IFPRI RWANDA

STRATEGY SUPPORT PROGRAM | WORKING PAPER 18 NOVEMBER 2026

Aspirations, Constraints, and Livelihoods: A First Look at Rural Youth in Rwanda

Descriptive Findings from the Rwanda Youth Livelihoods Survey 2026

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ABSTRACT

This paper gives a first descriptive look at the livelihoods, aspirations, and wellbeing of approximately 3,200 youth aged 15–35 living in 160 rural villages across Rwanda's four provinces outside Kigali, interviewed for the Rwanda Youth Livelihoods Survey (RYLS) 2026. Agriculture dominates their work: 88% of working youth name an agricultural activity as their main work, most often farming the household's own crops or working as agricultural day laborers. Most of this work is part-time, with three in four working youth (74%) usually working fewer than 30 hours a week, and fewer than 2% holding a non-agricultural wage or salaried job. Importantly, aspirations far exceed current circumstances which implies significant optimism for the future. Youth place the job they hold today at three on a ten-step aspirations ladder and their dream job at seven, and about 60% would like to complete university or a higher degree. About one-third of youth consider working in agriculture as a dream job, one-third would be willing to work in agriculture, and approximately one-third would prefer other employment. Of those not willing to work in agriculture, most cite low profits and lack of land rather than social stigma. Financial resilience is quite low with 83% of youth respondents indicating that they could not raise RWF 75,000 (≈$50) within a week or would find it very difficult. Nineteen percent of youths hold a bank account, and informal borrowing requests far outweigh formal borrowing. Nearly all youth live in a household with a mobile phone, but only 20% have their own phone with internet access, and this share rises steeply with household wealth. Diets rely on beans and starchy staples, with little animal-source food. While nine in ten youth feel their voice matters, fewer than half see action on the issues they raise. Young women aged 15–24 lag on most measures of access and participation when compared to other youth categories. Overall, these results are meant to provide a baseline for forthcoming thematic analyses and for a planned second survey wave that can track how youth experiences and opinions evolve over time.

Keywords: youth; livelihoods; aspirations; agriculture; financial inclusion; Rwanda

KEY FINDINGS

- **Farming is the focal point of rural youth work, but most youth work fewer than 30 hours a week**. About 88% of working youth name an agricultural activity as their first main work, mostly farming their household's crops (62%) or working as agricultural day laborers (22%). Fewer than 2% hold a non-agricultural wage or salaried job, and nearly three in four (74%) usually work fewer than 30 hours a week.
- **Youth exhibit strong positive aspirations**. On a ten-step ladder (where 1=poor pay, poor conditions, etc., and 10=high pay, community respect, etc.) youth place the job they hold today at 3 and their dream job in five years at 7. In addition, 60% of all youth would like to complete university or a higher degree, compared with 1.1% who have reached university level so far.
- **About two-thirds of youth would consider working in agriculture, and one in three would name it as their dream job**. Farming crops, raising livestock or agricultural trading is the dream job of 36% of youth. Those unwilling to work in agriculture mostly cite low profits (29%), lack of land (23%), or a dislike for manual labor (21%). Very few youth (3%) point to social stigma around agriculture.
- **Education is rising across generations**. Four in ten youth (40%) have studied beyond primary school, compared with 16% of household heads. The share with no schooling falls from 23% among household heads to 3% among youth.
- **Financial access is limited and mostly informal**. More than eight in ten youth (83%) say they could not, or would find it very difficult, to raise RWF 75,000 within a week. Youth are about five times as likely to borrow, or try to borrow, from informal sources (45%) as from formal ones (9%), and fewer than one in five (19%) hold a bank account.
- **Phones are near-universal, but internet access is not**. Nearly all surveyed youth (93%) live in a household with a mobile phone, yet only 20% have their own phone with internet access. This share rises from about 5% among youth in the poorest wealth quintile to about 41% in the richest.
- **Diets rely heavily on beans and starchy staples, with limited animal-source foods**. During the last 24 hours, 85% of youth ate beans or pulses, but only 15% had milk, 6% eggs and 4% red meat.
- **Youth feel heard but see less follow-through**. Ninety percent feel their voice matters, and three in four youth whose groups hold regular meetings (75%) attended one in the past year, yet fewer than half (46%) feel action followed on issues they raised. Jobs and the economy dominate their concerns and priorities.
- **Young women aged 15–24 lag other youth on access and participation**. Younger women have the lowest rates of internet-enabled phone ownership, saving, mobile money use, borrowing, meeting attendance and participation in climate activities, and they share the lowest rate of bank account ownership (6%) with young men of the same age.

1. INTRODUCTION

Typical of many African countries, Rwanda's population is young and living in rural areas. About 35% of Rwanda's 13.2 million people are between the ages of 15–34, and 72% of all Rwandans live in rural areas (NISR 2023). Each year, large cohorts of young people reach working age, most of them in rural areas where agriculture remains the main source of work. In 2024, the unemployment rate among youth aged 16–30 was 18.5%, compared with 14.9% for the working-age population (NISR 2025). How rural young people make a living, what they hope to achieve, and what stands in their way are therefore central questions for Rwanda's youth employment and agricultural transformation policies.

The Rwanda Youth Livelihoods Survey (RYLS) 2026 was undertaken by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to better answer these questions. The survey interviewed about 3,200 young people aged 15–35 in 160 villages in the Eastern, Northern, Southern, and Western provinces and collected detailed information on education, work, financial and digital inclusion, migration, health and nutrition, civic participation, climate change, aspirations, and time use. For purposes of multi-country comparisons, the survey follows the African Union definition of youth as people aged 15–35 (African Union 2006) which is broader than the 16–30 range used in Rwanda's national labor statistics. The same young people will be re-interviewed in a planned second panel survey wave.

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the survey design, data, and methods. Section 3 profiles the youth surveyed. Sections 4 to 8 present results on work and income; aspirations and attitudes to agriculture; digital and financial inclusion; health and nutrition; and civic voice, priorities, and concerns about climate change. Section 9 provides a summary of key findings and Section 10 concludes.

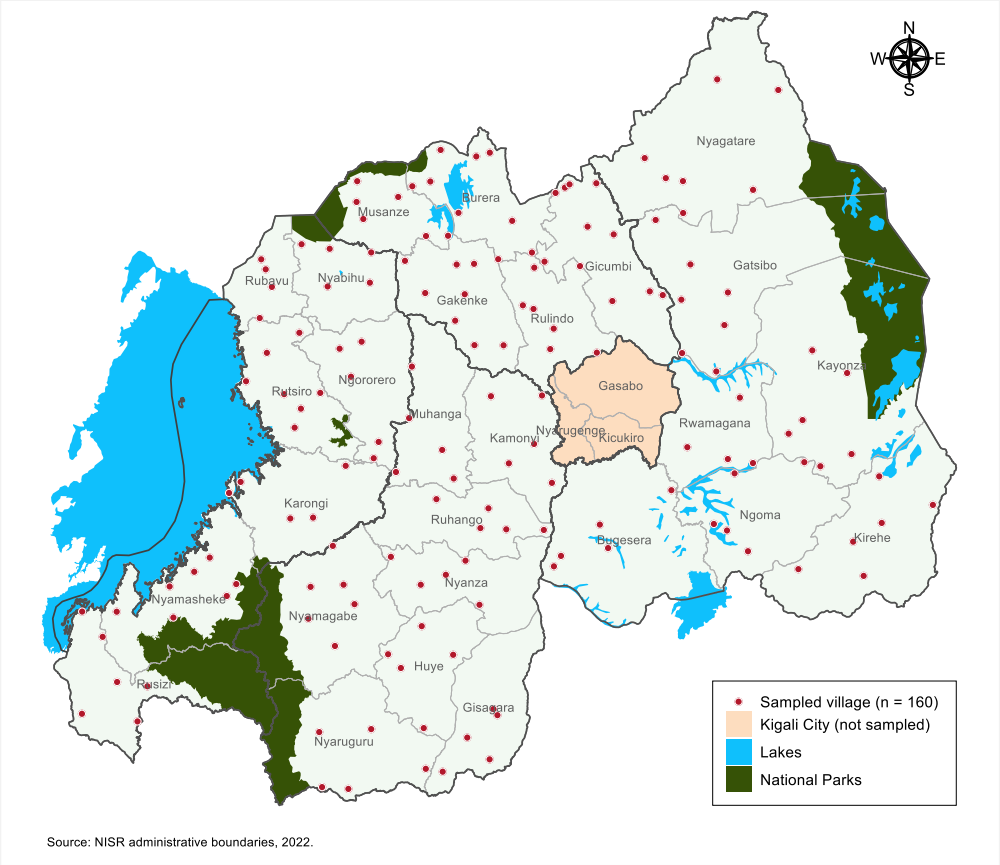
2. DATA AND METHODS

To better understand the livelihood trajectories of young women and men in rural Rwanda, sample size calculations were based on youth-level, rather than household-level, characteristics. A two-stage sample strategy was employed, first choosing the village sample, then listing youth households within the village. A total number of 160 villages were selected from the four provinces, excluding Kigali City,[1] using probability proportional to size (PPS) sampling.[2] After the village selection, a household listing was conducted to identify young people aged 15–35 years. Youth were then randomly selected from the listing to fill four strata defined by sex and age: young men aged 15–24 years, young women aged 15–24 years, young men aged 25–35 years, and young women aged 25–35 years. On average, 20 youths were interviewed in each selected village. The final sample includes 3,227 youth from 3,227 households (Table 1). While equal numbers of youth were sampled in each category (≈805), the weighted percentages are lower for older youth (see weighted sample in Table 1). This suggests that older youth have disproportionately migrated to urban areas leaving less of their cohort remaining in rural areas. A quintile wealth variable was created using principal component analysis (PCA) on household characteristics and asset ownership (including livestock).

[1] Kigali province was not included because of the limited number of youth as well as the perceived different rural youth conditions near the capital.

[2] As the term indicates, PPS is a sampling methodology that samples directly proportional to size. In this case, probabilities of being selected increase by the number of existing households in the village.

Figure 1: Survey Location



Note: Shaded areas show the 160 villages selected for the survey. Kigali was excluded by design.

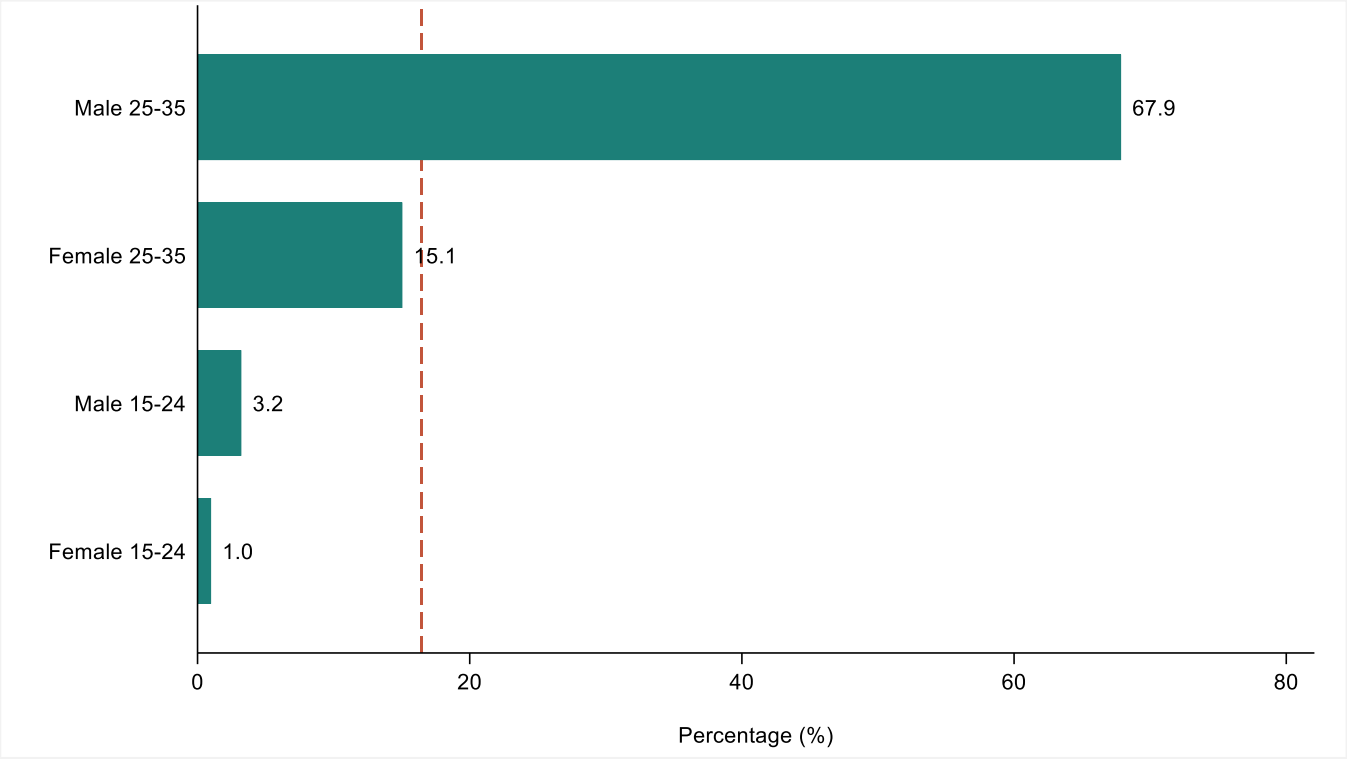
Table 1: Characteristics of the youth sample

	Male 15-24	Female 15-24	Male 25-35	Female 25-35	All Youth
Number of youths interviewed (unweighted)	807	810	805	805	3,227
Share of the sample (weighted %)	30.4	31.0	17.7	20.8	100.0
Province					
South	31.3	30.6	17.5	20.5	100.0
West	29.1	31.7	17.4	21.8	100.0
North	29.2	30.7	18.8	21.3	100.0
East	31.5	31.0	17.4	20.1	100.0
Mean age (years)	18.8	18.9	29.9	30.4	23.2
Currently attending school (%)	46.8	51.5	1.2	0.6	30.5
Head of own household (%)	3.2	1.0	67.9	15.1	16.4

3. PROFILE OF RURAL YOUTH

Most young people surveyed still live in a household headed by someone else, typically a parent (Figure 2). Only 16.4% head their own household, and the move to heading one's own household depends strongly on age and sex. About two-thirds of young men aged 25–35 (67.9%) head their own household, compared with about one in seven young women of the same age (15.1%). Very few youths under 25 are household heads (3.2% of young men and 1.0% of young women).

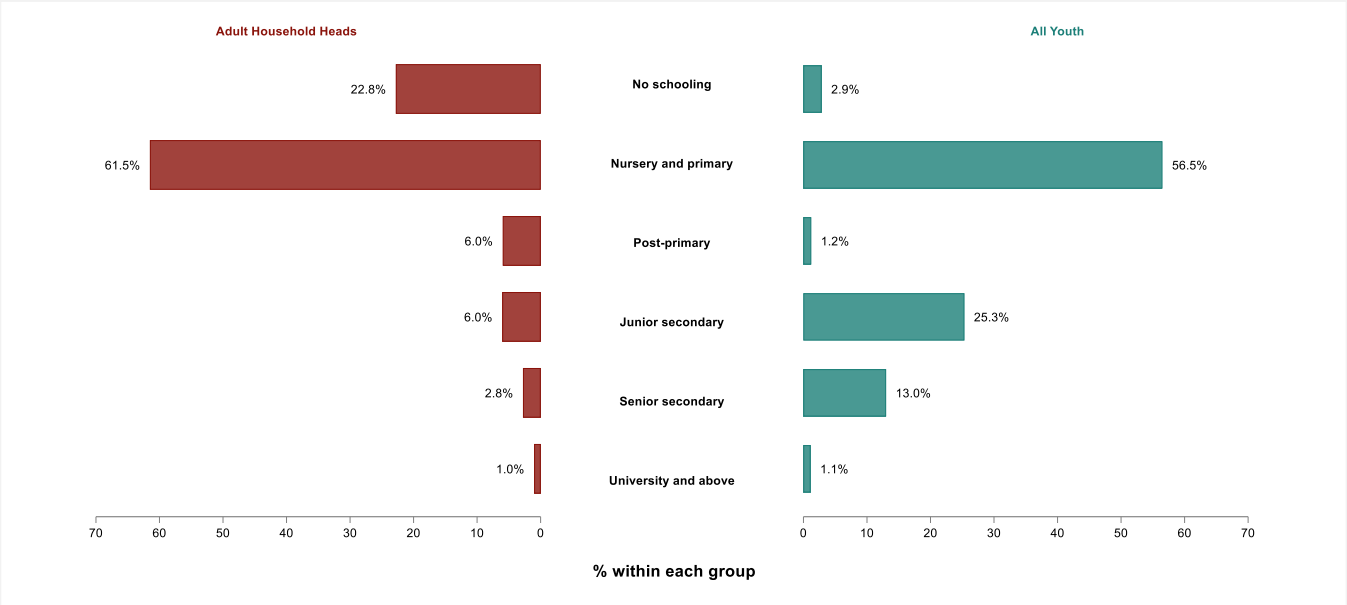
Figure 2: Share of youth who are the head of their household



Note: Dashed line shows the average across all youth (16.4%).

Today's rural youth are much better educated than the household heads over 35 (Figure 3). Almost one in four household heads over 35 (22.8%) never went to school, compared with just 2.9% of youth. Primary schooling remains the most common highest level for both groups, but 42.6% of youth have studied beyond primary school (post-primary vocational, secondary, or higher), compared with about 16% of over 35 household heads. The gains are concentrated at the secondary level, with university education remaining rare in both groups (1.2% of heads and 1.1% of youth). Many younger respondents are still in school, so final attainment for this cohort will be higher than shown here.

Figure 3: Highest level of education attained: household heads compared with youth



Note: Highest level completed. Percentages within each respondent group.

4. WORK, AND TIME USE

Agriculture is by far the main source of work for rural youth (Table 2). Nearly nine in ten working youth (88%) depend on agriculture for their main activity. Farming the household's own crops is the single most common activity (61.7%), followed by agricultural day labor on other people's farms (22.3%). Agricultural day labor is more common among young women (26–27% in both female strata), and young women aged 15–24 are more likely than young men of the same age to work on the family's crops (61.1% compared with 53.8%). Wage employment is almost absent with fewer than 1% of working youth holding any kind of wage or salaried job. Young men aged 15–24 have the most varied work, with approximately one in five working outside agriculture, most often as casual non-farm laborers (7.5%), drivers (2.1%) or construction workers (2.0%). Overall, work activities vary by gender and age: Women's work is more concentrated in crop farming and agricultural day labor, while men report a wider range of activities. Older youth more commonly farm their household's own crops and less often undertake day labor than younger youth particularly among men. These differences may reflect variation in household responsibilities and access to employment opportunities among rural youth.

Table 2: Main work activity (%)

Main work activity	Male 15-24	Female 15-24	Male 25-35	Female 25-35	All Youth
Agriculture, own farm, crops	53.8	61.1	68.3	64.4	61.7
Agricultural day labor	19.4	27.2	16.5	26.1	22.3
Nonagricultural day labor (casual worker)	7.5	2.8	3.3	1.6	3.9
Agriculture, own livestock	6.6	2.6	2.2	1.3	3.2
Driver/transportation	2.1	-	3.0	-	1.3
Small business without employees	1.9	1.3	0.5	1.0	1.2
Construction	2.0	0.1	2.0	0.2	1.1
Other Agricultural services	1.6	0.9	0.2	1.3	1.1
Non-agricultural wage/salaried activities	0.2	0.2	0.6	1.3	0.6
Other work activities	4.9	3.7	3.4	2.9	3.7

Note: Among youth who worked in the past 12 months. The main activity is the one that takes up most time. Activities held by fewer than 1% of all youth are combined into broader categories: "Small business without employees" combines non-agricultural trading, regular market trading and small businesses with or without a fixed location or employees; "Non-agricultural wage/salaried activities" combines government, private company, education, health, NGO and other salaried work. Columns may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Most working youth work far less than full-time, partly because many are still in school (Table 3). Nearly three in four (74.3%) usually work fewer than 30 hours a week, and only 11.9% work 40 hours or more. This points to potential underemployment where many young people have time available but not enough productive work to fill it. Seasonal farm work is likely to explain part of this pattern. Short working weeks are most common among young women aged 15–24 (44.8% work under 15 hours), many of whom may also be in school or doing unpaid household work. Hours vary little by province or household wealth.

Table 3: Usual hours worked per week (%)

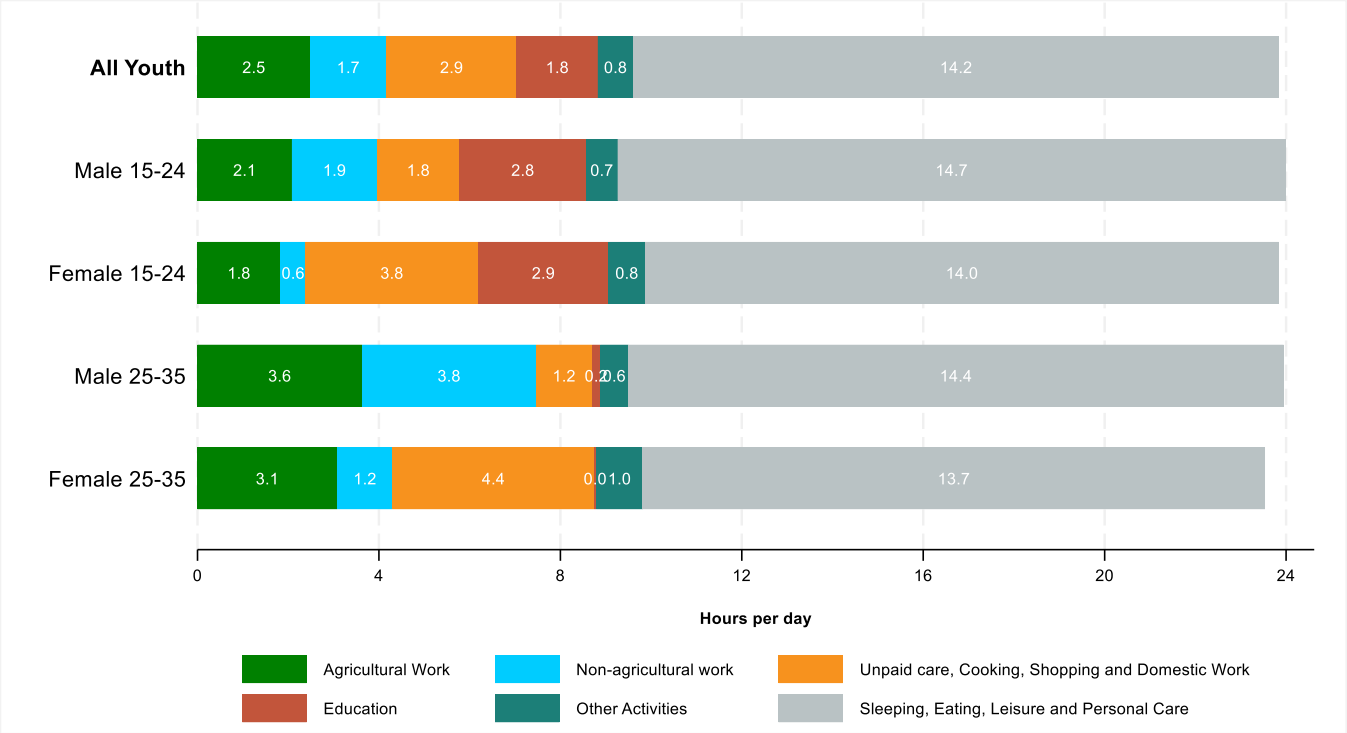
	Under 15 hrs	15-29 hrs	30-39 hrs	40-48 hrs	49+ hrs
All youth	37.9	36.4	13.8	6.3	5.6
Province					
South	38.4	37.1	12.3	6.2	6.0
West	36.4	36.1	12.7	8.3	6.6
North	40.6	33.3	14.4	5.7	6.0
East	36.9	37.8	15.3	5.4	4.5
Sex and age group					
Male 15-24	40.7	34.5	11.5	6.2	7.1
Female 15-24	44.8	33.4	13.0	4.9	3.8
Male 25-35	31.3	38.2	16.3	7.8	6.4
Female 25-35	34.8	39.1	14.6	6.4	5.1
Wealth quintile					

Q1 poorest	35.9	40.8	13.3	5.5	4.5
Q2	39.5	34.6	14.8	7.3	3.9
Q3	38.1	34.1	14.5	6.8	6.6
Q4	36.3	38.7	14.5	5.5	5.0
Q5 richest	39.9	33.2	11.6	6.6	8.8

Note: Usual hours worked per week, among youth who worked in the past 12 months. Rows may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

The 24-hour time diary shows differences between young women and men and how they spend their day (Figure 4). Young women spend far more time on unpaid care, cooking, etc. (3.8 hours/day for women aged 15–24; 4.4 hours for women aged 25–35) compared with young men (1.8 and 1.2 hours, respectively), while men aged 25–35 spend the most time in non-agricultural work (3.8 hours). Sleeping, eating and personal activities average about 14 hours a day but are slightly lower for women 25-35 years old. Education takes up a meaningful share of the day for 15–24-year-olds (2.8-2.9 hours) and almost none for 25–35-year-olds. These patterns point to a burden of unpaid domestic work on young women, which limits the time they have for paid work and education.

Figure 4: Daily time allocation by activity (average hours per day)



Note: Average hours per day from the 24-hour diary.

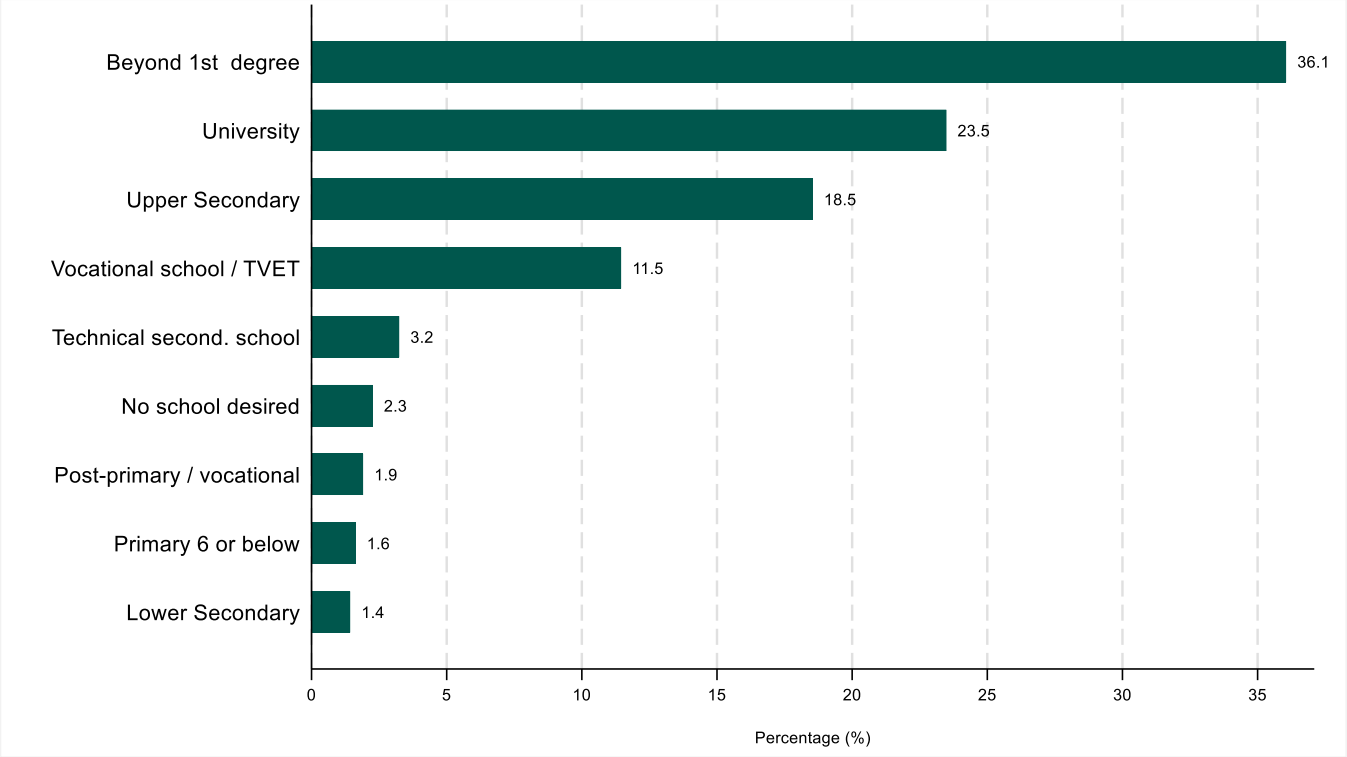
Taken together, the results in Tables 2, 3 and Figure 4 indicate that rural youth's working lives differ by gender and age. Agriculture dominates employment, and most working youth report shorter working weeks. Women's main activities are more concentrated in crop farming and agricultural day labor, and they devote more time to unpaid domestic work, whereas men report a broader range of activities and more time in paid work. Youth aged 25–35 more commonly farm household crops and report longer working weeks, while those aged 15–24 spend more time in education. These findings suggest that assessing youth employment requires considering agricultural

livelihoods, unpaid household responsibilities and schooling commitments, as these shape the context in which young people work and allocate their time.

5. ASPIRATIONS AND THE PLACE OF AGRICULTURE

Rural youth have high ambitions for their education (Figure 5). If they faced no constraints, 23.5% would like to complete a first university degree and a further 36.1% would like to study beyond that, so six in ten (59.6%) aspire to university or a higher degree. Another 16.6% aim for vocational or technical training (TVET, technical secondary, or post-primary vocational school), and 18.5% for upper secondary. Only 2.3% report no additional desired level of schooling. These ambitions contrast sharply with current attainment: 1.1% of youth have reached university level (Figure 3).

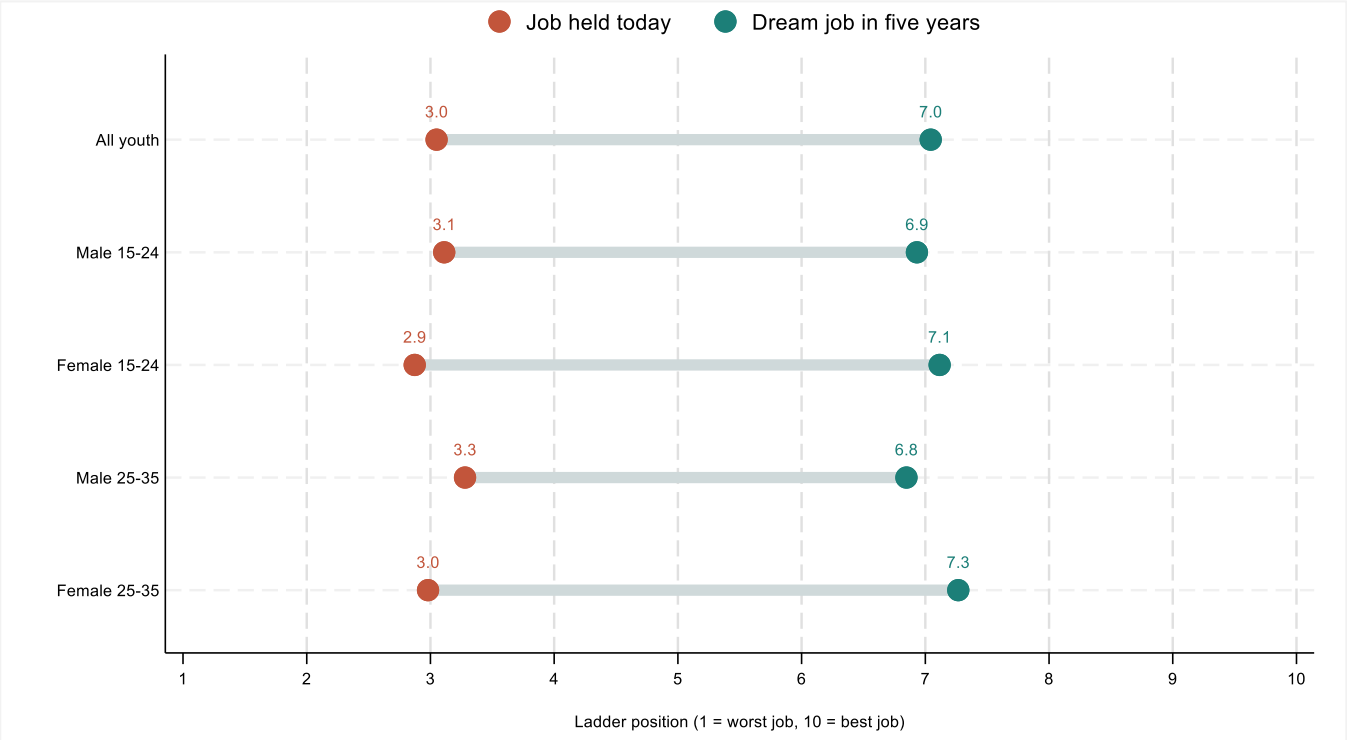
Figure 5: Highest level of education youth would like to complete



Note: The highest-level youth would like to complete if they faced no constraints. Percentages of all youth.

Similar to reported education desires, desire for work are just as high (Figure 6). Comparing them with current jobs shows a large “aspiration gap.” On average, youth rate the job they hold today at only 3.0 out of 10, but place their dream job at 7.0, a gap of four full steps, and the pattern is similar across youth groups. Women rate their current jobs slightly lower and their dream jobs slightly higher than men, giving them the largest gaps. Specifically, women aged 25–35 move from 3.0 to 7.3, compared with 3.3 to 6.8 for men of the same age.

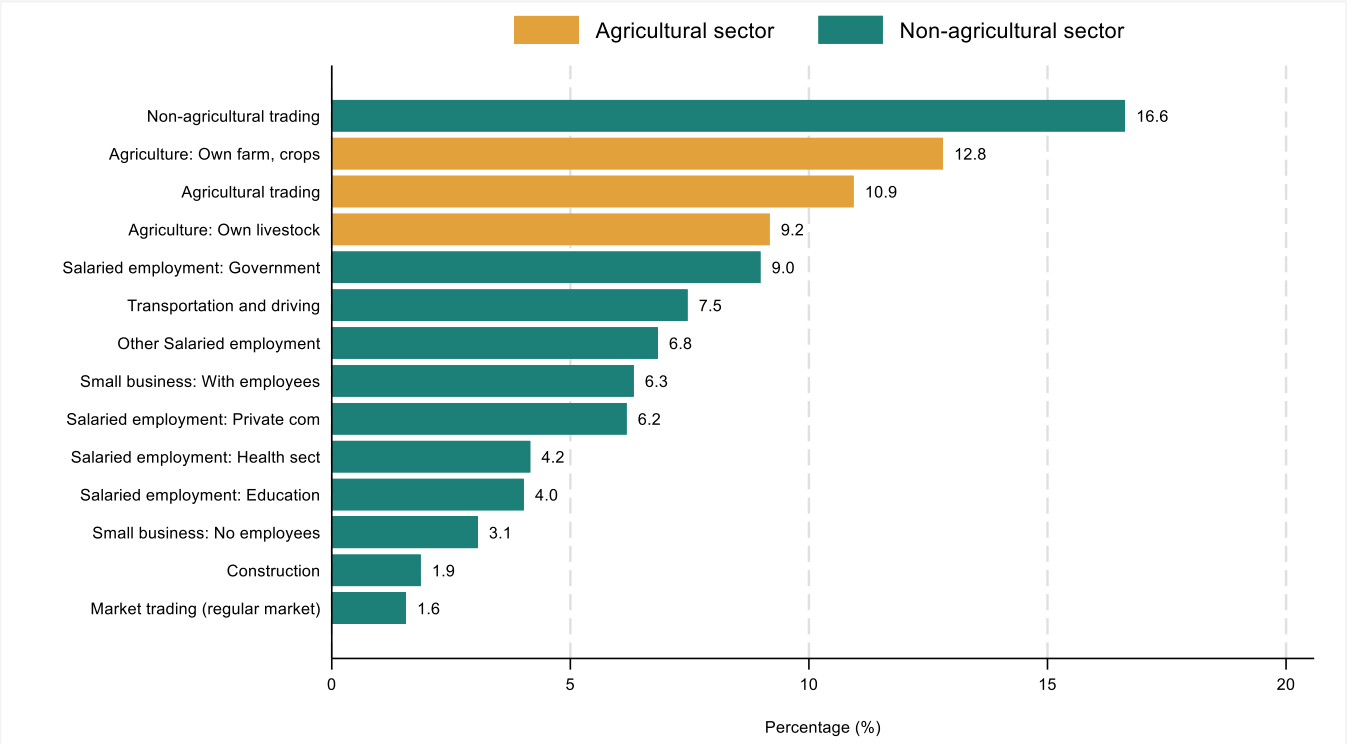
Figure 6: Self-rated position of current job and dream job on a ten-step ladder



Note: Respondents placed the job they hold today and the job they would most like to hold in five years on a ladder from 1 (worst possible job) to 10 (best possible job).

While youth hope to move into non-agricultural trading, salaried work or business activities, agriculture remains a significant part of many young people's plans (Figure 7). The single most popular dream job is non-agricultural trading (16.6%). Taken together, salaried jobs in government, private companies, education, and health are named by 23.4% of youth, compared with fewer than 1% who currently hold any wage job. Agriculture still features prominently with 32.9% of youth indicating agriculture as their desired work in the future. Specifically, they named farming crops (12.8%), agricultural trading (10.9%) or raising livestock (9.2%) as their dream job. Agricultural trading is far more popular as an aspiration than as a current activity (0.4%), suggesting youth interest in moving into the more commercial parts of agricultural value chains.

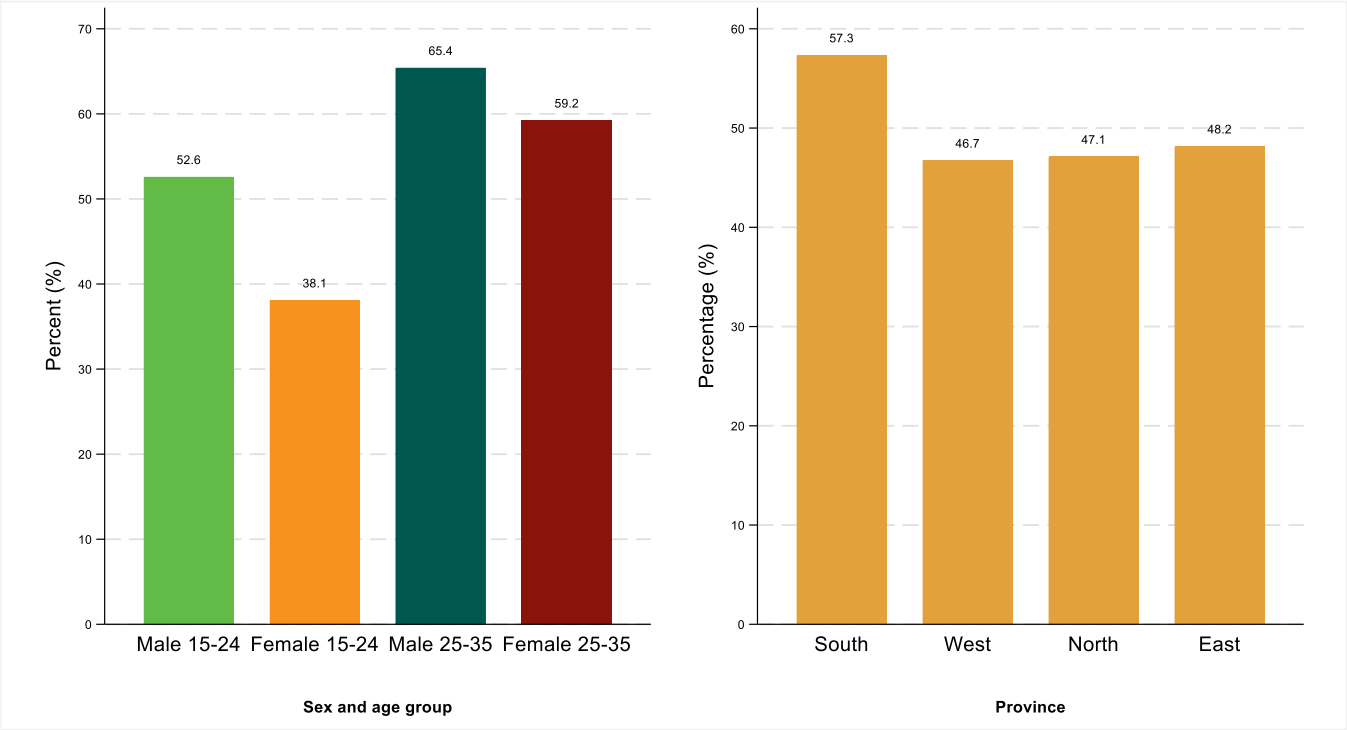
Figure 7: Activity named as dream job in five years



Note: Percentages of all youth.

Of those who do not identify agriculture as a dream job, approximately half of these youth identify working in agriculture in their future (Figure 8). Willingness is highest among older youth, who are more likely to farm already on their own account: 65.4% of young men and 59.2% of young women aged 25–35 would consider it. Young women aged 15–24 are the least willing (38.1%). By province, willingness is highest in the South (57.3%) and similar elsewhere (47–48%).

Figure 8: Share of youth willing to work in agriculture and province averages

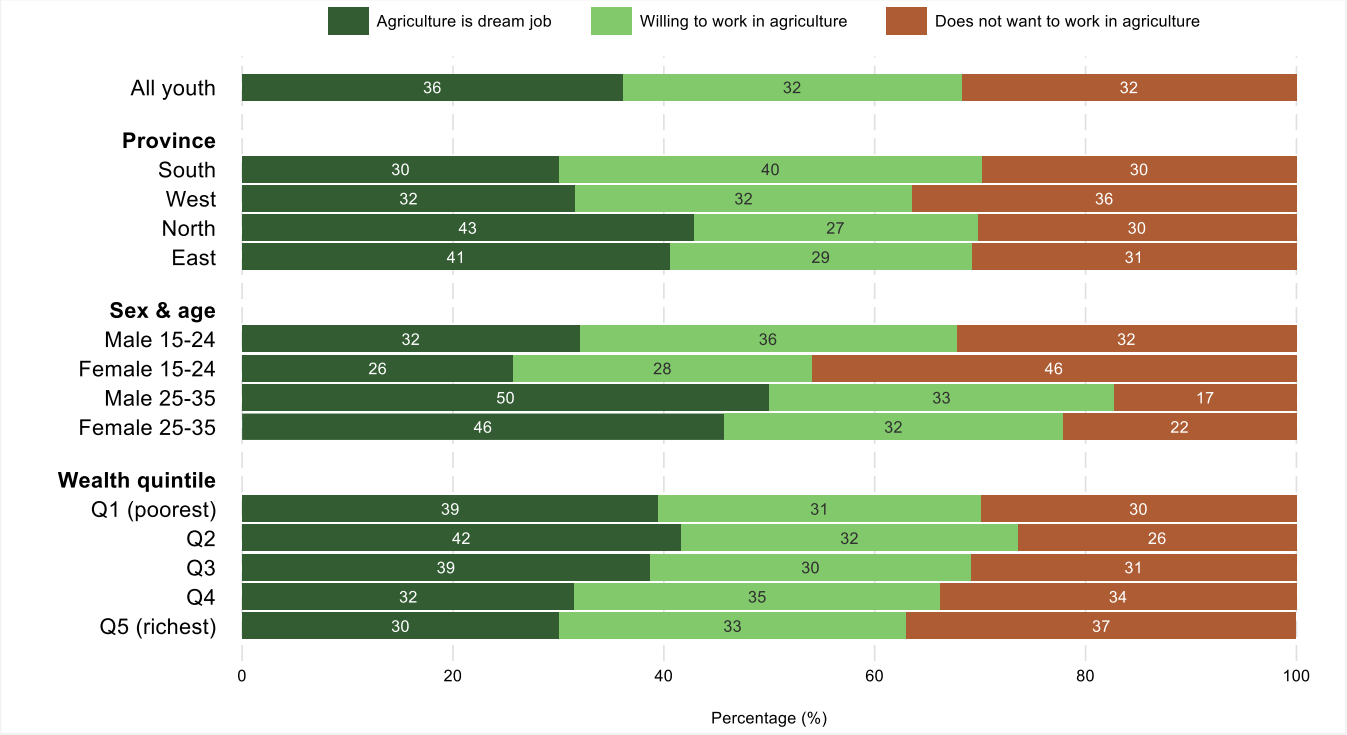


Note: Youth who said they would consider working in agriculture.

Agriculture holds a stronger place in rural young people's aspirations than is often assumed. More than a third of rural youth (36%) name farming as their dream job, and a further 32% say they would be willing to work in agriculture even though it is not their first choice. Together, more than two in three rural youth (68%) are open to an agricultural livelihood, while just under a third (32%) do not want to work in the sector.

The situation varies considerably across groups. Interest is highest in the North (43%) and East (41%), where farming is the dream job for around four in ten youth, compared with 30–32% in the South and West; the West also has the largest share unwilling to farm (36%). Age and gender produce the sharpest differences. Older youth aged 25–35 are far more attached to agriculture than younger ones: half of young men (50%) and 46% of young women in this group call it their dream job, and only 17% and 22%, respectively want to work in other areas of the economy. By contrast, young women aged 15–24 are the least interested in any group: only 26% see farming as their dream job and nearly half (46%) do not want to work in it. Wealth also matters, with aspirations declining as households get richer. Farming is the dream job for 39–42% of youth in the poorest three quintiles, but only 30% in the richest, where the share unwilling to farm rises to 37%.

Figure 9: Youth Willingness to Work in Agriculture (%)

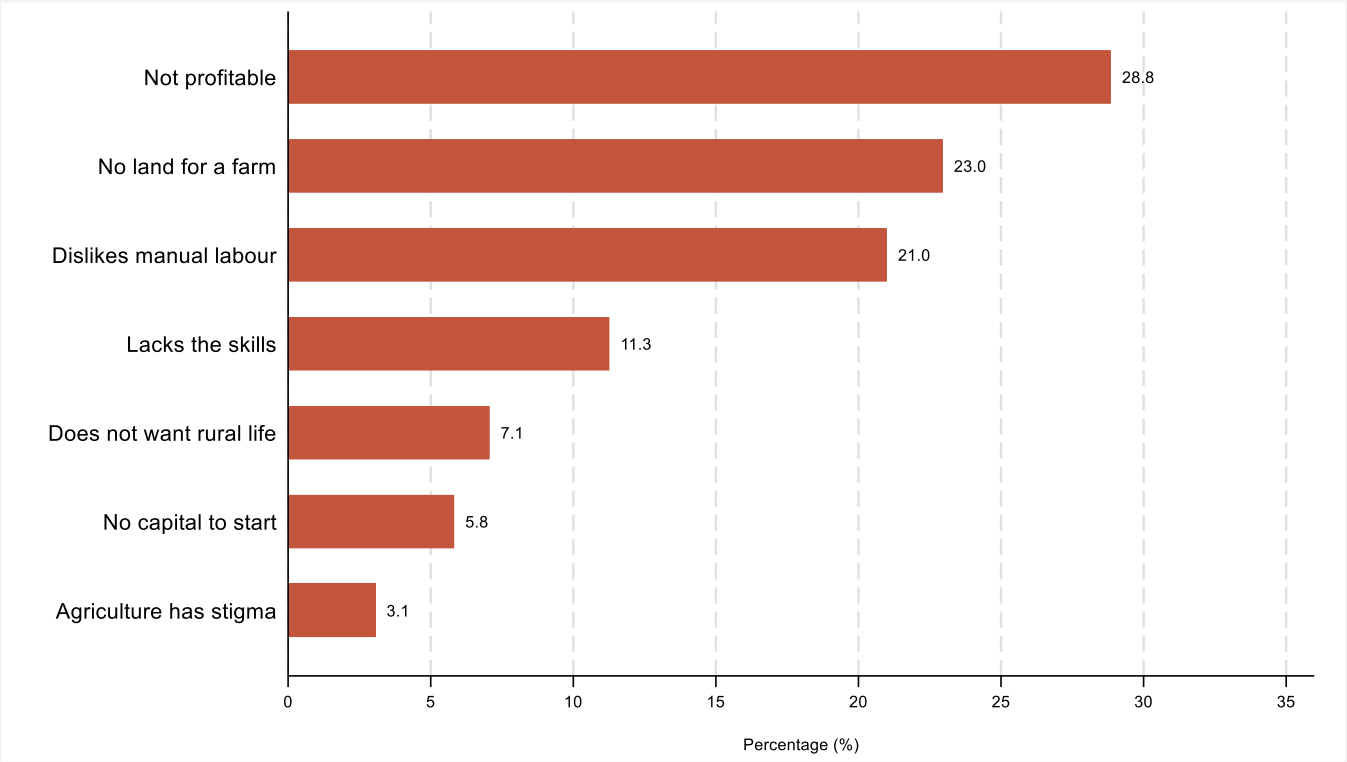


Note: Percentages of all youth.

Youth who do not want to work in agriculture mostly give economic reasons for their choice (Figure 10). The most common is that farming is not profitable (28.8%), followed by having no land to farm (23.0%). Lacking skills (11.3%) and start-up capital (5.8%) are further practical barriers. Taken together, nearly seven in ten responses (68.9%) point to constraints on earning a living from farming, rather than to a rejection of farming as such.

Attitudes play a smaller but still notable role. One in five (21.0%) dislike manual labor and 7.1% do not want to live in a rural area, while only 3.1% cite the stigma attached to farming. This suggests that making farming more profitable and improving young people's access to land, skills and finance may do more to attract them than efforts to change how agriculture is perceived.

Figure 10: Reasons for not wanting to work in agriculture



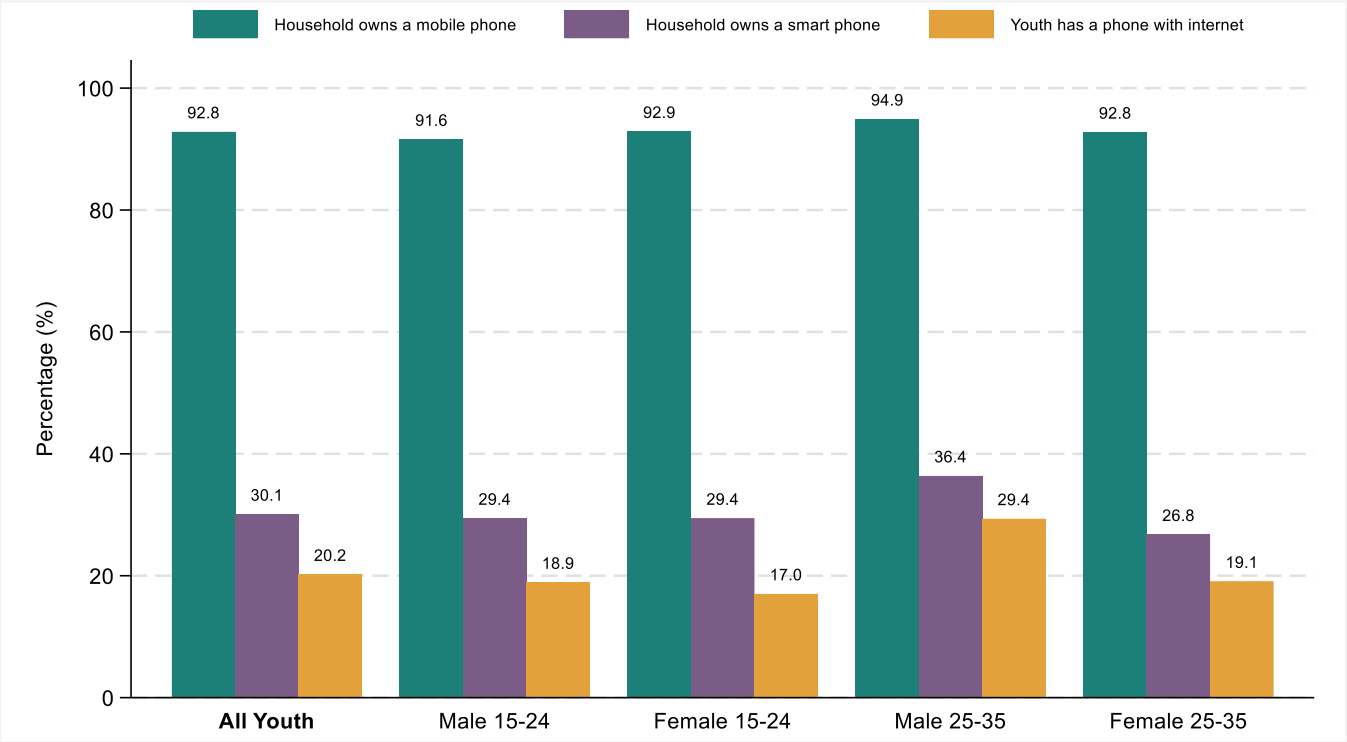
Note: Among youth who would not consider working in agriculture. Each respondent gave one main reason.

Figures 5–10 reveal a substantial gap between rural youth's current circumstances and their educational and occupational aspirations. Although many aspire to higher education and non-agricultural employment, agriculture remains a part of the plans of well over half of all rural youth, including through trading and livestock production. Willingness to work in agriculture is highest among older youth and lowest among younger women. Among those unwilling to work in the sector, perceived low profitability and lack of land are the most frequently reported barriers. These findings suggest that agriculture's appeal is linked to its economic prospects and accessibility, underscoring the relevance of promoting both commercially oriented agricultural opportunities and pathways into non-farm employment.

6. DIGITAL AND FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Access to phones, mobile money and financial services can open doors to information, markets and credit. Rural youth are well connected by basic mobile phones, but deeper digital and financial inclusion is limited and uneven. Nearly all youth (92.8%) live in a household with a mobile phone, but only 20.2% have their own phone with internet access (Figure 11). Three in ten youth (30.1%) live in a household with a smartphone. Young women aged 15–24 are the least connected (17.0% have an internet-enabled phone), while young men aged 25–35 are the most connected (29.4%). Young men aged 15–24 (18.9%) and young women aged 25–35 (19.1%) fall in between, so the main gap is between older male youths and everyone else.

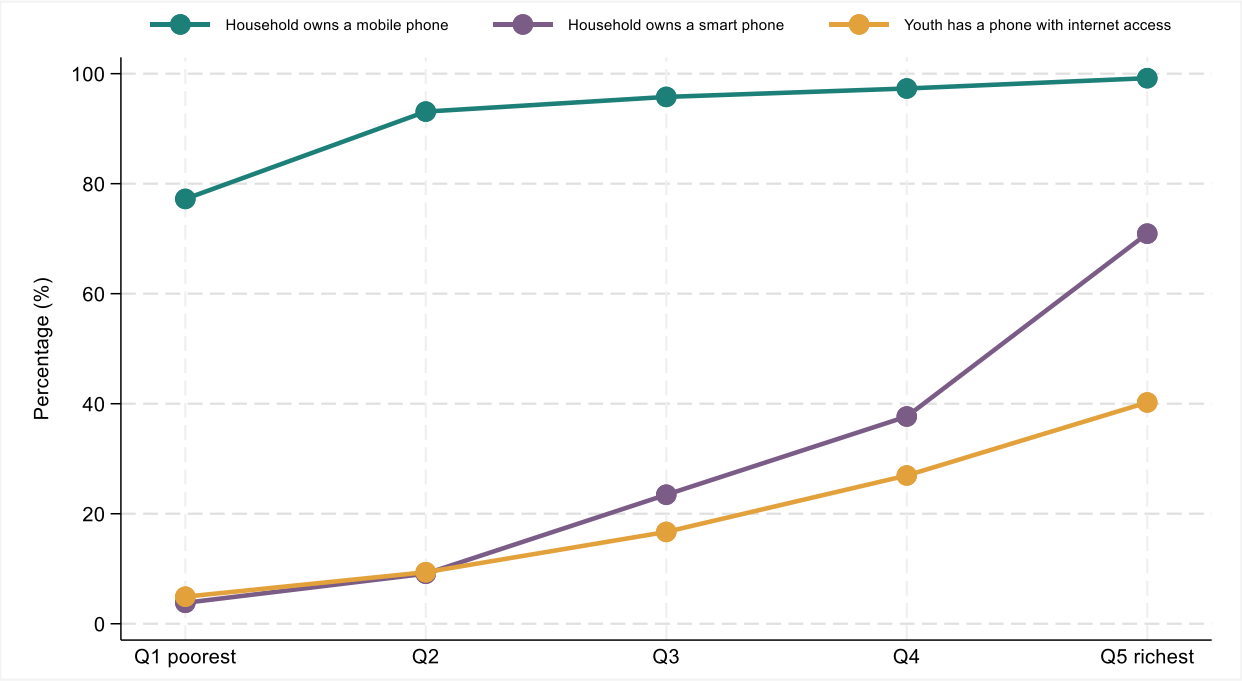
Figure 11: Mobile phone ownership and internet access, by sex and age



Note: Household phone ownership refers to any member of the youth's household.

The digital divide follows household wealth closely (Figure 12). Basic phone ownership is high across all wealth groups (about 80% among the poorest, near universal among the richest). Smartphones and internet access, however, rise steeply with wealth: about 5% of youth from the poorest quintile of households have an internet-enabled phone, compared with about 41% in the richest. Household smartphone ownership rises even more steeply, from about 4% to about 73%.

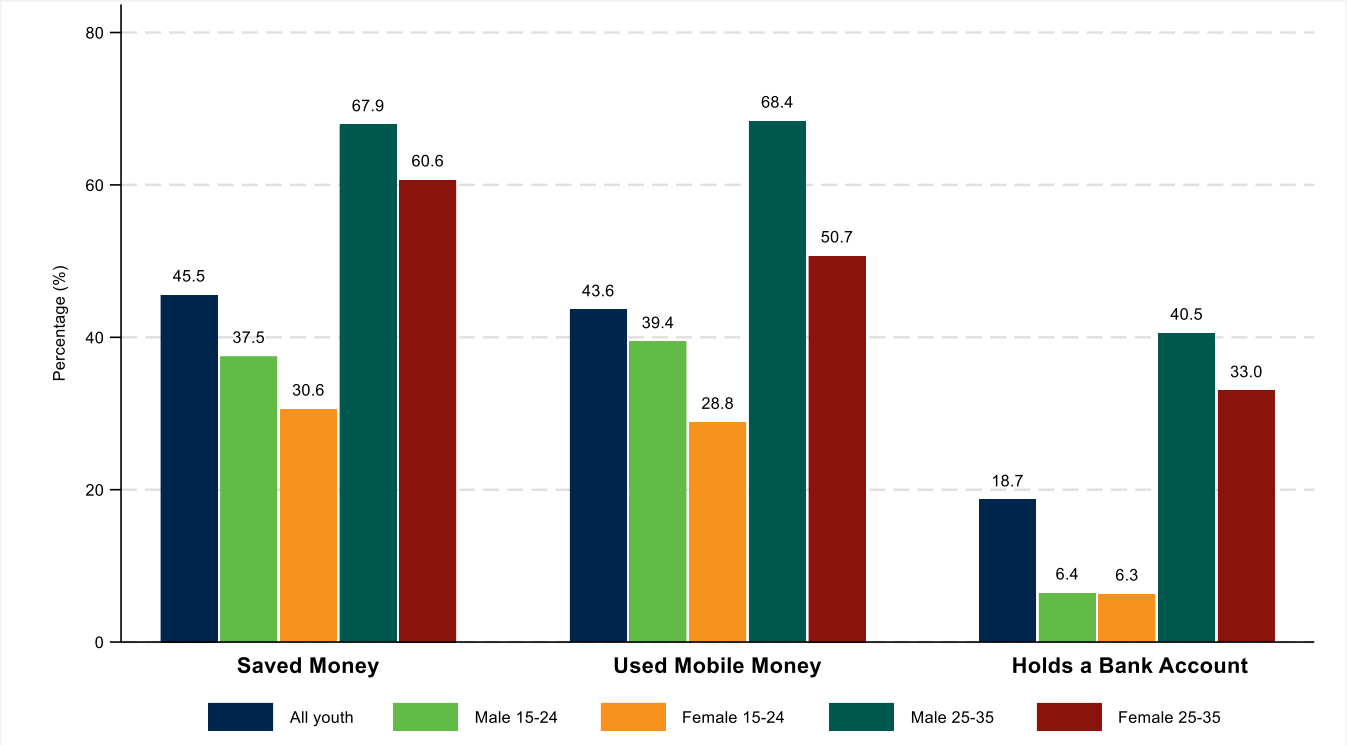
Figure 12: Mobile phone ownership and internet access, by household wealth



Note: Household wealth quintiles from Q1 (poorest fifth) to Q5 (richest fifth).

Related to finance, just under half of all youth saved money (45.5%) or used mobile money (43.6%) in the past year, but fewer than one in five (18.7%) holds a bank account. The differences by age are large (Figure 13). Older youth are more likely to save, use mobile money and hold a bank account, indicating greater engagement with financial services. This may reflect differences in income and financial responsibilities across age groups. Among 15–24-year-olds, fewer than one in ten have a bank account (6.4% of young men and 6.3% of young women), compared with 40.5% of men and 33.0% of women aged 25–35. Young women aged 15–24 have the lowest rates of saving (30.6%) and mobile money use (28.8%), and they share the lowest rate of bank account ownership with young men of the same age. Wealth also matters[3]: youth in the poorest quintile of households are about half as likely to have a bank account as those in the richest (14.2% compared with 28.0%). This contrast may partly reflect the costs of maintaining and using an account and the resources available to save. Among youth who use mobile money, it appears to play a more routine role among older youth. These differences likely reflect variation in income, resources, and transaction needs.

Figure 13: Savings, mobile money use and bank account ownership

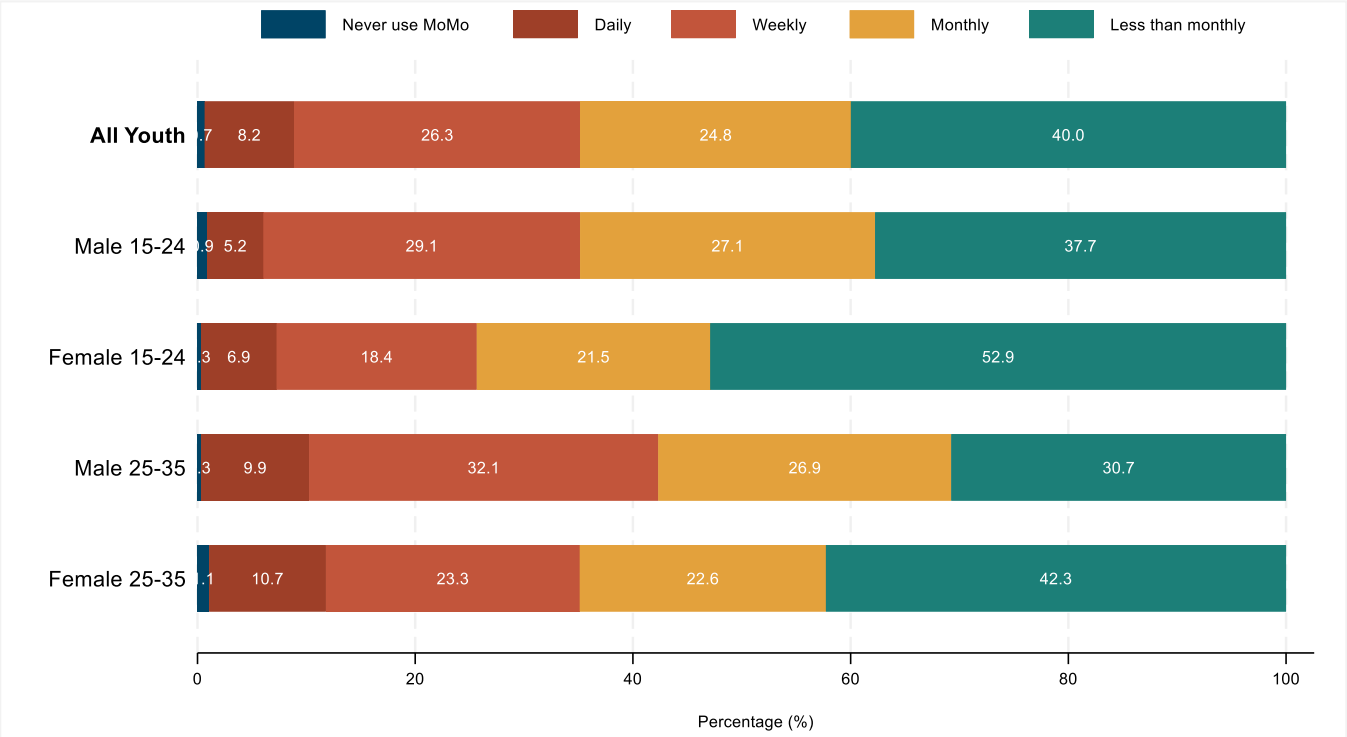


Note: Percentages of all youth in each group.

Among mobile money users, most use it only occasionally (Figure 14). About a third (34.5%) use mobile money daily or weekly, while 40.0% use it less than once a month. Young women use it least often: more than half of young female users aged 15–24 (52.9%) use it less than monthly, compared with just over a third of young male users of the same age (37.7%). Older young men are the most regular users (42.0% daily or weekly).

[3] For brevity, results by wealth quintile concerning bank accounts are not shown. Detailed results are available upon request.

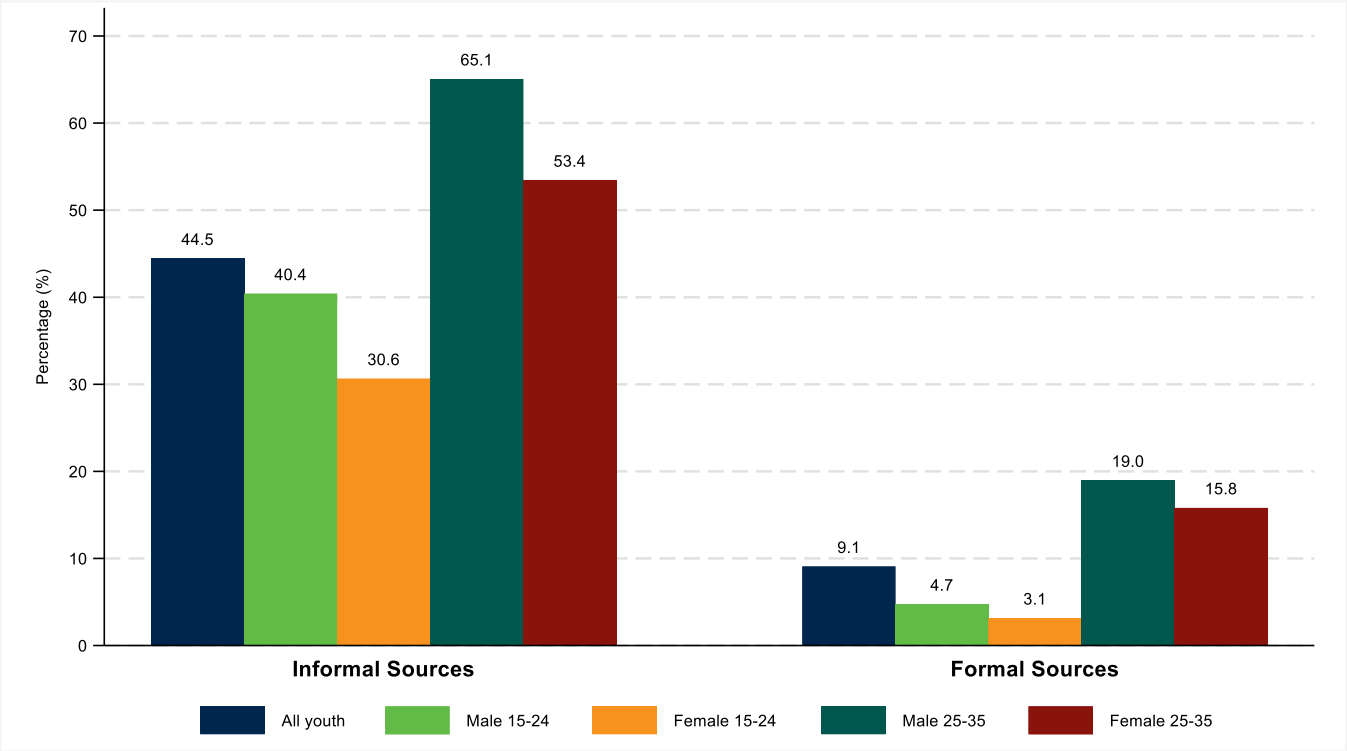
Figure 14: How often youth use mobile money (MoMo)



Note: Among youth who used mobile money in the past 12 months.

When youth look to borrow money, they turn mostly to informal sources (Figure 15). In the past 12 months, 44.5% tried to borrow or borrowed money from informal sources such as friends, relatives, moneylenders, or community groups, compared with 9.1% from formal financial institutions such as banks, savings associations, and microfinance institutions. Formal borrowing requests are very low among 15–24-year-olds (4.7% of young men and 3.1% of young women) and reach only 16–19% among older youth.

Figure 15: Attempted or actual borrowing in the past 12 months, by source

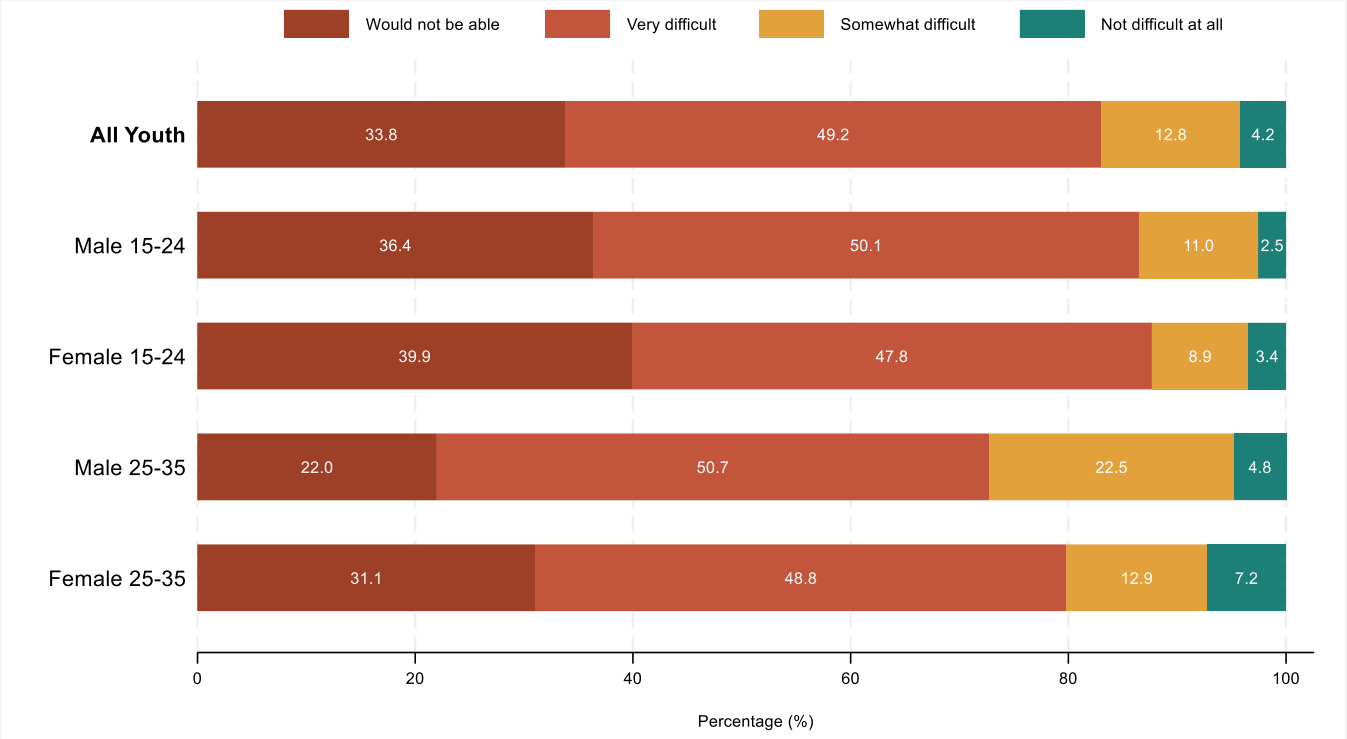


Note: Percentages of all youth in each group who tried to borrow or borrowed money from each type of source.

Most rural youth have little financial resilience: 83.0% say they would not be able to raise RWF 75,000[4] (≈$50) within the next seven days or would find it very difficult (Figure 16). Only 4.2% say it would not be difficult at all. Young women aged 15–24 are the most vulnerable (87.7% unable or finding it very difficult), while young men aged 25–35 are somewhat better placed (72.7%). This leaves young people exposed to shocks such as illness, crop failure or extreme weather.

[4] This amount was chosen for reasons of comparability across the other administered country youth surveys.

Figure 16: How difficult it would be to raise RWF 75,000



Note: Percentages of all youth in each group. RWF 75,000 is approximately US$50 (1,480 RWF to USD July 2026).

Overall, the results on digital and financial inclusion show that widespread household access to mobile phones coexists with limited personal internet access, infrequent mobile money use and low engagement with formal financial services. Borrowing requests are predominantly informal, and most youth report substantial difficulty raising emergency funds. Younger women are particularly disadvantaged across several indicators, while poorer youth face pronounced gaps in digital access. These findings highlight the importance of assessing inclusion beyond household phone ownership, considering individual access, frequency of service use and financial resilience.

7. HEALTH AND NUTRITION

The majority of youth rate their health positively: 64.7% say it is good or very good, while 8.5% say it is bad or very bad (Table 4). Health ratings are relatively worse in the Eastern Province, where 12.0% report bad or very bad health, about double the rate in the Western Province (6.2%). Young women aged 25–35 report the poorest health of any group: 11.2% rate it as bad or very bad, and only 56.8% as good or very good. This may reflect the demands of childbearing, care work and agricultural labor; future analyses will examine this further.

Table 4: Self-rated health today (%)

	Very good	Good	Moderate	Bad	Very bad
All Youth	22.5	42.2	26.8	7.6	0.9
Province					
South	24.3	43.7	24.3	7.1	0.6
West	20.7	53.6	19.5	5.7	0.5
North	25.0	39.9	28.5	6.0	0.5
East	20.6	33.8	33.6	10.5	1.5
Sex and age group					
Male 15-24	24.7	45.6	22.2	6.3	1.3
Female 15-24	24.1	42.7	24.8	8.0	0.4
Male 25-35	20.7	39.9	32.3	6.5	0.6
Female 25-35	18.3	38.5	32.0	10.1	1.1

Note: Percentages of all youth. Rows may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Rural youth diets are dominated by beans and starchy staples, with limited consumption of animal-source foods (Table 5). On the day before the survey, 85.3% ate beans, peas or lentils and 78.2% ate potatoes, cassava, sweet potatoes or similar starchy foods. Around half ate dark green leafy vegetables (53.4%) or other vegetables such as tomatoes and cabbage (53.1%). Animal-source foods, which are important sources of protein and micronutrients, were much less common: only 14.6% consumed milk, 9.1% fish, 6.4% eggs, 4.2% beef, goat, or sheep, and fewer than 1% chicken. Vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables were also uncommon (21.4% for carrots, pumpkin or orange sweet potato and 12.6% for mango, papaya or similar fruits).

Young women aged 25–35 eat animal-source foods least often, with the lowest consumption of milk (8.7%), eggs (3.5%), and red meat (1.7%), as well as fruit. Snacks and sweet foods are more common among younger youth: about one in six 15–24-year-olds ate cakes or sweet biscuits (16.6% of young men and 16.4% of young women), more than double the rate among women aged 25–35 (6.2%).

Table 5: Foods and drinks consumed the previous day (%)

	Male 15-24	Female 15-24	Male 25-35	Female 25-35	All Youth
Beans, soybeans, peas or lentils	86.3	86.8	85.2	81.9	85.3
Irish potato, cassava, sweet potato, yam, plantain	77.5	78.6	80.4	76.6	78.2
Green amaranth, sukuma wiki, cassava leaves, spinach	51.5	52.7	58.4	53.1	53.4
Tomatoes, cabbage, eggplant, green pepper	55.8	50.3	59.6	47.8	53.1
Kawunga, rice, chapati, bread or macaroni	56.0	51.9	50.0	40.6	50.5
Sosoma, sorghum or millet porridge, maize	40.5	46.4	39.0	50.6	44.2
Banana, avocado, guava, watermelon, pineapple	45.4	38.2	40.0	34.0	39.9
Groundnuts, sunflower or pumpkin seeds	21.9	22.6	28.2	23.8	23.6
Carrots, pumpkin or orange sweet potato	21.2	22.2	23.4	18.6	21.4
Mandaazi, samosa, chips, fried sweet potato	26.2	18.3	20.5	12.8	20.0
Milk, tea with milk or powdered milk	18.2	13.5	17.2	8.7	14.6
Cakes or sweet biscuits	16.6	16.4	9.5	6.2	13.1
Ripe mango, papaya, tamarillo or passion fruit	14.0	13.1	11.6	10.5	12.6
Bean, pumpkin, sweet potato or yam leaves	13.6	10.8	13.9	12.5	12.6
Fish, dried fish or sardines	9.2	7.5	10.5	10.1	9.1
Tea or coffee with sugar	10.9	8.1	12.2	4.5	8.9
Ikivuguto or yogurt	10.8	6.0	10.8	2.9	7.7
Bonbon, chocolates or ice cream	9.5	9.5	4.1	3.0	7.2
Juice	8.5	5.3	8.5	4.8	6.7
Eggs	7.7	5.5	9.2	3.5	6.4
Orange, mandarin or grapefruit	4.9	5.2	5.8	3.8	4.9
Beef, goat, offal or sheep	6.1	3.1	5.8	1.7	4.2
Fanta or energy drinks	2.9	3.3	8.1	2.2	3.8
Cucumber, beetroot, mushrooms or cauliflower	2.8	4.5	3.9	2.3	3.4
Pork or rabbit	2.6	1.2	3.4	0.8	2.0
Crisps	1.8	1.3	2.5	0.9	1.6
Chicken or duck	0.4	0.6	2.0	0.2	0.7
Macaroni for children	0.8	0.3	0.6	0.7	0.6
Food from a fried chicken or pizza outlet	0.1	0.2	1.2	-	0.3
Cheese	0.5	0.1	-	0.2	0.2
Sausages	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1

Note: Respondents could report more than one item. Ordered by consumption among all youth.

Overall, Tables 4 and 5 show that most rural youth perceive their health positively, while their reported diets are dominated by beans and starchy staples, with limited consumption of several nutrient-rich foods. Women aged 25–35 report both less favorable health and lower consumption of these foods. These findings highlight differences that aggregate health ratings may obscure and provide a basis for further investigation into dietary quality and health across gender and age groups.

8. CIVIC VOICE, PRIORITIES, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Savings and credit groups, including the traditional ikibina, are by far the most common form of organized participation (Table 6). Membership jumps from about a quarter of 15–24-year-olds to about 61% of 25–35-year-olds, likely because young adults take on household and financial responsibilities. Younger youth are more involved in student unions and youth groups (19.7% of young men and 13.3% of young women aged 15–24) and in sports groups, mostly young men (13.8% of men aged 15–24). Participation in formal governance structures is low: only 3.5% of youth took part in a government council or agency.

Table 6: Participation in organizations in the past 12 months (%)

	Male 15-24	Female 15-24	Male 25-35	Female 25-35	All youth
Savings or credit groups, including ikibina	25.6	23.9	62.3	60.3	38.8
Student union or youth interest group	19.7	13.3	9.6	3.9	12.6
Groups providing local services	4.9	2.7	16.3	14.2	8.2
Sports or recreational organization	13.8	4.0	7.6	1.0	7.0
Livelihood groups and cooperatives	3.3	2.5	11.3	7.8	5.4
Government councils or agencies	1.9	2.0	5.9	6.2	3.5
Community or cultural organization	2.5	1.9	5.6	4.1	3.2
Other groups	0.7	0.7	1.1	2.9	1.3

Note: Percentages of all youth. Respondents could report more than one type of organization.

Among youth who belong to an organizational group and participated in the last year (about 57% of all respondents), three-quarters (74.9%) attended at least one regular meeting, and 62.2% spoke at one (Table 7). Nearly all youth believe their voice matters (89.5%), but fewer than half (45.7%) feel action followed on the issues they raised. The gap between feeling heard and seeing results is widest for poorer youth and only 37.3% of those in the poorest wealth quintile saw action follow, compared with 53.5% of the richest.

Gender and age shape who takes part in community affairs. Young women aged 15–24 who belong to such groups are much less likely to attend meetings (51.5%) than any other group, and far less likely than men aged 25–35 (92.9%). Yet, younger women aged 15–24 are just as likely as others to feel their voice matters, which suggests that barriers to taking part, rather than lack of interest, may be holding them back. They are also the most likely of all groups to feel able to take part in the political process (69.9%).

Table 7: Voice in community affairs (%)

	Attended a meeting of own group	Spoke at a meeting of own group	Able to participate in the political process	Feels their voice matters	Feels action followed what they raised
All youth	74.9	62.2	61.8	89.5	45.7
Province					
South	64.3	58.0	72.0	89.7	48.8
West	80.2	57.4	61.0	91.6	41.4
North	77.4	69.2	52.5	91.6	44.0
East	76.1	63.2	59.2	86.4	47.3
Sex and age group					
Male 15-24	83.2	65.0	59.3	88.3	41.2
Female 15-24	51.5	47.0	69.9	89.1	41.8
Male 25-35	92.9	78.2	53.6	94.2	58.1
Female 25-35	78.0	56.0	60.3	87.9	47.6
Wealth quintile					
Q1 poorest	74.4	59.6	52.8	82.9	37.3
Q2	77.9	56.9	58.4	90.5	43.3
Q3	79.0	61.2	63.9	89.7	43.4
Q4	81.1	63.8	67.7	91.2	51.9
Q5 richest	66.2	67.1	66.6	93.9	53.5

Note: Attendance and speaking are among members of groups that hold regular meetings; the other columns are among all youth. "Feels action followed" refers to whether action was taken on issues the respondent raised.

Economic issues dominate young people's concerns (Table 8). The local economy is by far the top concern (48.7%), followed by the national economy (23.3%). Local conflict is the third most common concern (22.0%) and matters more to young women (about 26% in both female strata) than to young men (about 18%). In the Rwandan context, "local conflict" is likely to refer mainly to land and family disputes; the survey does not ask about the nature of the conflict. Young men are three to four times as likely as young women to mention international conflict (14–21% compared with 4–5%). Despite widespread climate worries, presented later, the environment is named as a top concern by only 7.1% of youths, which suggests it ranks below immediate livelihood concerns.

Table 8: Issues of greatest concern (%)

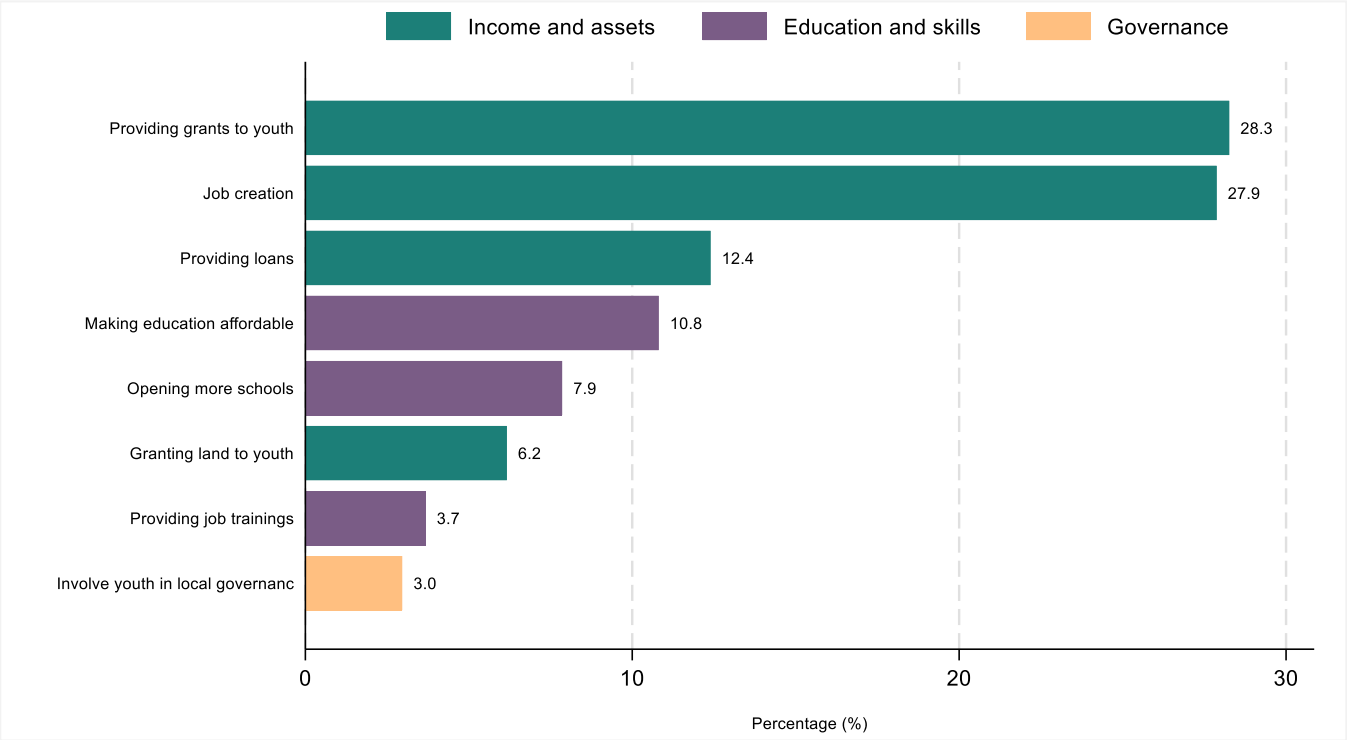
	Male 15-24	Female 15-24	Male 25-35	Female 25-35	All Youth
Local economy	48.7	41.7	57.4	51.6	48.7
National economy	21.3	21.0	32.0	22.1	23.3
Local conflict	18.2	25.7	17.4	25.8	22.0
International conflict	14.4	4.1	20.5	5.3	10.4
Local governance and corruption	10.1	7.7	10.9	7.7	9.0
Environment	5.7	7.4	9.1	7.1	7.1
Human rights	5.9	9.7	4.2	7.0	7.0
International economy	6.4	2.7	8.4	3.9	5.1
Local laws	3.3	5.4	4.0	4.4	4.3
Local politics	4.6	3.5	4.1	1.6	3.6
International aid	3.1	4.1	2.5	3.1	3.3
National conflict	4.2	2.9	2.5	2.9	3.2
National governance and corruption	2.0	1.0	2.4	1.0	1.6
International laws	1.4	1.5	1.4	0.5	1.2
National laws	1.6	0.6	0.8	1.2	1.1

Note: Respondents could name up to three issues.

Asked where government should spend more on youth, most want the money to go directly into jobs and incomes (Figure 17). Grants to youth (28.3%) and job creation (27.9%) top the list, followed by loans (12.4%) and land grants (6.2%). Together, income- and asset-related priorities account for about three-quarters of responses (74.8%).[5] Education-related priorities account for 22.4%, and involving youth in local governance is chosen by only 3.0%. Notably, job training is rarely chosen (3.7%), which suggests youth see lack of capital and opportunities, rather than lack of skills, as their main constraint. Overall, these preferences emphasize access to economic opportunities and resources over training alone. This is consistent with the reasons they give for not wanting to work in agriculture (Figure 10).

[5] Respondents were asked to rank their two highest priorities; only the first-ranked priority is shown.

Figure 17: Highest priority for government spending on youth



Note: Area named as the single highest priority for government spending on youth.

Half of rural youth (51.2%) are at least moderately worried that climate change threatens people and the planet, and one in four (24.5%) are very or extremely worried (Table 9). About one in five (19.9%) are not worried at all. Concern is higher among older youth, with 35.4% of young men aged 25–35 very or extremely worried compared with 19.3% of young women and men aged 15–24. Concern is somewhat lower in the Northern Province, where 19.2% are very or extremely worried. Fewer than four percent reported either not being aware or having no opinion of climate change at all and are excluded from the table.

More than half of youth (51.5%) have taken part in a climate-related activity in the past three years. Participation rises with age and, broadly, with wealth, from 44.0% among the poorest youth to 59.5% among the richest. Once again, young women aged 15–24 are the least involved (36.9%), compared with 71.1% of young men aged 25–35. Participation is highest in the Northern Province (58.9%), even though worry is lowest there. This may reflect government or NGO programs promoting climate-smart agriculture in that region.

Table 9: Worry about climate change and participation in climate-related activities (%)

	Not worried at all	A little worried	Moderately worried	Very worried	Extremely worried	Participation in a climate activity*
All Youth	19.9	29.0	26.7	19.9	4.6	51.5
Province						
South	20.1	29.0	27.0	20.3	3.6	48.4
West	15.7	31.3	26.5	20.7	5.7	53.7
North	20.9	32.0	27.9	16.1	3.1	58.9
East	22.3	25.2	25.9	21.2	5.4	47.9
Sex and age group						
Male 15-24	21.6	31.6	27.5	16.9	2.4	50.7
Female 15-24	25.6	29.5	25.6	16.0	3.3	36.9
Male 25-35	13.0	24.8	26.9	29.4	6.0	71.1
Female 25-35	15.1	28.1	27.0	21.7	8.2	57.5
Wealth quintile						
Q1 poorest	22.7	32.8	21.2	18.5	4.8	44.0
Q2	18.6	28.2	28.8	20.1	4.3	50.0
Q3	23.3	29.8	24.4	17.8	4.7	49.7
Q4	19.5	26.0	29.7	20.5	4.2	54.7
Q5 richest	15.0	28.1	29.6	22.7	4.7	59.5

*Note: Columns 2–6 show how worried respondents are that climate change threatens people and the planet. Youth who did not know or had never heard of climate change (<4%) are excluded from these columns. *Took part in a climate-related activity in the past three years.*

Overall, the results in Section 8 (Tables 6-9, Figure 17) show that rural youth's civic engagement centers on community organizations, particularly savings groups among older youth and student, youth and sports groups among younger youth, while formal governance participation remains limited. Although most youth believe their voice matters, fewer than half report action on issues raised, with poorer youth reporting less responsiveness and younger women participating less in meetings. Economic concerns and preferences for grants and job creation emphasize the importance of livelihood opportunities and desire for economic empowerment. Meanwhile, climate participation varies by gender, age, and wealth, and concern is somewhat lower in the Northern Province. Together, these findings highlight the importance of linking livelihood support with opportunities for meaningful participation and responsive decision-making, particularly for younger women and poorer youth.

9. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS BY AGE AND GENDER

The findings reveal shared challenges alongside distinct differences in rural youth's livelihoods, aspirations and wellbeing. The table below summarizes the characteristics of each gender and age group.

Table 10: Summary of results

Youth category	Summary of important results
Women aged 15–24	**Disadvantages are evident across several domains.** Agricultural day labor is relatively common (27.2%), and 44.8% work fewer than 15 hours per week. They spend more than double the time on unpaid domestic tasks than men of the same age. They report the lowest saving (30.6%), mobile money use (28.8%) and climate participation (36.9%). Meeting attendance among eligible group members is also lowest (51.5%), despite strong confidence that their voice matters.
Men aged 15–24	**Work activities are more varied, although casual work remains prominent.** Compared with women of the same age, they more commonly report non-farm casual labor, transport and construction. They spend more time in education than older men, but financial engagement remains limited: only 6.4% hold a bank account.
Women aged 25–35	**Agricultural work coincides with substantial domestic responsibilities and less favorable health indicators.** Most report household crop farming (64.4%) or agricultural day labor (26.1%). They spend 4.4 hours in unpaid care, report the least favorable self-rated health, and have the lowest consumption of several nutrient-rich foods. Financial and climate participation exceed those of younger women but remain below older men's levels.
Men aged 25–35	**Paid work and financial, organizational and climate participation are comparatively higher.** Household crop farming is the main activity for 68.3%, and they spend the most time in non-agricultural paid work (3.8 hours daily). They have the highest bank account ownership (40.5%), meeting attendance among eligible group members (92.9%) and climate participation (71.1%). Nevertheless, 72.7% report being unable to raise emergency funds or finding it very difficult.

Overall, younger women show disadvantages across participation and financial indicators, while older women face a combination of agricultural work, domestic responsibilities and poorer reported health. Older men generally report greater engagement, but substantial financial vulnerability persists across all groups.

10. CONCLUSION

This first look at the data reveals a generation of rural youth that are better educated than the adults who head their households and are highly ambitious, but whose working lives remain rooted in relatively low-return, part-time agricultural work, with little financial security. Three themes cut across the results.

1. First, **the gap between aspirations and reality is large**, in education, in the types of jobs youth hope for and in how they rate their own work.
2. Second, **economic constraints appear to be the main barriers to working in agriculture**: youth cite low profits, lack of land, and lack of capital far more than stigma, although one in five dislike manual work.
3. Third, **young women aged 15–24 lag somewhat on access and participation**, with the least access to internet-enabled phones, savings, mobile money, and credit and the lowest meeting attendance, while women aged 25–35 report the poorest health and eat animal-source foods least often.

Based on initial findings of the paper, a few targeted youth interventions could be considered:

Improving the returns to the work youth already do. Most young people work part-time on family farms or as day laborers, and few hold wage jobs. Their interest in agricultural trading suggests scope in improving the more commercial parts of agricultural value chains.

Access to land and start-up capital. These are among the main reasons youth give for avoiding agriculture, and grants, job creation, and loans are their top priorities for public spending on youth.

Inclusive financial and digital services. Most youth rely on informal finance, and few have an internet-enabled phone, especially young women aged 15–24 and youth in poorer households.

Building financial resilience. Most youth report substantial difficulty raising emergency funds, with women aged 15–24 reporting the greatest difficulty. Accessible emergency-saving arrangements and links to existing social protection could complement broader financial inclusion efforts.

Making participation count. Youth feel heard but often see no follow-through on the issues they raise. Work should be done to improve accountability on issues raised at meetings.

Support women who have unpaid care responsibilities. Women aged 15–24 and 25–35 spend substantially more time on unpaid domestic work than men. Flexible schedules, accessible locations and childcare where needed could help them participate in education, employment and community activities.

Forthcoming analyses will examine these patterns in greater depth, including the links between aspiration gaps, diet quality, and mental health; youth experiences across agricultural value chains; exposure to pesticides and climate shocks; and the relationship between employment and civic engagement. Further analyses will examine gender differences in time allocation and employment, and the relationship between financial inclusion and financial resilience across gender, age and wealth groups. The planned second survey wave will follow the same young people to see how their livelihoods, aspirations, and wellbeing change as they move into adulthood. This longitudinal evidence will help identify factors associated with these transitions and refine priorities for targeted support. International comparisons with Kenya and Nigeria will add continental context to the findings on livelihoods, participation, and wellbeing.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Mastercard Foundation for its generous financial support, which enabled both the implementation of this study and the subsequent data analysis. Additionally, we thank Esther Tumuhairwe for her invaluable editorial assistance in preparing this manuscript.

This publication has been prepared in the context of the Strengthening Food Systems to Promote Increased Value Chain Employment Opportunities for Youth partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. It is a five-year initiative running between 2022 and 2027 to gain insight into the latest trends and challenges in agrifood systems, and how addressing market inclusion and post-harvest losses can enable dignified and fulfilling livelihoods for young women and men. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Foundation, its staff, or its Board of Directors. This publication has not been independently peer reviewed. Any opinions expressed here belong to the author(s) and are not necessarily representative of or endorsed by IFPRI.

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The Rwanda Strategy Support Program (Rwanda SSP) is managed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Funding support for Rwanda SSP is provided by the MasterCard Foundation. This publication has been prepared as an output of Rwanda SSP. It has not been independently peer reviewed. Any opinions expressed here belong to the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of IFPRI or MCF.

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