1 Africa’s Rural Youth in the Global Context

Valerie Mueller, James Thurlow, Gracie Rosenbach, and Ian Masias

1.1 Introduction

Governments in Sub-Saharan Africa are under enormous pressure to create more and better jobs for the region’s young and rapidly growing population.¹ Africa is undergoing a ‘youth bulge’ in which the share of young people in the working age population is peaking due to past declines in mortality coupled with persistently high fertility (Canning, Raja, and Yazbeck 2015). This demographic transition has created a sense of urgency, and even anxiety, within national governments and the international development community (Resnick and Thurlow 2015). With the advent of the Sustainable Development Goals (UNDESA 2016), most policies and strategies in Africa today focus on promoting ‘inclusive growth’, which means that the population, especially the poor, should not only benefit from, but also participate in, the development process. This has made job creation a major policy objective, alongside the more traditional goals of accelerating economic growth and reducing poverty and hunger.

The successes of other developing countries, especially in Asia, provides African governments with what is sometimes considered a ‘blueprint’ for inclusive growth. Rapid economic growth in East Asia, for example, was accompanied by a process of ‘structural change’ in which the share of workers employed in agriculture declined as jobs were created in more productive and remunerative industrial sectors (McMillan, Rodrik, and Verduzco-Gallo 2014). This led to substantial poverty reduction, in large part because poor workers, especially farmers and their families, were able to take advantage of better job opportunities, often by migrating to cities and towns (Ravallion et al. 2007). Urbanization and structural transformation were supported by rising agricultural productivity (Ravallion 2009). This allowed workers to leave farming without raising food prices and urban wages, which might have jeopardized industrialization (Zhang, Yang, and Wang 2009).

¹ Unless stated otherwise, the terms ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’ and ‘Africa’ will be used interchangeably in the book.
Strong agricultural growth meant that rural poverty continued to fall, even as economies reoriented towards urban industry (Christiaensen, Demery, and Kuhl 2011). This stylized model of development, drawn from the East Asian experience, is characterized by rapid economic growth and urbanization, underpinned by agricultural and structural transformation.

Unfortunately, Sub-Saharan Africa does not appear to be emulating the East Asian model. Africa’s populations are urbanizing, and its economies are growing, but there has not been a major shift towards high-value manufacturing (Diao, Harttgen, and McMillan 2017). Structural change in Africa is instead driven by workers moving out of agriculture into informal services, particularly small-scale retail trade (de Vries, Timmer, and de Vries 2015; McMillan, Rodrik, and Sepúlveda 2017). This has limited the contribution of structural change to economic growth (Rodrik 2016). Urbanization without industrialization has also given rise to ‘consumption cities’ rather than engines of national economic growth (Gollin, Jedwab, and Vollrath 2016). Africa’s pathway is partly an outcome of today’s competitive global economy, which can make it more difficult for late-transforming economies to adopt an export-oriented industrialization strategy (McMillan, Rodrik, and Verduzco-Gallo 2014). It raises doubts about whether Africa can create enough jobs for its growing population (Canning, Raja, and Yazbeck 2015), especially the kinds of jobs that its young men and women aspire to (Sumberg et al. 2012).

Africa has also yet to undergo substantial rural transformation. Agricultural productivity in rural areas remains low, with few farmers using improved technologies (Christiaensen and Demery 2018). Although the agricultural sector is growing, a large part of this growth is driven by extending farmlands, rather than raising productivity (Benin 2016). Africa’s rural population continues to expand rapidly, despite urbanization, and this raises further concerns about whether higher rural population density will eventually undermine the traditional role of farming in providing poor Africans with a basic livelihood (Chamberlin, Headey, and Jayne 2014). Indeed, most of the world’s poor people today reside in rural Africa, and global projections indicate that this concentration will become more pronounced if current trends continue (Thurlow, Dorosh, and Davies 2019). Projections also indicate that, even with urbanization, about half of Africa’s new job seekers will need to find employment in rural areas, at least until 2030 (Filmer and Fox 2014; Thurlow 2015).

Ensuring that Africa’s rural youth find decent jobs therefore lies at the heart of the global development agenda. However, it does not necessarily follow that Africa has a ‘youth problem’. While there are concerns about Africa’s youth bulge, there are also reasons for optimism (Bloom, Canning, and Sevilla 2003). Young Africans may prove to be the ‘agents of change’ that the region sorely needs (Resnick and Thurlow 2015). African youth, for instance, are better educated than previous generations and so may be better positioned to adopt new technologies and establish new kinds of enterprises. This could help rural households raise and diversify their incomes by adopting modern technologies, operating nonfarm enterprises or migrating to cities and towns in search of work. Concerns about the
shortcomings of Africa’s development trajectory may also be overstated. While Africa is a late-transforming region, it is not clear whether the economic conditions and challenges it faces today differ significantly from those faced by other developing regions when they underwent their own demographic transitions. Africa’s challenge may not lie with its youth bulge per se, but rather in creating better jobs for its entire workforce, both young and old.

The opportunities and challenges of African youth receive greater attention today from researchers, governments, and development partners, but there are still gaps in our knowledge and often an overreliance on stylized facts and general frameworks. Recent reports from international organizations document Africa’s demographic transition and the need to create jobs for young men and women (see, for example, AfDB et al. 2012; AfDB 2016; Filmer and Fox 2014). However, while these reports are grounded in cross-country data and have raised the profile of youth, their regional perspective often focuses on general trends, constraints, and policy needs. Recent academic studies address youth employment issues within selected African countries and confirm the importance of understanding country-specific contexts (see, for example, Hino and Ranis 2014; Resnick and Thurlow 2015). However, these studies tend to consider youth employment in general, rather than the specific challenges facing youth in rural Africa. Yet it is here where the world’s working poor are concentrating and where the challenge of meeting the needs and aspirations of African youth is perhaps most daunting.

This book investigates the role of rural youth in Sub-Saharan Africa’s development. Are rural youth active participants in the national growth process? What barriers do they face in acquiring more productive jobs, and are there policies in place to help them to overcome those barriers? How are rural youth involved in agricultural technology adoption, rural income diversification, and urban migration, and how do these intersections affect rural transformation? These and other questions are addressed throughout the book, drawing on household surveys rather than cross-country data. Thematic chapters discuss youth dynamics across countries, including migration, political participation, and representation in national policies. Case study chapters analyse selected African countries, focusing on what household surveys tell us about the participation of youth in rural transformation and national development. Together, the authors present a holistic picture of the challenges and opportunities facing youth in rural Africa today and what this means for inclusive growth in the region. The remainder of this chapter revisits the cross-country data and considers whether there is something unique to Africa’s youth bulge today. It also highlights the diversity of African countries and the need for country-specific analysis rather than stylized facts.

1.2 Africa’s Youth Bulge in Historical Context

Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of Sub-Saharan Africa’s demographic transition is that it occurred far later than in other developing regions. Using
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historical and projected population estimates, we can identify when countries' youth bulges peaked (or will peak). This is defined as the year when the share of youth in the working age population is highest. Africa typically defines ‘youth’ as people aged 15–34 years, as opposed to the 15–24 years used elsewhere. This reflects the notion that, because of socioeconomic constraints, Africans are living in ‘waithood’ or a prolonged period before they can support themselves and their families (see Resnick and Thurlow 2015). Africa also uses a more expansive definition of the working age population than, say, the United Nations, which limits the workforce to people aged 15–64 years. For this chapter’s global comparison, we will adopt the more restrictive definition of youth (15–24 years), but later chapters will consider both international and African definitions. Figure 1.1 shows the estimated years when developing countries’ youth bulges peaked.

Sub-Saharan Africa’s youth bulge peaked in 2003, whereas other regions peaked sometime between 1976 and 1985. Despite being decades later, the magnitude of Africa’s youth bulge is similar to that of other regions. Regional averages, however, hide wide variation across countries. Within Africa, Mauritius’ youth bulge peaked in 1967, but it will only peak in 2027 for the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Figure 1.1. National and regional youth bulge peaks, 1960–2030

Notes: Sample includes the 109 countries and dependencies that were, as of 2018, recognized by the United Nations and fall within the low- and middle-income categories and regional groupings defined by the World Bank. Youth bulge is defined as the share of youth (15–25 years) in working age population (15–64 years). Regional averages are weighted by countries’ populations.

Source: Authors’ calculations using historical and projected population data from UNDESA (2018).

Developing countries include all low- and middle-income countries, as classified by the World Bank in 2018. Note that all statistics for Sub-Saharan Africa exclude South Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa’s peak occurs four years later when youth is defined as people aged 15–34 years.
Similarly, South Africa’s youth bulge peaked at 35.5 per cent, whereas Cape Verde peaked at 48.1 per cent. This variation underscores the importance of conducting country case studies and avoiding stylized facts about Africa’s youth challenge.

Africa’s delayed demographic transition means that it will soon become the main source of growth for the world’s workforce. Figure 1.2 reports annual changes in the global working age population, with projections until 2100. The largest annual expansion occurred in 2003, when the global working age population increased by 74 million people. This expansion is expected to decline until 2100, at which point the absolute size of the global workforce will have plateaued. However, from 2046 onwards, Africa will be the only region with a growing working age population—a trend that is expected to continue into the next century. The scale of Africa’s employment challenge is also evident from the figure. Africa’s potential workforce will increase by 21 million people per year during the 2020s, rising to 30 million people during the 2050s, after which it will begin to decline.

The absolute size of Africa’s young and growing workforce may be daunting from the perspective of other regions, especially developed countries. However, it is more informative to reflect on the situation that young Africans face within their own economies. Moreover, since we would like to understand if there is something unique about Africa’s youth challenge, other than its delayed occurrence, it is useful to compare the economic conditions in Africa today to those of other regions when their youth bulges peaked back in the 1970s and 1980s. Table 1.1 therefore

![Figure 1.2. Annual change in global working age population, 1950–2100](image)

*Notes: Sample includes the 203 countries and dependencies that were, as of 2018, recognized by the United Nations and fall within the low-and middle-income categories and regional groupings defined by the World Bank. Working age population includes all people aged 15–64 years.*

*Source: Authors’ calculations using historical and projected population data from UNDESA (2018).*
<table>
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<tr>
<td>(year when youth bulge peaked)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Population</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Population at peak (millions)</td>
<td>1,475</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural population share (%)</td>
<td>75.3</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>78.5</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual population growth after peak (%)</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban areas</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GDP per capita at peak ($)</strong></td>
<td>820</td>
<td>6,498</td>
<td>4,266</td>
<td>457</td>
<td>814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National GDP share at peak (%)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>38.9</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>58.7</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>38.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which manufacturing</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>47.9</td>
<td>35.2</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>40.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which trade services</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual GDP per capita growth after peak (%)</strong></td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>−2.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>−2.8</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which manufacturing</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>−1.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of which trade services</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labour force participation rate after 15 years (%)</strong></td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>61.5</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth (15–24 years old)</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>49.2</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate after 15 years (%)</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth (15–24 years old)</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National employment share after 15 years (%)</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>62.4</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>National employment share after 15 years (%)</strong></td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed workers</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>76.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employers</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family workers</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own-account workers</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>60.4</td>
<td>49.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage and salaried workers</td>
<td>42.0</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In some respects, Africa today faces more challenging conditions than other regions did a few decades ago. However, there are also areas where Africa’s conditions or trends are no worse, and are sometimes better, than they were elsewhere. For example, Africa is still at an early stage of economic development, but so too were East Asia and South Asia at the time of their youth bulges. This is measured by gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, which was $814 in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2003, but was only $457 in South Asia in 1978 (measured in 2010 prices). In contrast, the Middle East and North Africa had much higher GDP per capita during its demographic transition, but this declined over the next 15 years (~2.2 per cent per year), whereas Africa’s has grown relatively fast (3.4 per cent per year). Overall, Africa’s economic conditions in 2003 appear to be most like those of East Asia in 1985, both in terms of GDP per capita and the sectoral structure of their regional economies. However, as discussed earlier, East Asia then went on to enjoy a period of far more rapid growth and structural change than Africa has in recent years.

One of Africa’s major challenges is its high population growth rate. This means that, despite very rapid urban population growth, Africa’s rural population is still growing much faster than it was in East Asia. From a demographic perspective, Africa has far more in common with South Asia. Both regions had high rural population shares and rapid rural population growth during their demographic

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Primary school enrolment ratio at peak (gross)</th>
<th>115.9</th>
<th>107.2</th>
<th>85.5</th>
<th>76.9</th>
<th>83.9</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total change over 15 years</td>
<td>−8.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school enrolment ratio at peak (gross)</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>43.2</td>
<td>39.8</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total change over 15 years</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: GDP data is from UNSD and includes the 109 countries and dependencies that were, as of 2018, recognized by the United Nations and fall within the World Bank’s low- and middle-income categories and regional groupings. All other data are regional estimates from the World Bank. EAP is East Asia and Pacific; LAC is Latin American and Caribbean; MENA is Middle East and North Africa; SA is South Asia; and SSA is Sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa). High-income countries are excluded. Growth rates reflect changes over 15 years after the year in which a region’s youth bulge peaked. Official urban definitions are used. GDP is measured in constant 2010 US dollars unadjusted for purchasing power parity. Gross enrolment ratios are actual enrolment divided by the population with the correct age for that level of schooling (i.e. higher ratios may indicate late-enrolment or repeated grades).

transitions. Given their similar stages of development, it is not surprising then than a large share of Africa and South Asia’s workers continued to be self-employed in rural agriculture 15 years after their youth bulges peaked. It is also in these two regions where most of the world’s poor population are concentrated today (Thurlow, Dorosh, and Davies 2019). This underscores the importance of creating jobs and income opportunities in rural Africa.

The table also compares education levels across regions. Again, we find that Africa has more in common with South Asia. Both regions had low primary and secondary school enrolment at the peak of their youth bulges, and even though enrolment increased over the next 15 years, much of these gains were achieved by closing primary school enrolment gaps. In contrast, East Asia and Latin America started with much higher school enrolment and were far more successful in closing secondary school enrolment gaps. The quality of education in Africa vis-à-vis other regions three decades ago is difficult to assess. Nevertheless, Africa has moved closer towards achieving universal primary schooling, and this highlights the better educational attainment of young Africans compared to adults. Africa also has much higher labour force participation. This is because more women are part of Africa’s workforce today than they were in other regions, except for East Asia. Of course, high participation rates mean that more jobs will be needed as Africa’s population grows. However, it also means that a larger share of the African population is participating in, and hopefully benefiting from, the region’s growth process.

Finally, we compare the pace of economic growth and structural change during countries’ demographic transitions. As mentioned earlier, successful economic development is usually accompanied by a falling share of workers in agriculture, and a shift in employment towards more productive sectors, leading to faster economic growth. Figure 1.3 uses employment data collected from national population censuses and household and labour force surveys around the period when countries’ youth bulges peaked. Unfortunately, not all countries have such data, especially those whose youth bulges occurred during the 1960s and 1970s when surveys were conducted less frequently or not at all. It is also not possible to estimate comparable changes in employment patterns for countries that have only recently (or not yet) undergone their peak youth bulge. As a result, the figure only includes information for about half of all developing countries, and so regional averages are not reported.

Despite limited country coverage, it is still possible to discern regional patterns from the figure. East Asian countries, for example, generally experienced strong economic growth (horizontal axis) as well as a rapid decline in agricultural employment shares (vertical axis) (see China and Indonesia). In contrast, Latin American countries experienced more modest, or even negative, economic growth, and a more gradual exit from agricultural employment (see Mexico). Again, there
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... especially wide variation across African countries. A few fast-transforming economies experienced rapid growth and structural change similar to East Asia (see Botswana and Rwanda). However, economic growth in most African countries is slow, and workers are only gradually leaving agriculture. This is consistent with projections suggesting that most of the jobs created in rural Africa until 2030 will be in agriculture (Filmer and Fox 2014; Thurlow 2015).

In summary, the lateness and absolute size of Africa’s demographic transition is unique. The region will soon become the main driver of growth in the global workforce, and African economies will need to create large numbers of jobs just to keep pace with rapid population growth. Fortunately, African economies are growing, but, except for a few countries, they are not matching East Asia’s high rates of economic growth and structural change. Moreover, Africa’s rural population continues to expand, despite rapid urbanization. Together, these trends indicate that creating rural employment, including in agriculture, will be crucial in ensuring that African economies can absorb enough job seekers into the workforce and avoid rising unemployment. At the same time, Africa will need to...
provide better jobs for its adult workforce, who also aspire to improved living standards and working conditions. In that regard, Africa does not necessarily face a youth challenge, but rather the broader challenge of promoting inclusive growth and decent employment in today's competitive global economy.

1.3 Framing Agricultural and Rural Transformation

This book focuses on the participation of rural youth in national development. Agricultural and rural transformation are therefore important concepts that help structure the research questions and analysis. As discussed earlier, economic development is strongly associated with structural change, which occurs when workers leave agriculture for more productive jobs in other sectors (Johnston and Kilby 1975; Chenery and Syrquin 1975). However, structural change is not the only driver of economic growth. Economy-wide labour productivity also rises when workers within a sector become more productive without needing to move to other sectors of employment. Agricultural transformation refers to a process in which farm productivity rises, leading to growth in the broader rural economy. Timmer (1988) provides a framework with four stages that are summarized in Figure 1.4.

During the first stage (subsistence agriculture), most rural inhabitants are farmers engaged in food production for their own consumption and use rudimentary technologies and farming practices. The focus for policy at this stage is raising farm productivity, such as through greater use of improved seeds, chemical fertilizers, and soil and water management. Land and labour resources at this stage are likely to be underemployed and it may not matter if technological improvements are labour- or land-saving. Since youth in Africa are better educated than adults, many expect that they are more likely to adopt improved farm technologies (see Sheahan and Barret 2017). The country chapters in this book assess the contribution of youth to ongoing changes in the farming sector.

During the second stage, there is an expansion of farm-nonfarm linkages, as farm productivity rises and farmers begin to produce marketable surpluses. This leads to growth in goods that are produced in rural areas and primarily sold to other rural households. The rise of rural markets creates nonfarm jobs linked to agriculture, such as traders and transporters. Nonfarm workers may live in rural market centres, where agriculture indirectly supports an even wider range of

Figure 1.4. Timmer’s four stages of agricultural transformation

Source: Authors’ interpretation of Timmer (1988).
occupations. New job opportunities encourage farmers to diversify incomes or exit agriculture entirely. However, at this stage of agricultural transformation, farming remains the primary driver of national growth and job creation. Youth are again expected to play a key role during this stage. Better-educated people are more likely to run rural nonfarm businesses (Naglar and Naude 2017), and emerging land constraints may mean that it is youth who are more likely to seek off-farm work (Bezu and Holden 2014). The country chapters examine the links between youth, education, and rural nonfarm employment.

The third stage of agricultural transformation involves a strengthening of rural-urban linkages. Nonagricultural sectors, particularly in cities and towns, become drivers of national development. Agriculture increasingly supplies urban consumers and rural inhabitants migrate in search of urban job opportunities. Migrant workers may remit incomes back to their rural families or occasionally return to rural areas to alleviate seasonal labour shortages. Outmigration may require labour-saving technological improvements in agriculture to prevent food prices and urban wages from rising and stalling structural change. At this stage, urban nonagricultural growth drives national development and pulls agriculture behind it. Chapter 2 in this book specifically addresses the role of youth in migration decisions, and the various country chapters examine the links between youth and urbanization.

The final stage is the transition to modernized agriculture. This is most relevant for today’s developed countries, where high rural-urban inequality and concerns about national food security may prompt governments to subsidize agriculture and protect ‘rural lifestyles’. Few, if any, African countries, or even areas within these countries, have reached this late stage of agricultural transformation.

Although Timmer’s framework was developed three decades ago and is grounded in the Asian experience, it still provides a useful device for analysing the pace and participation of youth in Africa’s agricultural and rural economies. It underpins the view that, despite global developments since the 1980s, agricultural transformation is still essential for economic development in Africa (Diao, Hazell, and Thurlow 2010; Timmer and Akkus 2008). Not only will Africa’s youth need to find jobs in agriculture and rural areas, but they could help drive the transformation process. Chapters 3 and 4 in this book examine whether the needs and potential of youth are reflected in national policies, and whether youth are more politically active and demanding of their governments.

### 1.4 Evidence of Agricultural Transformation in Africa

Most African countries today, or at least most rural populations within African countries, are in the second or third stage of Timmer’s transformation framework. Farmers still grow some of the food they consume, but most now sell at
least some of their output in local markets (Carletto, Corral, and Guelfi 2017). This marketable surplus is the result of rising farm production levels over the last 15 years. Figure 1.5 reports the growth in agricultural land and labour productivity that occurred after Africa’s youth bulge peaked in 2003. The figure shows that both land and labour productivity increased for most African countries, including the region as a whole. However, land productivity growth exceeded labour productivity growth in almost all countries, implying that agricultural labour grew faster than agricultural land. This reflects growing concerns about rising rural population densities and the ability of available lands to support the livelihoods of a rapidly growing rural workforce.

The case study chapters in this book examine the contribution of youth to agricultural transformation in five countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, and Tanzania. These countries were selected to capture the variation in trends observed across Africa, although data availability was also a consideration. As indicated in the figure, Ethiopian agriculture is transforming rapidly, whereas Malawian and Senegalese agriculture are not. Ghana and Tanzania are close to the African average. The case studies allow us to examine the role of youth in

![Figure 1.5](image)

**Figure 1.5.** Agricultural productivity growth in sub-Saharan Africa, 2003–2016
*Notes: Sample includes 42 Sub-Saharan African countries (excluded are Eritrea, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, and Sudan). GDP is measured in constant 2010 US dollars unadjusted for purchasing power parity. Agricultural land includes lands used crop cultivation and animal husbandry.*

*Source: Authors’ calculations using data from ILO (2018), FAO (2018), and UNSD (2018).*
raising farm productivity—the first stage in Timmer’s framework—taking account of how this may vary across African countries.

Although Africa’s rural economy is dominated by agriculture, a large share of rural incomes is earned in the rural nonfarm economy (Carletto, Corral, and Guelfi 2017). This is important for the second stage of Timmer’s framework, when farm-nonfarm linkages expand. Household surveys suggest that more than a third of rural incomes in Africa are generated through nonfarm employment (Haggblade, Hazell, and Reardon 2007), and that most rural households engage in some form of nonfarm activity (Davis, Di Giuseppe, and Zezza 2017). As mentioned earlier, most of the structural change in Africa in recent years was driven by workers leaving agriculture to work in informal services. Many of these services are agriculture-related, such as the trading and transport of food and agricultural products. While these are not the kinds of high productivity industrial jobs that dominated the East Asian experience, their growth has helped reduce poverty in many parts of Africa (Dorosh and Thurlow 2016).

Figure 1.6 reports changes in urban population shares and nonagricultural employment shares since 2003. For Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, the decline in the rural population was matched by a decline in agricultural employment (i.e. the

Figure 1.6. Urban population and nonfarm employment shares in sub-Saharan Africa, 2003–2016

Notes: Sample includes 44 Sub-Saharan African countries (excluded are Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, and Sudan). Official definitions of urban areas are used.

Source: Authors’ calculations using data from ILO (2018) and UNDESA (2018).
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The regional average lies close to the diagonal line in the figure). This suggests that there was no significant change in the share of rural nonfarm employment in the region. Again, we find that regional averages hide wide variation across countries—differences that are captured in our choice of country case studies. The exit from agriculture in Ethiopia, for example, greatly exceeds the pace of urbanization, suggesting that many of the workers that left farming found employment in the rural nonfarm economy. The opposite is true for Senegal, where agricultural employment has risen, despite urbanization. This suggests that some of Senegal’s rural nonfarm workers are returning to agriculture. Tanzania and Ghana are again closer to the African average, and there was little agricultural transformation taking place in Malawi. Detailed household surveys allow the country chapters to investigate whether it is youth or adults, or young men or women, who are more actively engaged in the rural nonfarm economy.

The third stage of Timmer’s framework is characterized by a strengthening of rural-urban linkages. There is some evidence that Africa’s urban consumers are increasingly driving demand for agricultural products (Tshirley et al. 2015). As mentioned earlier, rapid urbanization is a defining feature of African development. Moreover, expanding urban populations and migration within rural areas has meant that many of Africa’s rural inhabitants today reside in peri-urban areas adjacent to major urban agglomerations (FAO 2017). It is in peri-urban areas where rural-urban linkages are expected to be strongest and where agricultural transformation should be most advanced (Dorosh and Thurlow 2014).

Cross-country data suggests that young African men may be more likely to migrate than either adults or young women. Figure 1.7 estimates the relative speed of urbanization for youth and adults (horizontal axis) and for young men and women (vertical axis). This is measured by estimating the gap between average annual urban and rural population growth rates for each population subgroup. A large positive number means that the subgroup’s urban population is growing much faster than its rural population. The figure reports differences in the speed of urbanization between two population subgroups. For example, the horizontal axis focuses on the differences between youth and adults. The relative speed of urbanization is generally positive, implying that African youth are concentrating in urban areas faster than African adults. This is consistent with findings in other studies (see De Brauw, Mueller, and Lee 2014; Holden and Otsuka 2014), but it hides how most urban migration is to smaller towns, rather than bigger cities (Mueller et al. 2019). The tendency for youth to urbanize faster than adults is most pronounced in Ghana and Malawi, but it is negligible in the other three case study countries. Similarly, there is some evidence that young men are urbanizing faster than young women. Our case studies capture variation across African countries. This variation may reflect differences in education or other factors that influence the decision to migrate. A thematic chapter in this book analyses youth migration decisions using detailed household surveys rather than country-level data.
In summary, African agriculture is transforming, albeit slowly and with some cause for concern. Agricultural land and labour productivity are growing, but so too are rural population densities. This suggests that agriculture’s contribution to future job creation may be constrained as lands become scarce. Africa’s rural nonfarm economy is also expanding, although in many countries it is not keeping pace with urbanization. On average, workers are leaving agriculture and moving to urban areas faster than they are finding work in the rural nonfarm economy. As urban centres become congested, more of the population are likely to reside in peri-urban (or peri-rural) areas where rural-urban linkages are often strongest (Thurlow, Dorosh, and Davies 2018). Recent estimates suggest that one third of rural Africans already live within one-hour travel time of cities with populations of 50,000 people or more (SOFA 2017). The nonfarm economy surrounding cities and towns will therefore play an important role in creating work for rural job seekers, including youth. This means that, while agricultural transformation is proceeding in Africa, it is not only uneven across countries, but also across areas within countries. This underscores the need for detailed country case studies and cautions against an overreliance on country-level data.

Figure 1.7. Speed of urbanization for youth and adults in sub-Saharan Africa, 2003–2015

*Note:* Sample includes 44 Sub-Saharan African countries (excluded are Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, and Sudan). Speed of urbanization is the difference between average annual urban and rural population growth rates, i.e., a number greater than one implies that the urban population share is rising over time. Figure compares the speed of urbanization for different population groups, i.e., a number greater than one means that the first group is urbanizing faster (or deurbanizing slower) than the second group.

*Source:* Authors’ calculations using historical population data from ILO (2018).
Table 1.2. Country case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population, 2016 (millions)</td>
<td>1,033</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural share (%)</td>
<td>61.0</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>53.7</td>
<td>67.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population growth, 2006–16 (%)</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural areas</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban areas</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita, 2016 ($)</td>
<td>1,173</td>
<td>426</td>
<td>1,617</td>
<td>448</td>
<td>962</td>
<td>792</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture share (%)</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita growth, 2006–16 (%)</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour force participation, 2016 (%)</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth (15–24)</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>72.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate, 2016 (%)</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth (15–24)</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agricultural employment, 2016 (%)</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>53.6</td>
<td>67.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual change, 2006–16 (%-point)</td>
<td>–0.53</td>
<td>–1.10</td>
<td>–0.38</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>–0.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: GDP is measured in constant 2010 US dollars unadjusted for purchasing power parity.

Source: Authors’ calculations using GDP data from UNSD (2018) and other data from the World Bank (2018).
Our country case studies reflect some of the important variations observed across Sub-Saharan Africa. Table 1.2 provides current statistics for the five countries and the region. By design, our cases are either low- or lower-middle-income countries, often with a greater dependence on agriculture and with a larger share of the population in rural areas. Youth unemployment is lower amongst our case study countries than in Africa as a whole, which partly reflects our focus on agrarian economies, which have lower unemployment rates than more mining-based economies like Nigeria or South Africa. Ghana and Ethiopia are two of Africa’s fastest transforming countries, but Ghana is at a later stage of development (i.e. GDP per capita is higher and the population is more urbanized). Ghana is also one of the earliest African countries to experience a demographic transition (i.e. its youth bulge peaked in 1987), whereas Ethiopia is one of the last countries. Malawi is at a similar stage of development as Ethiopia, although Malawi, like Senegal, is not experiencing rapid economic growth and the share of employment in agriculture is not falling. Labour force participation in Senegal is one of the lowest in Sub-Saharan Africa, largely because women are less likely to work and because international migration is particularly important for Senegal. Finally, Tanzania provides an intermediate case. The country is transforming, and workers are leaving agriculture, often for urban areas, but the economy, particularly agriculture, is growing much slower than in Ethiopia or Ghana. Our five case studies therefore reflect the diversity of African countries and allow us to gain a more nuanced understanding of youth in rural areas.

1.5 Organization of the Book

There is a large body of research on agricultural transformation and structural change in Africa (see, for example, Diao et al. 2007; McMillan, Rodrik, and Sepúlveda 2016). Few studies, however, examine employment through a *youth lens* and with a focus on *rural* Africa. This book provides new empirical evidence on the participation of rural youth in national development processes. Cross-country evidence is informative, but cannot substitute for detailed case studies that use micro-level data to reveal countries’ unique characteristics and challenges. It is only through the collection of robust country-specific evidence that we can move beyond stylized facts and determine to what extent African youth should be a source of optimism or a cause for concern.

The book is separated into two parts. Part I includes three thematic chapters that cover important under-researched areas for youth employment. Rising population densities in rural areas has raised concerns about the future role agriculture in job creation and the prospect of accelerated urbanization. Chapter 2 uses new household survey data to investigate youth migration patterns in four African countries, paying particular attention to the effect of land scarcity on young
people’s decision to migrate to urban centres. Despite urbanization, rural job creation is a major policy goal for many African governments. However, it is unclear whether national polices adequately reflect and address the constraints facing young job seekers in agriculture and rural areas. Chapter 3 reviews national policies in 13 African countries, and uses a novel approach to classify policies according to the employment constraints they address. One reason for the attention given to job creation is the belief that unemployed youth are a potential source of political instability and unrest. Chapter 4 examines whether African youth are more politically engaged than their older counterparts, and to what extent their demands for political action are motivated by concerns about jobs and unemployment.

Part II includes five country case study chapters that examine youth employment dynamics in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, and Tanzania. The chapters address a common set of questions about the roles that youth are playing at different stages of agricultural and rural transformation. How are youth driving the changes that are taking place within the agricultural sector? Are youth more involved in off-farm employment and rural income diversification? And are youth more spatially and occupationally mobile than previous generations? The chapters also address questions that are specific to their respective countries. Chapter 5 focuses on Ethiopia’s land constraints and asks if this is driving youth off the farm and into the rural nonfarm economy. Chapter 6 addresses Malawi’s weak agricultural transformation, and asks if rural households, particularly youth, are engaging in multiple forms of employment that may not be adequately reflected in national data. Chapter 7 reflects Ghana’s later stage of development by focusing on the link between urban development and the livelihoods available to rural youth living close to cities or towns. Chapter 8 combine household and firm level analysis for Tanzania to examine what determines the success of rural nonfarm enterprises, including the role of young entrepreneurs. Finally, Chapter 9 on Senegal pays particular attention to international migration and whether young migrants are contributing to rural transformation in their home country. Chapter 10 concludes by summarizing the major findings and discusses their implications for youth employment and inclusive growth in rural Africa.

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