Title: The Intersection of youth access to land, migration and employment opportunities: Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa

Agricultural productivity growth is widely considered to be at the foundation of economic transformation and improved livelihoods for young rural Africans. Increasing land scarcity, however, may be creating entry barriers into farming to an extent not previously experienced, potentially locking a large number of new farmers out of the agricultural growth process. This topic has received relatively little attention to date. Using nationally representative and multi-year data from multiple African countries, we document evolving dynamics in land distribution and ownership patterns, the effect of land access on youth livelihood choices, and the development of land markets in the region. Six key findings are highlighted: First, a progressively smaller proportion of youth are inheriting land due to land scarcity. Second, rural youth who do inherit land are now waiting longer to gain access to it because of rising life expectancies. Third, the share of individual labor time devoted to farming is declining over time across age categories and gender, in some areas quite rapidly, and the variations in the pace of labor exit from farming are significantly related to lagged agricultural productivity growth. Nonetheless, farming still accounts for significant shares of individuals’ labor time, particularly between the ages of 15 to 19 years. Fourth, as young people progress into their 20s and 30s, the share of their work time in farming declines in favor of off-farm employment opportunities. Fifth, access to land is indeed shaping employment and migration decisions of rural youth; the amount and quality of parents’ farmland influences youth decisions to remain in farming beyond their 20s. Other factors such as education, remoteness, age of household head, and number of siblings also significantly influenced youth livelihood choices. Sixth, younger heads are generally more likely to rent in land than older heads, particularly in countries with relatively active rental markets. Overall, our analysis suggests policy actions promoting secured access to land will significantly shape young people’s engagement in farming. To be successful, such policies need to anticipate the impacts of land distribution and ownership trends and develop effective responses that will foster inclusive, competitive, and productive agricultural growth.