen’s studies of the violence in Sierra Leone highlight the diverse dynamics that encouraged young people to perpetrate brutal violence. In addition to economic exclusion and grievances related to limited access to education and jobs, Keen identifies intergenerational tensions that drove a search for “respect through the barrel of a gun” (Keen 2002, p. 5; Keen, 2005). He argues that the need for status and visibility were important factors in young peoples’ involvement in violence, thereby linking the drivers of violence to wider societal dynamics and the institutions (formal and informal) that mediate youth transitions to adulthood. What becomes clear from these studies is that a simplistic analysis of the connections between youth, unemployment, and violence obscure “the specific transmission mechanisms from economic marginality to violent behaviour” (Batmanglich and Enria, 2014, p. 11). Furthermore, in a careful and systematic study of the

¹¹ The focus on youth as “angry young men” has meant that research on women’s roles and motivations for participating in violence are lacking. In turn, research and policy that looks more widely at different groups of youth (violent women and nonviolent young men and women) to understand their diverse needs and aspirations is also lacking.

evidence used to support a direct causal link between youth unemployment and violence, Cramer (2010) concluded that the evidence is lacking. He argues that data about youth and youth issues is meager; what data is available points to a complex and diverse web of factors that lead young people to engage in violence.

A more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the connections between youth, unemployment/underemployment, and violence becomes possible when understandings of risk and fragility are unpacked. Risk analyses that assess the likelihood that different groups of young people will engage in violence not only analyze incentives and grievances, but also what is known about local young peoples' own strategies for managing grievances. The Youth Vulnerability and Exclusion (YOVEX) study shows that young people's problem solving in West Africa, whether violent or not, tends to be mediated locally within their community, family, and close interests groups rather than having any connection to national levels (Ismail et al., 2009).¹² As mobile phone penetration and social media use rapidly increase across West African countries and increase young people's connectivity and means to share problems, frustrations, and seek support, the potential for an increase in group action (as observed among motorcycle taxi riders in Sierra Leone, for example) merits further exploration as a potential risk. For example, West Africa demonstrates high levels of social media use compared to the rest of Africa (Portland Communications, n.d.). In parallel, a deeper understanding of fragility would look beyond the role of youth in violence and the likelihood of their mobilization, to also address how different youth employment activities can either reinforce or undermine the rule of law and state institutions. Such an understanding of fragility highlights the need to examine the range of different youth livelihood activities and their interactions with fragility dynamics. The next section of this paper focuses on this interaction.

Clearly panic narratives are counterproductive to understanding and responding effectively to the diverse, real, and complex challenges presented by a growing youth demographic, limited quality employment opportunities, rapid social change, and the dynamics of state fragility that characterize the development context of West Africa.

3. Five livelihoods activities

In West Africa, as previously discussed, the majority of young people are employed in the informal sector. Given the ambiguity of employment status in the informal economy, debates on youth employment activities in the informal economy increasingly deploy the concept of livelihoods (Skinner, 2008). With a genealogy in the rural sector and links to agricultural activities, the term "livelihoods" suggests diverse activities combined to mitigate household or family risk (Bryceson, 2002); these are sometimes referred to as "multiplex" livelihood strategies. Typically precarious and low-productivity activities, young people engage in multiple activities at any one time to secure their livelihood.

¹² Note it is not clear from the study how different groups of young people (age, gender, class, and location) might negotiate grievances differently.

This section examines five livelihood activities popular with young people.¹³ The activities selected are often the core livelihood activity within a wider group of activities that form the multiplex livelihood strategy of young people in urban and/or rural areas of Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, and Nigeria. Artisanal and small-scale mining takes place mainly in rural areas. It is gaining new momentum and evolving as an industry as increasing numbers of young people engage in it. Motorcycle taxis provide a valuable public service transporting passengers and goods between rural and urban areas and through congested streets, at the same time employing many young men. Street trading is the lifeblood of African cities and towns. Considered to be a survivalist entrepreneurial activity, a wide range of products are distributed and the activity is continuously expanding. Hairdressing and barbering are prominent industries that present young West African men and women with a means to succeed, and for young men especially, barbering has been shown to be a space in which to reframe traditional ideas about masculinity and success. Lastly, drug trafficking is enabling some young people to become rich and achieve social status quickly, but the activity drives a whole range of negative societal dynamics from drug abuse to forced marriages to the sustained erosion of state institutions.

The Institute for Development Studies defines sustainable livelihoods as follows: "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base" (Krantz 2001, p. 7).

In fragile and conflict-affected countries and situations, the definition of sustainable livelihoods should be extended to include "not undermining the institutions of state." While many youth livelihood activities exist in the grey area between formal and informal, often contributing simultaneously to systems of taxation through the payment of licences and registrations, and to systemic corruption and other illegal activities, basic steps can be taken to reduce the way in which they contribute to state fragility. The following five sections, one on each livelihood activity, will explore the specific circumstances and processes that young people use to construct and make sense of their lives. Each of the five sections will explore pathways into and out of livelihood activities looking at the interaction of different groups of young people with the opportunities and constraints they experience. By understanding how young people construct their lives and identifying some of the vulnerabilities with which they live, governments and wider society can better support them, minimizing their potential contributions to fragility and maximizing their possibility to realize their potential and make unique contributions to development progress in West Africa.

Artisanal small-scale mining

What is it? A common definition for artisanal small-scale mining (ASM) is yet to be achieved. In some West African countries (such as Mali, Niger, and Burkino Faso) small-scale mining is differentiated from

¹³ Agricultural activities play a central role in many young peoples' livelihood strategies in West Africa and are pertinent to discussions about fragility, especially in relation to land rights, but were not selected for this study.

artisanal mining by the presence of permanent installations (Hentschel et al., 2002). Essentially it involves low-tech and labor-intensive natural resource extraction and processing. Two categories of ASM exist—one for minerals such as gold and diamonds, and the other for stone and construction materials such as sand. In recent years there has been a “meteoric rise” in the importance of ASM as the nature of activities and those engaged in it have changed (Hilson et al., 2013). Originally a component of family livelihood strategies, more recently there is evidence of greater commercialization in ASM operations—there are differences between countries and even between mining sectors within a country, as demonstrated in Sierra Leone between gold and diamond mining (Pijpers, 2011).

Common characteristics of ASM include (see Hentschel et al., 2002; Hinton et al., 2003):

- minimal machinery or technology; ASM mining relies instead on simple techniques and a great amount of physical labor;
- lack of occupational safety measures, health care, or environmental protections;
- the ability to operate without legal mining titles (concession, claim) or a valid contract with the title holder;
- low productivity, since ASM often takes place in very small or marginal plots, is often limited to surface or alluvial mining, and uses inefficient techniques (however, total recovery is improved by repetitive scavenging and reprocessing);
- may be practised seasonally (such as to supplement farm incomes) or temporarily in response to high commodity prices;
- economic insecurity, lacks social security; and
- is highly gendered, possibly also ethnicized by politics of access.

Geographic coverage. ASM takes place in many different locales across West Africa. Most ASM communities are located in sparsely populated, rural, remote regions (with some exceptions, such as the Ashanti district in Ghana) (Hinton et al., 2003). Ten percent of Mali’s population depends on gold mining (Hinton et al., 2003).

How do young people get involved? The International Labour Organization (ILO, 1999) estimates that ASM provides direct employment for over 3 million people in sub-Saharan Africa. It is mainly undertaken in small groups who are self-employed, and requires low capitalization. Financial capital requirements for starting the work in the simplest cases are for tools only. Social capital is also required to get involved.

ASM has been a part of family livelihood strategies as an off-farm activity across all four countries since before independence. As a family livelihood, young family members usually engage in this activity during the dry season when agriculture activities are at a low point. Young men dig the earth to find the mineral bearing gravel and then pan or sift the dirt to find minerals. They work in a gang with specific

tasks for the day. Mostly this would be unlicensed and informal agreements with landowners are negotiated through kinship networks. The winnings are given to the family head to share and use for the family interests. For young people, being able to contribute to family income is an important status symbol.

More recently, ASM has seen a shift to more commercial operations. It is still labor intensive but organized on a different scale. Individuals called “supporters” may purchase licenses to mine and engage a group of young men to do the labor. The supporters will provide food, shelter, and other basic necessities until the minerals are recovered and converted to cash. At this time, some portion is given over to the laborers while the supporter keeps the lion’s share. Different arrangements are negotiated by each group and depend on the minerals’ market value. There is the likelihood of a cash windfall after much hard labor, which is an incentive for young people to do this kind of work.

Mining construction material is normally part of a family livelihood strategy and undertaken in the dry season. Where large rocks are available, a family will work together (including children) using hammers to break them down to gravel size. This is collected into piles for sale at a fixed price. Sand mining has also become increasingly lucrative and the banks of rivers and streams are being exploited usually by groups of young people. In larger rivers, a gang of young people will use a wooden canoe to dig sand out of the river bed, transporting it to shore and heaping it onto piles for sale.

In Ghana, young operators (under 25) reported spending 0.1–6 years on the same site and 2–7 years in ASM. Their main reason for being involved was needing money, but in contrast to older operators, they also referred to dropping out of school and lack of family support as motives for engagement (Tschakert, 2009). Women are active in ASM across West Africa—89,500 women in Ghana; 100,000 women in Mali (Hentschel et al., 2002). Women’s activities on ASM sites differ according to the legality of the operation, the presence of a cooperative, and societal attitudes toward rural poor women’s work. For example, at the Akoon mining cooperative, women don’t engage in underground mining due to the risks involved (Hinton et al., 2003). Women in Mali are actively involved in mineral processing—their participation in this activity specifically is thought to be linked to strong traditional associations with gold mining among certain cultural groups, and droughts are also believed to have driven those not typically engaged in mining into ASM (Hinton et al., 2003). With increasing migration to urban areas or large mining districts by men, many of the poorest rural households—the dominant group who engage in ASM—are de facto headed by women, thus partly explaining their considerable involvement in ASM (Hentschel et al., 2002).

How does it contribute to young peoples’ livelihoods? Young people engage in ASM for several reasons: because it provides cash income; supplements the declining viability of small holder plots and their seasonality; has low start-up costs; can absorb a lot of labor; and because there are limited viable alternative livelihood options available (Mark, 2014). In Ghana, ASM has replaced small holder farming as a primary income-generating activity (Hilson and Garforth, 2012). Earnings depend on the mineral being mined. For example, Pijpers (2011) finds that in Sierra Leone, gold is more reliable than diamond mining on average, although one lucky diamond dig could significantly outweigh extensive gold mining

efforts. In contrast with Ghana, in Sierra Leone a drop in the profitability of diamond mining has meant that some miners are switching to farming (Pijpers, 2011).

What risks and challenges does ASM pose to young people and society? Approximately 80 percent of ASM is illegal (ILO, 1999). As a result ASM is plagued by social and environmental problems related to health, safety, struggles over land, fights between mining gangs, cheating by buyers, bribery of soldiers, association with other criminal activities (especially during the marketing of mining products), and links to violent conflict (Tschakert, 2009; Hilson and Potter, 2003). Obara and Jenkins (2006) highlight how the arrival of multinational mining companies in Ghana gives rise to issues concerning displacement, land registration, and lack of alternative livelihoods—thus their arrival drives potential for conflict. More recently, ASM has been identified in supporting terrorist activities (Maconachie and Hilson, 2011). Despite the risks and threats, young operators express interest in staying in the sector (Tschakert, 2009). It is difficult to imagine alternative, accessible, and lucrative livelihood activities arising to replace ASM. As one multinational representative pointed out, “How do you convince a person who takes or gets a million [Ghanaian Cedis] in a week into a livelihood like cocoa or oil palm that will take him 3 years before he gets a penny?” (quoted in Obara and Jenkins, 2006).

How is it organized/regulated? The regulatory framework for mining, particularly for valuable minerals, is complicated. While sand and gravel mining would require paying local councils to use the natural resources, regulative administrative requirements for more valuable resources typically include a mining title, environmental compliance, an environmental operations license, a registered company, paying taxes, and enrolling staff in social security benefits. As all of this is typically undertaken in the city away from mining sites, ASM thus lends itself to informality. For example, in Ghana, where ASM was legalized in 1989, ASM miners continue to operate illegally (Hilson and Potter, 2003).

What are the policy options? Despite its significance in some of the world’s poorest regions, ASM is under-recognized in poverty alleviation and livelihood strategies (Hilson et al., 2013). The Ghanaian government established a special program called Youth in Mines when other livelihood programs (such as silk farming) failed to attract miners’ interests. Their program focused on the rehabilitation of the environment after mining operations. Formalizing ASM activities that traditionally occur in an unregulated and rural setting does not automatically improve the livelihood situation in ASM mining communities (Owusu and Dwomoh, 2012). On the contrary, policy efforts have often attempted to eliminate ASM to create space for business, enterprise, and foreign direct investment (Lawal, 2002). Often little or no consultation occurs in these processes, and formalization has been more concerned with legislative frameworks than the impact on miners and their livelihoods. Often, formalization does not address ASM, and formal sector mining develops alongside informal sector mining. In response, ASM activities move to more marginal areas, creating more environmental and health issues. Without specific attention to ASM and the needs of these miners in policy formulation, ASM will remain “a rational response to poorly formulated legislation” (Maconachie and Hilson, 2011).

Motorcycle Taxis

What is it? Poor infrastructure and transport systems plus the availability of cheap imported motorcycles have led to the growth of a vibrant, largely unregulated (in the formal sense, although informal internal regulation of the sector is strong), informal motorcycle taxi “industry” in West Africa. The development of the Okada¹⁴ industry was enabled by the influx of inexpensive Chinese manufactured motorcycles in the mid-1990s, transforming what was initially a marginal activity of short-distance commercial transport into a widespread means of transport across cities, towns, and villages in West Africa. Transport was traditionally provided by vehicle taxis and buses, which ply set routes with and between towns and cities. Motorcycles are usually used to provide commercial taxi services over short distances or in congested traffic. They are a faster and more flexible means of transportation than taxis (Olubomehin, 2012).

Okada riding has had a significant impact on economies. It has created employment, generated revenues for government via licensing, supported industry-associated businesses, for example, by providing spare parts and necessitating repairs, and facilitated the marketing of rural produce and trade, especially where other transport links are weak. “[Okada] have highly enhanced the mobility of people who can afford to hire a bike; almost all narrow tracks and bush paths—and therefore most remote areas—are traversable on them. By speeding up a great portion of economic activities, transporting people and goods, and increasing the number of consumers, bike riders contribute to the economy and society at large, and therefore they indirectly benefit people who do not ride bikes themselves” (Bürge, 2011).

Geographic coverage. Prior to independence in Nigeria, cities relied on private monopoly suppliers of public transport; after independence, governments took over provision but eventually subsidies could not be maintained and public transport deteriorated giving rise to informal transport. In Lagos, commercial motorbikes started in 1980 in Agege’s local government area, and they were initially used to supplement other forms of income. They spread in the 1990s with the decline in public transport and declining formal sector opportunities for a growing youth population. By 2007 there were almost 200,000 bikes on the road (Kumar, 2011). In Ghana, rapid urbanization and decentralization (rapid growth in suburban areas and “edge cities”) combined with poor transport systems and a growing youth population to give rise to commercial motorbike riding (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang, 2012). This trend has been observed across the region.

How do young people get involved? There are few practical barriers to this livelihood for men—one can learn to ride a bike from a friend in a short time. Driving licenses are usually bought and easy to access. Some borrow a friend’s bike in the evening to run some business and gather the capital required to purchase a bike. Alternatively, motorcycles can be bought through a friend’s reference and paid for in installments. In Ghana, the cost of a new motorbike and accessories (helmet, repair kit, tools) is

¹⁴ Okada is the popular term for motorcycles that are used for public transportation in the anglophone countries in West Africa; it originated in Nigeria. The term comes from the now-defunct airline established in Okada, Edo state; its use is a reference to speed (Beekers, 2008; Kumar, 2011).

between 700 and 1,500 Ghanaian Cedis, while used motorbikes are between 200 and 400 Ghanaian Cedis (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang, 2012). Riders look out for brands of motorcycles that are durable and have low fuel consumption (Olubomehin, 2012). They seek bikes capable of plying rough roads and that can conveniently carry two passengers simultaneously, producing more profit.

Okada riding has negative social perceptions. It is perceived as a job only suitable for earning “quick money for the day, to eat, drink, possibly smoke jamba (marijuana), visit a prostitute, and gamble a little, but unfit to feed a family and sustain an orderly and responsible lifestyle” (Menzel, 2011, p. 98). In reality however, Okada-riding fathers sustain many families. Young men from rural areas with appropriate social networks migrating to cities find this work easy to obtain. Urban young men engage in Okada riding until they find full-time employment that is more in line with their educational status and aspirations, while others use it as a livelihood to facilitate their longer term plans (Menzel, 2011). Most people engage in this work for a defined period of time with the perception on entry that they will make money, save capital, and progress to other types of business, but in reality this is not always the case.

How does it contribute to young peoples’ livelihoods? In Lagos, Nigeria, there are 200,000 commercial motorcycles and 100,000 minibuses that provide direct employment to over 500,000 people—if an average household size is 5 people, more than 2,000,000 people benefit from the business (Kumar, 2011; Olubomehin, 2012). In a survey of 125 Okada riders in 4 “parks” Freetown, Sierra Leone (Fortune, 2010), half the respondents had worked for two years or less as bike riders and most had worked for 1–4 years. Only 11 percent of the sample had worked for five years or more. Forty one percent of the respondents said it was their own idea to get into the business and 47 percent said they intended to be Okada riders for two years or less. Only 9 percent said five years or more. Okada riding in this part of Freetown is thus seen as a relatively short-term livelihood project from which gains are made to help the individual move on. The daily income, expenses, and profits of Okada riders in Freetown are set out in the table below.

Table 3. Daily earnings of Okada riders in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2010

No.	Item	Description	Income (SL Leones)	Expenses (SL Leones)
1	Income	Working 10 hours per day	100,000	
2	Fuel	One gallon		16,500
3	Bike Riders’ Association dues	Daily membership rate		1,000
4	Bribes	Daily to duty bearers (police, road transport authorities)		25,000

5	Master money	For rental of the motorcycle for the day		30,000
6	Drivers license			278
7	Health care	Daily costs of pain medication		2,000
Subtotals			100,000	74,778
Profits (daily)			25,222	

Given that 39 percent of these Okada riders owned their own motorcycle, daily profits were substantially higher. Among those that did not own their own bikes (61 percent), monthly profits could rise to SL Leones 1,000,000 per month. In Accra, Ghana (in 2012), Okada operators can earn between 40 and 50 Ghanaian Cedis a day, compared to the national minimum wage of 6 Ghanaian Cedis. Hire purchase usually costs around 20 Ghanaian Cedis a day, which still puts earnings above the minimum wage (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang, 2012). In Ibadan, Nigeria, start-up costs are low (the most used Jincheng Suzuki motorbikes cost about 55,000 Nigerian Naira) and riders make about 700–800 Nigerian Naira on average per day (much more than other informal occupations like street hawking) (Beekers, 2008). The Okada business is considered relatively lucrative, in the scheme of options available. Of those interviewed in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 85 percent had savings from their earnings and 48 percent had opened bank accounts for their savings (Fortune, 2010). Some commentators observe that artisanal trades are suffering as young people are less inclined to learn trades when the Okada business is more accessible, profitable, and exciting (fast, social) (Olubomehin, 2012). Okada riders develop wide social networks through their customers and through well-established and powerful unions and welfare associations.

What risks and challenges does it pose to young people and society? Traffic congestion in urban West Africa situates Okada riders in a struggle with traffic police and other duty bearers and road users. Operating mainly in the informal sector and having bought their licences, some Okada riders have no idea about the laws or rules of the road. Conflict with police is daily and often associated with violated traffic laws, overloaded vehicles (enabling riders to earn more from each ride, fast money), and inadequate documentation (licenses or insurance). A further reason for adversarial relations between riders and law enforcement/duty bearers is Okada riders’ revenue streams. With a relatively high income to hand in cash (because each passenger pays for each short trip), Okada riders can be targeted for bribes from those who want a share of their relative wealth. Perceived and real injustices by law enforcement have led to mob action. Okada riders use their mobile phone network to quickly mobilize protection. These incidents exacerbate tensions and produce a threatening dynamic around road accidents involving Okada riders (Fortune, 2010). Increased competition between Okadas, buses, and taxis for livelihood revenues also contributes to tensions and threats on the road.

There are also serious health risks involved in Okada riding, which is likely why riders limit their engagement in this work to a few years. Riding for 10 to 12 hours a day through all kinds of weather, traffic, and landscapes is physically taxing and results in poor health and injuries from accidents and exposure to the elements. Riding is considered a young man's work and rarely will one find anyone over 40 years actively engaged (Fortune, 2010).

How is it organized/regulated? Okada riding fits into a legal and regulatory framework related to licensing (of bike and driver), insurance coverage, taxation on imported goods (the motorcycles), as well as safety provisions for riders and passengers (helmets). In Fortune's 2010 survey of Okada riders in Freetown, 97 percent of riders said their motorcycle was licensed (at a cost of approximately Le 270,000), 93 percent said their motorcycle was insured (at a cost of approximately Le 50,000) yet only 72 percent said they were licensed to drive (the cost of a driver's license is Le 100,000). In Ghana, the Motor Traffic Act does not recognize commercial motorbikes, and in 2012 LI 2180 Regulation 128 introduced the "prohibition of use of motorcycle or tricycle for commercial purposes" (cited in Bentil, 2013). However, Okadas continue to ply the roads of Accra in defiance of regulation (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang, 2012). In Lagos, the state government banned circulation between 7 P.M. and 6 A.M. with a fine of up to 50,000 Nigerian Naira (Kumar, 2011), and in 2010, Governor Fashola banned Okadas from the main roads and bridges (*Economist*, 2010). Similarly, motorcycle taxi riders in the Liberian capital Monrovia also face legal restrictions around their access to the city center.

Okada riders are organized through fairly ad hoc, small-scale self-help welfare and solidarity associations and through highly organized (often officially recognized) transport unions that can also have some political traction, although it is often unclear to what extent this translates into defending the rights of the riders themselves. In Lagos, the Nigerian Auto Bike Commercial Owners and Workers Association (NACOWA) is the dominant union with 57 branches (Kumar, 2011). Congregating in certain sections of the city, the bike riders take over a space where they park and await passengers and socialize with each other. These "parks" are usually organized with an elected head and perhaps two or three associates to support the head. In Ganta, Liberia, a very well developed welfare model of support has been developed by leaders to encourage young riders. Membership fees are paid on a daily basis, and in return the leadership supports negotiations with the police and other duty bearers; assists during times of injury or ill health; and provides representation in civil society. Welfare, including justice issues, is at the core of the Okada associational life; riders mobilize to support each other in the face of hostile duty bearers, including police and licensing authorities. They also mobilize to squeeze out competition from nonmembers. Beekers' research (2008) in Nigeria links associational life, mutual support, and solidarity groups among Okada riders to the Yoruba practice of *oredogbe* (friends become a club). Some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) also work with youth riders and association leaders to provide training in road rules and leadership skills.

What are the policy options? Policy makers and the plethora of duty bearers working on roadway issues have been slow to capitalize on the innovation and entrepreneurial character of the Okada business in West Africa. They have focused on getting their share of the business through harassment, bribes, and controlling roads using outdated laws. Legal restrictions concerning motorcycle taxi access to cities and

urban areas are closely associated with a widespread generalized perception of Okada riders as facilitators of criminal activity—supporting robberies, for example. However, in Ghana at least, there is little empirical evidence for the connection between Okada riding and crime (Oteng-Ababio and Agyemang, 2012). Similarly, research in Nigeria regarding the perception that Okada riders are potential “rented crowds” for politicians has found empirical data inconclusive (Beekers, 2008). The merits of imposing legal restrictions vis-à-vis the Rwandan strategy of formally regulating motorcycle taxis in Kigali have yet to be studied.

Street Trading

What is it? Informal commerce has become the lifeblood of African cities. Street trading is a common way to sell both goods and services or both, and accounts for 12–24 percent of total urban informal employment in many sub-Saharan African cities (IEMS, 2012).¹⁵ Street trading refers specifically to trade that is characterized as outside of the regulatory environment and does not participate in business regulation, planning codes, or other legal requirements. However on closer examination, street trading (like many informal sector livelihood activities) is deeply intertwined with formal sector activity. In a 2012 IEMS study of street trade in sub-Saharan African cities, it was found that over 50 percent of traders source their goods from formal sector suppliers; nearly two-thirds of traders make payments to the city government for a licence; and a quarter of traders have either paid or unpaid helpers who learn skills from them. Far from being located outside the formal economy, street traders play a part in the rise of African cities as nonindustrial “trading cities” that serve as major economic nodes connecting national and international trade in complex and increasingly global networks of trade (Skinner, 2008). Trade liberalization has facilitated street trading dramatically, increasing the importation of cheap goods. Items manufactured in China can be seen proffered for sale by young men and women at intersections and stoplights in cities across West Africa (Langevang, 2008).

Informal sector work is often segmented into two parts, the lower and upper tier. The upper tier is often referred to as top performers, and they are considered growth-oriented entrepreneurs. The lower tier is often labelled as entrepreneurial survivalists. Recent research has revealed a third group called constrained gazelles, who, while in the lower tier, show a number of characteristics like the top performers. In a less dynamic economy they are a significant group, between 20–35 percent of the total (Grimm et al., 2012), and this has implications for policy.

Street trading can be done part time, full time, all day, or all night, and can be tailored to the vendor’s needs in terms of time commitment. Some street vendors are fixed in one place—in a kiosk or around a major road junction, or in shopping malls—while others have no fixed location. Vending takes places through different structures, including tables, racks, wheelbarrows, handcarts, mats, on the ground, or simply displayed on the traders’ hands and heads (Mitullah, 2003).

How do young people get involved? West African countries, especially matrilineal societies, are distinctive in their long tradition of informal markets controlled by women (Skinner, 2008). While still

¹⁵ The ILO (2002) notes that street trading is especially difficult to measure because of the nature of the work—numbers can fluctuate depending on season and even during the day, and locations continuously shift and change.

dominant, the largest group of street traders are older women (Charmes, 2012), the large numbers of young people entering street trading as a livelihood strategy is shifting the character of this ubiquitous activity. The proliferation of street vendors is increasingly fuelled by urbanization, migration, public sector restructuring, conflict, drought/famine, and the impoverishment of people (Brown and Lyons, 2010; Skinner, 2008; Mitullah, 2003). Originally viewed as an economic activity for those with a low level of education and for women with multiple responsibilities/extending the reproductive and domestic roles traditionally assigned to them, more recently people from all backgrounds have entered street trade as a livelihood strategy, especially after the structural adjustment-related retrenchment of the civil service (Mitullah, 2003).

How does it contribute to young peoples' livelihoods? Income distribution of street vendors is highly skewed; a few make quite high incomes, comparable to those of successful storekeepers and career professionals, while most making relatively low incomes, comparable to those of unskilled manual laborers (Bromley, 2000). In Niamey, Niger, a vendor's average earning is four times the minimum wage, and often comparable to wages of skilled laborers in the formal sector—women therefore join the urban street food trade because of the possibility to earn higher incomes (Otoo et al., 2011). Factors determining productivity and income levels include location in the public space, the nature of the goods, trader's social relations and networks, access to finance, and access to basic infrastructure (Grimm et al., 2012). Street vendors are twice as likely as market vendors to face insecurity of workplace, and one in two vendors reported insecurity of their vending site as a significant problem for their trading (with many unable to access a license or permit) (IEMS, 2012). Furthermore, two-thirds of street vendors reported poor access to infrastructure (running water and waste management) impacting hygienic conditions and the success of their trade (IEMS, 2012). Numerous factors influence how economically productive street trading is; while it is widely considered a "lower tier" activity with traders often referred to as survivalist entrepreneurs (Grimm et al., 2012), it plays an important role in economies and has the potential to facilitate social mobility for traders in the right conditions.

Associational life has the potential to play an important role in increasing street traders' livelihood security and social status. However, strikes and demonstrations as mechanisms to voice vendor concerns (regarding their regulation or the lack of services despite revenue collection) have not been successful because traders cannot forego income to participate, and weak associations have no voice (Mitullah, 2003). Associational life can be valuable for developing the social capital required for accessing microcredit. Most microcredit is administered through peer groups that mirror traditional cooperative savings systems. Street traders who are mobile find it particularly difficult to develop this kind of social capital (Lyons and Snoxell, 2005).

What risks and challenges does it pose to young people and society? Street trading is sometimes perceived as negatively impacting the formal economy, stimulating conflicts with urban authorities over licensing, taxation, operation site, sanitation, and working conditions. State responses to street trading have included large-scale, sustained evictions and event-driven evictions, all coexisting with lower level ongoing harassment of traders (Skinner, 2008). Traders surveyed in sub-Saharan Africa cite abuse of authority as a key risk/threat to their working conditions (police harassment, bribes, arbitrary

confiscation of merchandise, and physical abuse) (IEMS, 2012). They also suffer extortion by gangs or informal “security” providers.

How is it organized/regulated? Millions of petty traders and urban poor are organized into associational life in urban economies mainly around problem solving and conflict mitigation (Skinner, 2008). Street trader and market associations fall into two groups—formal associations recognized by the authorities and informal kinship, or social networks that derive their power outside the political economy of the state. The level of organization amongst street traders is not well understood.

What are the policy options? Street vending as a livelihood activity can be combined with other types of productive trading, and studies show that people who move between production sectors are more likely to be upwardly mobile; women are particularly found to be more mobile than men (Lyons and Snoxell, 2005).

Hairdressing and barbering

What is it? Hairdressing and barbering encompass a whole range of hair care businesses—from informal services delivered between friends through roadside temporary stands, to highly entrepreneurial small shops and salons. Providing a highly personal service, hairdressing and barbering rely heavily on the service providers’ social capital.

Hair care businesses increased in popularity and importance during the early 2000s as a result of urbanization and the influence of hair relaxing techniques and new fashions (Oda, 2005). Hairdressing particularly expanded as the result of vocational training programs for urban women that focused on traditional female livelihood activities: hairdressing, tailoring, and catering. The proliferation of hairdressing has meant that markets are becoming saturated, affecting the ability of businesses to sustain themselves (Langevang and Gough, 2012). In a saturated market, women who have been trained as hairdressers seek alternative livelihood activities to supplement or entirely replace their hairdressing income (Oda, 2005). The overpopulated hairdressing sector has suppressed the earning power of urban young women (Korboe and Williams, 2012). In contrast, barbering has seen little in the way of large-scale investment but has organically grown to meet demand, creating new spaces for young men to assert new forms of masculinity.

How do young people get involved? Parallel businesses have evolved in the informal and formal sectors. In the informal hairdressing sector, women learn the skills of the trade informally from family and friends, and set up independently with little need for start-up capital beyond the cost of small plastic combs and a few stools (Essah, 2008). Formal hairdresser training has been the focus of numerous skills and vocational training programs for urban girls rolled out by governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations in countries across West Africa. The modalities of apprenticeships vary but usually involve low entry requirements; long hours (usually six days per week); some trainees pay for their training or forgo their income; and sometimes they get board and lodging, but only in very few situations do they get to keep the profits of what they produce (Donkor and Mallet, 2006). In Côte d’Ivoire, high unemployment levels in the hairdressing sector mean that trainees prefer to extend

apprenticeships to at least continue receiving in-kind support (food and so on), if not an income (Grootaert, 1990). In Ghana, formal sector salons experience competition from hairdressers without formal training who are able to set up small hair-braiding kiosks and offer competitive rates because they rely on their clients to bring their own products. Despite their relatively good income, the kiosk hairdressers are often cast as lower class (Essah, 2008).

Barbering has not benefited/suffered from the consequences of extensive vocational training. It is normally learned from older brothers or friends and deployed as an asset among networks of family and friends (Langevang, 2008). From here it can morph into a central part of young men's livelihood strategy. If people like the quality of the work, a client base and business is developed.

How does it contribute to young peoples' livelihoods? Hairdressing is an attractive occupation for young West African women negotiating the balance between domestic and child bearing/rearing responsibilities, and earning an income (Langevang and Gough, 2012). The hours are flexible, locations can be close to home or even in the home, and unlike many other informal sector activities, hairdressing is regarded as a respectable occupation. In Ghana, hairdressers also benefit from active hairdressing associations that have sought to increase their dues-paying membership, negotiate rates and tariffs with government, and worked to standardize training methodologies. Furthermore, drawing on global trends and new hair products that have created demand for hairdressing, trade associations have facilitated a shift in the perception of the occupation as one for school dropouts to one that is modern, lucrative, and enterprising (Langevang and Gough, 2012). Despite these attractions and benefits, many formally trained hairdressers in Ghana have become street traders because they are unable to make a sufficient income from hairdressing in a saturated market (Korboe and Williams, 2012).

In addition to providing an income, barbering has also provided young West African men a space to mediate and reframe negative stereotypes attached to their identities. For example, Ivorian youth that fled to Burkina Faso are renegotiating the negative image attached to refugees. They are reinterpreting negative meanings attached to the term "diaspo" by branding their barbering shops with names such as "Diaspo Coiffure" thereby creating a new urban cosmopolitan identity (Bjarnesen, 2012). Similarly, barber shop images in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, create "localised narratives that celebrate an Abidjanais-specific lifestyle and claim participation in the global political economy as black male actors" (Matlon, 2011, p. 381). By emphasizing their likeness to icons of the African diaspora, "these images represent expressions of masculinity that embody the desires and disappointments of marginalized Abidjanais men" and young "men's insistence on global membership and adoption of global masculine forms that compensate for their failures to assume the expected roles of men in their society" (Matlon, 2011, p. 381). These images and the narratives they represent are a direct response from young Ivorian men to the marginalization and stereotyping they experience in society. As such, barber shops become much more than the site of young men's income generation, but also the hub of their social transformation on their own terms.

What risks and challenges does it pose to young people and society? Apprenticeship models to transition young people into independent hairdressing entrepreneurs have been widely criticized. A

number of young people drop out at each stage in the process of becoming an independent hairdresser (access to apprenticeships, training, graduating, opening a shop, and so on) (Schraven, 2013). Woltjer (2006) similarly identifies a series of weaknesses in the traditional Ghanaian apprenticeship system: there is no formal curriculum, there are varied standards, and no government support/control/supervision. In addition, Donkor and Mallet (2006) highlight the lack of formal vocational and technical training provided to masters in the apprenticeship system. In effect, masters lack knowledge of and access to technological information, knowledge of wider environmental issues, and entrepreneurial skills to pass on. Aside from the issue of a saturated sector, the failings of apprenticeship systems are associated with hairdressers experiencing health problems because they deal with chemical hair relaxants unsafely, for example (Essah, 2008). The failure to effectively manage young women's vocational training and subsequent livelihood opportunities has undermined the sector as a valuable means for young women to achieve advancement.

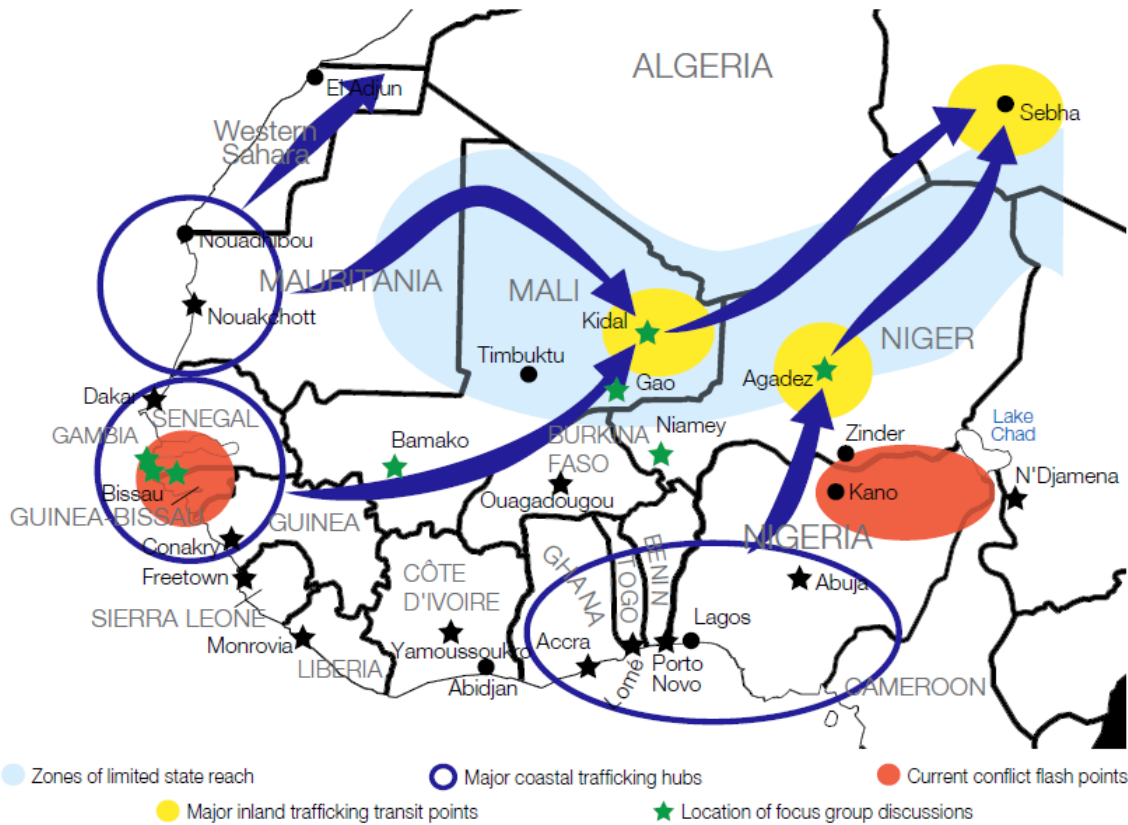
Most hairdressing and barbering opportunities for young people tend to exist in the informal economy in the form of pop-up shops (Essah, 2008; Matlon, 2011). As such, they exist in the grey space of other informal sector activities, supporting the formal economy yet negotiating the constraints of informality and a lack of protections.

Drug trafficking

What is it? West Africa has been a transit and repackaging point for the cocaine trade between Latin America and Europe for the last ten years (Ellis, 2006). The flow peaked at 47 tons in 2007 and declined more recently to about 18 tons, the latter with a European street value in the region of US\$1.25 billion (UNODC, 2013). Reitano and Shaw (2014) suggest that the increasing complicity of West African political and security actors in cocaine trafficking has encouraged a diversification of drug trafficking and organized crime in the region: "Drugs ranging from hashish, methamphetamine and precursor chemicals to cocaine and heroin have all been seized in recent years" (p. 2). For example, in Ghana, recent major seizures include 675 kg of cocaine in 2004, and over 80 kg of heroin, over 220 kg of cocaine, and over 3,000 kg of cannabis in 2010 (Kavanagh, 2013). Furthermore, according to Pierre Lapaque, Regional Representative for the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, recent discoveries of large-scale methamphetamine labs in Nigeria, Guinea, and Liberia indicate that West Africa "is shifting from a transit and consumer place to a producing place" (quoted in Skelton, 2013). A full picture of the history and scale of drug trafficking in the region is impossible to achieve, as available figures are all based on estimates derived from seizures. The effects of drug trafficking on the region are more visible; it is facilitated by and encourages the further erosion of human security and statehood.

Geographic coverage. While not marked on the map in Figure 3, drug production has been identified in Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Guinea-Bissau. Access to European markets enabled by effective transportation infrastructure and systems combine with the limited reach of the state and an unpoliced Sahara to make these countries important transit countries for drug trafficking. 4x4 vehicles are used to transport drugs from east to west across the desert (Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, 2014).

Figure 3. Trafficking flows through West Africa and the Sahel



Source: Map compiled by the authors based on data collected during field research, drawn by Isabel Kruger

Source: Reitano and Shaw, 2014.

How do young people get involved? In Mali, for semi-nomadic communities that have long relied on cross-border trade and migration strategies for livelihoods and survival during droughts and conflict, trafficking commodities across the Sahel and Maghreb represents a way of life: “Arab youths begin learning to drive at a very young age, and are known locally to have a particular talent for driving in the desert. They start as early as 10; are well practiced by 15, and by 18 are driving in the drug convoys for long distances. After being paid for the first couple of runs, they purchase their own cars—normally 4x4s—and then their futures are made” (Reitano and Shaw, 2014, p. 6).

Less is known about the factors that influence the decisions of other young West Africans to engage in drug trafficking. In countries with large numbers of young people engaged in livelihood activities and jobs that offer limited opportunities for social mobility, the attraction of fast money and status offered by drug trafficking is clear: “Even if a mule earns only a small portion of the final street value, trafficking just a few grams of cocaine to Europe offers a payoff similar to the annual economic production of the region’s average citizen” (Cockayne, 2011, p. 3). But how do young people themselves understand the “opportunities” and risks involved in confronting the border regimes and laws of other countries? More

practically, how do they access the social networks that position them to engage in drug trafficking? Reitano and Shaw (2014) suggest that “young men engaged in trafficking publicise their success by buying valuable real estate, cars and other status symbols, which in turn become a tool for recruiting ... especially impressionable youths” (p. 6). In the case of drivers in Mali, recruitment was mediated by the young men’s willingness to engage and the traffickers need for both driving skills and knowledge of trafficking routes. Kinship and social networks also play a central role in recruitment. Fortune (2013) highlights the strategic selectivity exercised by transnational organized crime groups at recruitment; they reportedly “target government officials and politicians who are in positions to support their profit making.”

How does it contribute to young peoples’ livelihoods? The financial benefits of drug trafficking are clear. For example, 4x4 drivers in Mali are paid “at least US\$6,000 for trafficking cigarettes ... for hashish or cocaine they are paid a minimum of US\$14,000” (cited in Reitano and Shaw, 2014, p. 5). With higher incomes, these young men gain social status at the community level, which shifts the balance of power away from traditional authority figures (leaders of clans, imams, elders) (Reitano and Shaw, 2014) and creates the opportunity for young people to shape their futures and that of those who surround them. If drug trafficking goes wrong and young people get caught by law enforcement or engage in drug abuse, their livelihood strategies can be severely and negatively disrupted by imprisonment and/or health problems.

What risks and challenges does it pose to young people and society? In Mali, drug trafficking and the rapid social mobility it enables disrupt traditional hierarchies and social structures. Traditional justice and stabilization mechanisms have struggled to adjust and have become ineffective, which has led to intracommunity tensions. Collusion by state officials and the army with drug traffickers and other organized criminal gangs has eroded state capacity to protect citizens (Davis, 2014). Outbreaks of armed violence in relation to the control of trafficking routes have further eroded security. In terms of wider social cohesion, fears regarding young wealthy men’s potential appetites have also sparked tensions. Forced or swiftly arranged marriages are on the rise, as elders seek to “placate the desires of young Kel Tamasheq men who have access to large amounts of money”—that is, young men not involved in drug trafficking become priced out of marriage as the costs of dowries increase and divorce rates have increased, as young wives are rejected if they do not bear children quickly enough (Reitano and Shaw, 2014, p. 7).

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is challenging to make policies that improve opportunities for the growing population of young people who are largely employed in precarious, underproductive, and unsustainable livelihood activities that impact state-fragility in different ways across West Africa. Matching up diverse young people to the shifting and evolving opportunities produced by national and global dynamics is complex, yet much learning is already available to help avoid the repetition of past mistakes and missed opportunities.

Given the regional, high-level nature of this report, and patchy and limited availability of quality data about young peoples’ experiences of the five livelihood activities studied in the four focus countries, this

paper does not attempt to make sector-specific or country-specific recommendations for stimulating the advancement of young people in West Africa. To do so on the basis of limited knowledge and evidence of different groups of young people in different social and geographic locations would be irresponsible, given the limited resources available for investment; the specificity and complexity of the various situations affecting different countries in West Africa; and the risks for progressing peace, security, and development involved in pursuing ill-advised livelihood interventions. Rather, by bringing together available information on young peoples' livelihood activities in different contexts, this study highlights a series of broad guidelines and recommendations for policy makers and programmers working in/on West Africa:

- 1) Develop targeted interventions. Where working with youth is intended to reduce fragility, first identify which youth are involved in activities that contribute to fragility, how they get involved, and why.** For example, where fragility is related to the activities of radical groups such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, identify which youth are being recruited (gender, geographic location, socioeconomic background), how they are being recruited, and why recruitment is appealing to them. This is critical to effectively disrupting the recruitment process. From understanding the actions of specific groups of youth, it becomes possible to devise targeted strategies, policies, and interventions to minimize risks. For example, it may emerge that recruitment into radicalism is facilitated by the activities of wider groups in society (such as religious preachers) who could be better monitored and regulated, or that a credible nationwide anti-corruption campaign would help restore youths' trust in government and the state, thus discouraging them from engaging with radical groups (Onuoha, 2014). Similarly, where some motorcycle taxi drivers are found to be associated with violence and other criminal activities that contribute to fragility, formalizing motorcycle taxi services could be a productive response. The alternative—restricting where and when motorcycle taxis operate—in effect compromises the livelihood of many law-abiding riders and their dependents, and reduces the economic benefits of a flexible and affordable means of transportation for the wider economy. Lessons could be drawn from Rwanda's experience of formalizing motorcycle taxis, taking into account why formalization has worked there and why it might or might not work in other country contexts.
- 2) Reframe debate, policy, and programming on the youth bulge to acknowledge that youth are a national and continental asset, and that the large majority of youth are nonviolent, working hard and struggling against a plethora of obstacles to make a life for themselves, their families, and their communities.** Intergenerational tensions and hostility are aggravated when leaders and decision makers treat youth as one homogeneous category and focus their attention on the violent and criminal actions of a minority. Too much emphasis on the needs, interests, and incentives of the minority of youth who *do* engage in violence, without attention to the nonviolent majority who do not, can produce perverse incentives for the otherwise nonviolent to engage in violence. The circumstances, needs, interests, and incentives of the diverse, nonviolent majority of youth must be understood and managed to minimize

intergenerational tensions and hostility, and to channel the full potential of youth towards creating shared prosperity.

- 3) Manage expectations and publicly acknowledge that creating enough good jobs to meet demand involves significant structural reforms; as such, it is a medium- to long-term goal. Governments need to act now for the future and lead the multistakeholder effort.** Government leadership needs to bring together relevant government institutions (local and national, managing education, health, private sector development, natural resource management, and financial resources), the international community (including private sector actors), as well as traditional leaders, families, and diverse groups of youth themselves to respond to the job creation challenge. Each plays a role in building an enabling environment for young peoples' advancement in society and society's overall transformation. Where government capacity has been eroded by conflict and insecurity, government leadership of complex multistakeholder initiatives and significant structural reforms is an exceptionally tough challenge. The international community needs to support these governments particularly with specialized accompaniment and technical support as they rapidly put in place medium- to long-term plans that marshal stakeholders and resources. Urgent action is needed to put in place the right health, education, and training policies and programs to develop human resources with the right capacities and technical skills to benefit from future opportunities that arise from shifting global value chains and other labor market developments. Furthermore, education and training programs must produce workers with diverse and adaptable skills that match diverse and changeable labor market demands to avoid undermining the value of any particular skill set. For example, Ghana's experience of training too many hairdressers—which resulted in a flooded labor market, the undervaluing of hairdressers skills, and underemployment—is informative.
- 4) Mobilize regional networks. Governments must make more use of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), working with and within it to negotiate regional and global support to manage the employment challenge and its links to fragility in West Africa.** Globalization has meant that regional and international institutions play a central role in shaping the opportunities for job creation and managing cross-border fragility dynamics. For example, regulatory regimes shape opportunities for safe migration, market access for global trade, and the strength of illegal trafficking networks. ECOWAS can play an important role in securing an increase in the proportion of global value chains based in West Africa. Not least because West Africa benefits from substantial natural resources and a large young labor force (in the context of an aging labor force elsewhere in the world). Similarly, ECOWAS can play a role in pressing for the renegotiation of immigration policy to increase safe migration opportunities for young West Africans; or the terms of different regional trade rules that constrain market access available to West Africa producers. ECOWAS can also help to more strongly negotiate for international assistance to tackle cross-border drivers of fragility that impact prospects for peace, development, and investment in the region, for example drug trafficking.

5) **Pursue immediate reforms to improve the prospects associated with current youth livelihood activities:**

- a. **Recognize the contribution youth livelihoods activities already make to individual, household, and community well-being, including economic growth.** Numerous youth livelihood activities are not recognized as jobs despite the fact that they make important social and economic contributions. Young people thus spend years technically unemployed, not achieving recognition or adult status despite contributing substantially to their families and communities. In the short term, building a wider understanding and appreciation of how youth livelihood activities contribute to society and the economy can help improve youths' status and well-being, reducing youth marginalization and frustration. A sustained public information campaign can play a role in the recognition process—through radio interviews and stories, for example—alongside other targeted interventions.
- b. **Put in place mechanisms to enable youth financial inclusion, despite informal sector employment.** Access to credit and saving schemes are critical to reducing the economic vulnerability often associated with youth livelihood activities. Providing access to credit and facilitating savings through clubs and associations, the formal banking sector, or new technologies (such as mobile money) can also help catalyze youth livelihood activities toward increased productivity and further contributions to wider society and economic growth (Filmer and Fox, 2014).
- c. **Work with the private sector and NGOs to stimulate youth entrepreneurialism and build associations around livelihood activities that provide sustainable support.** Youth livelihood activities are shaped by market demands and opportunities, yet their potential for growth and expansion is constrained by limited education and little access to training and support. Young potential entrepreneurs need hands-on support to develop life, technical, and business skills that enable them to transform small-scale initiatives into small enterprises that can go on to employ others. Associations and clubs have been an important factor in determining the survival and success of youth livelihood activities. They provide support and development opportunities and represent the needs and interests of the group in local and national decision-making processes. Careful attention to facilitating the development of different groups and associations that can provide appropriate and sustained support to young entrepreneurs can further facilitate social integration and minimize the risk that livelihood activities contribute to fragility dynamics. Private-sector expertise combined with the trust and access enjoyed by NGOs make them both valuable partners in this endeavor.

6) **Deepen understanding of youth aspirations and frustrations in parallel with short- and long-term employment focused interventions.** Failed aspirations and frustration with authorities and

decision makers is often identified by youth who have engaged in violence as a significant factor, among others, in their mobilization. Decision makers rarely engage with different groups of youth directly. Engagement can be restricted to election time, when politicians want to mobilize votes. This relationship can be very narrow, short-term, and transactional in character, with limited benefit for the youth involved. Similarly, decision making concerning youth can treat them as technical “inputs” for economic progress, erasing agency and aspirations, and media and communications on new investments and economic growth that imply new opportunities are coming often raise expectations that rarely translate into changed daily realities for the majority of youth. These interactions often produce or even deepen the frustration and distrust that feed intergenerational, citizen-state tensions between youth and those who make decisions on their behalf. Political leaders and decision makers must better understand young peoples’ diverse lives (their challenges and aspirations), including their interest in cultural phenomena such as hip-hop, new technologies, and social media. Rather than treating them as a resource to serve political or economic ends, working to understand youth and their diverse realities can help foster confidence and reduce frustration.

- 7) **Manage expectations via tailored communications and honest and sustained dialogue mechanisms.** Youth with limited education can struggle to understand the complex realities that shape decision making (weighing important yet competing priorities, sequencing policy and program efforts, negotiating local and global dynamics). Where there are high hopes for the future, yet only long, slow, and difficult paths to get there, it is critical that communications do not unduly raise expectations and then deliver disappointment and frustration. Where reports of corruption and high levels of inequality prevail, repeated failed expectations can aggravate intergenerational tensions and citizen-state relations. Dialogue that is sustained beyond elections and other politically expedient moments, and that honestly engages with the diverse realities that diverse groups of youth confront and the diverse challenges that decision makers confront, can help build understanding and trust. Such sustained and honest dialogue can also help transform national political dynamics from limited transactional relationships to more productive collaborative relationships. By working with formal and informal collectives, associations, and unions in which different groups of youth participate, decision makers can help build confidence and trust in their capabilities. Working toward a more collaborative political culture can transform youth into active stakeholders in their future and help prepare future generations of leaders to manage the local and global challenges that confront decision makers in a globalized world.
- 8) **Improve the transparency of youth employment-related interventions by making the evidence base for interventions publicly available in order to facilitate dialogue and improve citizen-state relations.** Governments and their donor partners need to spend more money on research to build an evidence base for their decisions and to improve the targeting and effectiveness of policies and programs. As noted throughout this study, data on the diverse circumstances, needs, interests, and aspirations of different groups of young

people and their livelihood activities is limited. To mobilize the full potential of current youth livelihood activities in the short term and to pave the way for more and better livelihood opportunities in the future, much more context-specific research is needed to inform policy and programming interventions now. Participatory research and dissemination of the evidence base behind policy and programming interventions can also contribute to confidence-building and stronger intergenerational, citizen-state relations. For example, demand for evidence-based policy and programming builds demand for a local knowledge economy, which can in turn create employment opportunities for underemployed, educated, and talented youth.

A common feature of each of these guidelines and recommendations is that “one size does not fit all.” On the contrary, attempts to fit generic policies and programs for youth employment into fragile settings in West Africa have produced poor and sometimes undesirable results (Batmanglich and Enria, 2014).

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