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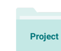

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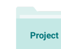

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Original Article

Perspectives on Desirable Work: Findings from a Q Study with Students and Parents in Rural Ghana

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Abstract The perspectives of young people and parents are important to policy that seeks to address youth unemployment in Africa. A systematic understanding of these should help to avoid implementation failure caused by incompatible assumptions or world views, and increase the likelihood that policies promoted by officials will be effective. We present results of a series of Q Methodology studies with senior high school students and parents at two rural locations in Ghana. At both sites, the dominant perspective among students and parents was that professional jobs were most desirable and that low-skill or manual jobs were least desirable. There was little indication that respondents saw "being your own boss" as making a job desirable. Students showed a strong social ethos: jobs were desirable if they helped people, made the world a better place or built the nation. These results have important implications for strategies that seek to address youth unemployment primarily by promoting entrepreneurship.

Les points de vue des jeunes et des parents sont importants pour informer les politiques qui cherchent à résoudre le problème du chômage chez les jeunes en Afrique. Une compréhension systématique de ceux-ci devrait aider à éviter l'échec dans la mise en œuvre de politiques dû à des présuppositions ou des visions du monde incompatibles entre jeunes et législateurs, et devrait augmenter la probabilité que les politiques promues par ces-derniers soient efficaces. Nous présentons les résultats d'une série d'études qui ont utilisé la méthode Q, et qui ont été faites auprès d'étudiants du secondaire et de parents dans deux sites ruraux au Ghana. Dans les deux sites, le point de vue dominant parmi les répondants était que les métiers professionnels étaient les plus désirables, alors que les métiers manuels ou ceux nécessitants de faibles niveaux de compétences étaient les moins désirables. Peu de signes ont démontré que le fait de pouvoir travailler à son propre compte rendait un emploi plus désirable. Les étudiants ont fait preuve d'un esprit social développé : les emplois étaient désirables s'ils aidaient les gens, s'ils rendaient le monde meilleur, ou s'ils contribuaient au développement de la nation. Ces résultats ont une incidence importante sur les stratégies qui cherchent à résoudre le problème du chômage chez les jeunes surtout par l'entremise de la promotion de l'entreprenariat.

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Keywords: youth; unemployment; Africa; entrepreneurship; aspirations

Introduction

Investment in the formal education of the next generation, one form of human capital development, has long been a *sine qua non* of development (The World Bank, 2006). Much research in developing countries has focused on the nature of the relationship between education, income and social mobility (Hurd and Johnson, 1967; Psacharopoulos, 1994;

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Bennell, 1996; Foltz and Gajigo, 2012; Rolleston, 2011). However, at its best, education does much more than provide skills or increase immediate employability and potential income: more profoundly, it changes who people are, who they want to become, what they want from life, and how they engage with the world. The role formal education plays in raising the aspirations of young people has been widely recognised in both developed and developing economies (Leavy and Smith, 2010; Bajema *et al*, 2002; Quaglia and Cobb, 1996).

In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), despite important gains made in relation to Millennium Development Goal 2 (Achieve Universal Primary Education) (United Nations, 2015), there is mounting concern among politicians, policy actors, development professionals and young people about the lack of employment opportunities (e.g. FAO CTA IFAD, 2014; Filmer *et al*, 2014; MasterCard Foundation, 2015). The depth of this concern is indicated by the words of Ghana's President, John Mahama:

> I therefore always say that youth unemployment is a national security issue. Indeed it is a major national security challenge and so every country should put youth unemployment on its national security agenda. Because if plans are not rolled out to ensure that you engage the youth then you can have a problem in terms of destabilisation and social deviancy.[1]

The paradox is that while many African economies have experienced strong economic growth over the last two decades (AfDB, 2014), the creation of new formal sector jobs has not matched the number of new entrants to the labour market. As a result of this phenomenon of "jobless growth" (Bhalotra, 1998), many young people find themselves with precarious informal sector jobs (Baah-Boateng, 2013; Meagher, 2015) (for a much more positive view, see Pinkovskiy and Sala-i-Martin, 2014). There is a growing literature on the various ways that young people negotiate these precarious employment situations (Honwana, 2012; Langevang, 2008; Langevang and Gough, 2009).

Policy makers and development officials have responded to the problem of youth unemployment in a variety of ways, of which the Joint Youth Employment Initiative for Africa, launched in 2011 by the African Development Bank, the African Union, ILO and UNECA, is but one example. Many of these initiatives are underpinned by a strong turn to entrepreneurship (Chigunta *et al*, 2005; Owualah and Obokoh, 2008; Oviawe, 2010). There has also been significant recent research interest in young people and entrepreneurship in the developing world (e.g. Langevang *et al*, 2012; Langevang and Gough, 2012; Jeffrey and Dyson, 2013; Thieme, 2013; Kew, 2015).

In fact, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship training have been promoted among young people in Africa for some years (Nelson and Johnson, 1997; Panayiotopoulos and Gerry, 1997; Nafukho, 1998). Often described in terms of creating an entrepreneurial culture (Hayton and Cacciotti, 2013) or unlocking latent entrepreneurial energies, the turn to entrepreneurship reflects in part the withdrawal of the state and the individualisation of responsibility (e.g. for employment) that accompanied the neoliberal project (DeJaeghere and Baxter, 2014). The influential Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) defines entrepreneurship as "Any attempt at new business or new venture creation, such as self-employment, a new business organization, or the expansion of an existing business, by an individual, a team of individuals, or an established business" (Reynolds *et al*, 1999; Singer *et al*, 2015); similarly, Langevang *et al* (2015) consider an entrepreneur to be "coincident with owning and managing a business including any self-employment or trade activity" (p. 452). It is important to note that these definitions do not emphasise some of the key characteristics traditionally associated with entrepreneurial activity including innovation and significant risk taking (Knight, 1921; Schumpeter, 1983), although any new venture will certainly involve some risk. Hamilton and

Hamilton (2012) also caution that "calling a street vendor or a babysitter an entrepreneur drains meaning from the term" (p. 67). In the light of this important observation, in this study, we use a strong desire to "be your own boss" as a proxy for an entrepreneurial orientation. In SSA, the turn to entrepreneurship has been combined with renewed interest in the agricultural sector and agricultural value chains as sources of jobs and employment for young people (FAO CTA IFAD, 2014; USAID, 2012; World Bank, 2006; Filmer and Fox, 2014).

In Ghana, education was already an established policy priority at the time of independence (Little, 2010), with both the state and individual families investing a substantial proportion of the revenue generated by the cocoa sector in education. Ghana's educational system is organised in primary schools (in principle, ages 6–11), junior high schools (in principle, ages 12–14) and senior high schools (in principle, ages 15–17). Between 2000 and 2014, the net enrolment rate in primary school increased from 64.9 to 88.9 per cent[2], although Osei-Assibey and Kwasi Grey (2013) report that in 2010 net enrolment in Greater Accra was 24.4 per cent points higher than in the more rural and poorer Northern Region. In relation to its coastal neighbours, net enrolment in Ghana is higher than in Nigeria (63.9) and Côte d'Ivoire (76.8) but lower than that in Benin and Togo (94.9 and 97.5, respectively). GDP growth has also been strong, averaging 6.8 per cent between 2000 and 2014, and reaching 14 per cent in 2011.[3] Of the neighbouring coastal countries in West Africa, only Nigeria had higher GDP growth over this period (8.4 per cent).

Despite these impressive records in education and economic growth, the dire employment situation faced by young people figures prominently in both political and public debate. In 2010, the official unemployment rate of young people aged 15–24 year was estimated to average 12.9 per cent, ranging from 18.1 per cent in Greater Accra to 5.8 per cent in Northern Region (Osei-Assibey and Kwasi Grey, 2013). However, as in many African countries, official unemployment figures are thought to grossly underestimate the magnitude of the problem as they do not capture the widespread phenomenon of underemployment (Hino and Ranis, 2013; Gough *et al,* 2013).[4] According to the 2010 National Youth Policy, "The problem of youth unemployment and underemployment is a major developmental challenge. Employment creation remains a major priority in the country's development agenda and it is the goal of Government to provide the youth with opportunities for employment and labour market information" (Ministry of Youth and Sports, 2010, p. 11). The turn to entrepreneurship is also evident in Ghana: in August 2014 the government established the Youth Entrepreneurship Support (YES) Fund (Ghana Cedi 10 million; US$ 3 million) designed to "help Ghana's young and innovative population turn great ideas into thriving business enterprises".[5] The future for rural young people as imagined by many policy makers and development professions is entrepreneurial, self-employed and agricultural.

It is in this context that the main aim of the research reported in this paper was to explore the views of students in rural senior high schools in Ghana, and parents, on jobs and work. It would have been possible to frame the research using the notion of aspirations, which underpins much research and policy discourse on youth. Leavy and Smith (2010) suggest that aspirations is used in two main ways in the literature: either referring to hopes and dreams, or to expectations, which are often seen to embody a greater sense of reality. The youth aspirations literature, much of which is framed in terms of educational aspirations (see e.g. Kao and Tienda, 1998), revolves around questions like what do young people aspire to; how are aspirations shaped, bound or levelled; how do aspirations change over time; and what is the relationship between aspirations and outcomes? However, in their recent work on young people in precarious labour markets in the UK, Hardgrove *et al* (2015) suggest that as it is commonly used, the notion of aspirations is of limited value because of its conceptual imprecision. Specifically, "When young people are asked about "aspirations," it can be difficult to determine whether their responses are based on expectations

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and intentions, or hopes and dreams that may or may not compel them to pursue trajectories towards future possibilities. For scholars interested in understanding the relationship between imagined futures and agency in the immediate, aspirations have failed to produce helpful insight" (p. 164). Drawing on the work of Markus and Nurius (1986) they argue that the idea of "possible selves" provides a useful alternative because possible selves are more grounded in past experiences and present circumstances than aspirations.

In the research reported here, we explore perspectives on two questions: What is a desirable job? and What makes a job desirable? We use the term desirable in the sense of being attractive, having good qualities, or worth having. Any job or class of jobs can thus be placed along a subjective continuum from undesirable to desirable. We argue that Q Methodology, which in this case involved individuals sorting a number of alternatives responses to these questions along a continuum from "more agree" to "most disagree", addresses some of the limitations of asking about aspirations, and provides insight into the futures that respondents imagine for themselves or for their children. We submit that the perspectives of young people and parents on these questions are of considerable importance to any policy or intervention that seeks to address youth unemployment. Specifically, a systematic understanding of these viewpoints should help to avoid policy implementation failure caused by tension between incompatible futures, imagined, for example, by policy makers on the one hand and young people and their parents on the other.

Methodology

General Overview of Q Methodology

This study was based on Q Methodology (Q) which provides a well-established means of systematically exploring and analysing different perspectives (subjectivities or viewpoints) on a question or issue (Watts *et al,* 2012). According to Baker (2006), Q is an appropriate methodology with which to explore questions about personal experience and matters of taste, values and beliefs. Q combines qualitative and quantitative analysis. Data is collected in the form of a Q-sort, which requires a participant to sort a number of statements about a particular question or issue according to a subjective dimension such as "most agree" to "most disagree". The sorting patterns of a group of individual Q-sorts are then intercorrelated and compared and contrasted using factor analysis. This allows for any "shared modes of engagement, orientations or forms of understanding to be detected" (Stenner *et al,* 2000, p. 442). The value of Q in relation to conventional survey methods is that it provides a systematic means of identifying and exploring, in an integrated manner, the different perspectives and viewpoints about a question that are represented within a selected group of participants. Q Methodology is not appropriate when the objective is to draw inferences about a particular population (e.g. "on average rural senior high students in Ghana think…"; or "x per cent of rural senior high school students in Northern Ghana agree that…").

Q has been used to address a wide variety of research questions and issues. Of direct relevance to the present study is, for example, the use of Q to study the career aspirations of Scottish secondary school pupils, and particularly disparities between male and female pupils (Lightbody and Durndell, 1996); Daniels and Kassdam's (2013) use of Q to explore the personal goals of internal medicine residents in Alberta, Canada; and Mutuku's (2011) use of the method to examine the perspectives of young adults in Kenya on empowerment. More generally, Previte *et al* (2007) have argued that Q offers particular synergies and opportunities

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for rural social science. Q has been critiqued for being subjective and too dependent on the individual researcher's interpretation, but it is now widely accepted as providing valuable insights into participants' views and perspectives (Cross, 2005; Brown, 1997).

Q-Set Design and Content

A Q-set is a collection of statements about a particular topic or issue that comes close to capturing the full gamut of potential views in relation to that topic or issue. The statements in a Q-set are sorted by study participants according to a particular condition of instruction (e.g. *Question*: What is a desirable job? *Condition of Instruction*: Sort these 34 statements from Most Disagree to Most Agree). There are several alternative approaches for developing the Q-set (Watts *et al,* 2012). For this research, the Q-set for each question was developed based on our reading of the relevant academic and policy literature; our understanding of relevant policy debates; and our previous research on and interactions with rural young people, other rural residents and development professionals in Ghana.[6] Information about the two Q-sets is given in Table 1. It is important to remember that a Q-set is not meant to be inclusive of all possible variants, views or responses, but rather to capture the essential character of this inclusive set.

Participants

For this study, we worked with two types of participants: (1) senior high school students (aged 15–23) and (2) parents of senior high school students. Students were enrolled in schools in two

Table 1: Q-set statements for questions 1 and 2

Question	*Number of statements in Q-set*	*Statements in the Q-set (to be sorted from most agree to most disagree)*
1. What is a desirable job?	34	(1) Farmer; (2) Farm worker; (3) Fisherman; (4) Livestock keeper; (5) Apprentice; (6) Brick maker; (7) Carpenter; (8) Charcoal maker; (9) Mine worker; (10) Hairdresser; (11) Street vendor; (12) Food seller; (13) Caterer; (14) Shop keeper; (15) Trader; (16) Agricultural input dealer; (17) Driver; (18) Driver's mate; (19) Taxi driver; (20) Motorcycle taxi; (21) Tractor driver; (22) Teacher; (23) Police officer; (24) Preacher or Imam; (25) Soldier; (26) Nurse; (27) Government official or civil servant; (28) Journalist; (29) TV or radio news presenter; (30) Football player; (31) Banker; (32) Business person; (33) Medical doctor; (34) Politician
2. What makes a job desirable?	25	(1) Earn enough money; (2) Earn lots of money; (3) Gives quick money; (4) Steady job / job security; (5) Opportunities for advancement; (6) Can travel; (7) Can use existing skills; (8) Learn new skills; (9) Can be creative; (10) Be in the open air; (11) Located in rural area; (12) Comfortable environment; (13) Located in urban area; (14) Based in an office; (15) Be close to family; (16) Produces food for the family; (17) Same work as mother or father; (18) A good boss; (19) Good work mates; (20) Be your own boss; (21) Help people; (22) Builds the nation; (23) Make the world a better place; (24) Community respect; (25) Public recognition

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rural sites in Ghana: Tepa Senior High School in the Ashanti Region and Savelugu Senior High School in the Northern Region. These sites were selected because they represent different farming regions. The Tepa site is in Ghana's cocoa producing area: good annual rainfall and a long growing season supports a variety of crop production activities. Rainfall around Savelugu limits crop production options and outcomes, and it would generally be considered to have lower agricultural potential than the Tepa site. Poverty indicators in Northern Region are higher than in Ashanti Region (Al-Hassan and Diao, 2007). The original intention was to interview a parent of each student participant. However this was only possible for six cases in each site (i.e. 30 and 33 per cent of cases in Tepa and Savelugu, respectively). To make up the numbers, the parents of other students at the school who lived nearby were recruited into the study.

In summary, we worked with 72 individuals distributed in four participant sets (students and parents, each at two sites) and each participant completed two sorts, thus making for 144 individual sorting exercises within eight Q studies (Table 2).

While Q Methodology is not about hypothesis testing, the participant sets (students and parents at sites with different agricultural potential) reflect our curiosity about if and how perspectives differ by social group and by the agricultural potential of the area.

We worked with officials at the two schools to identify students who were willing to participate in the study. Q Methodology is not concerned with representative samples – our aim was to identify a group of students that included the diversity present in the school, particularly in terms of age and gender. After an introduction to the study, the participant was given a shuffled pack of cards with each card containing a single statement. They were instructed to read and consider each card in turn, relative to the question, and to sort the cards into three piles: those they agreed with; those they did not agree with; and those they were ambivalent about, did not have strong feelings about or did not understand. Next they were instructed to take each pile of cards in turn and place them on the sorting grid at an appropriate place along the Most Agree – Most Disagree continuum. An example of a completed sort is shown in Figure 1.

After each sorting exercise, participants were asked if they had any comments they wanted to make about the ranking they had just completed. Notes were taken and these were used to inform the respective factor interpretations. Participants completed the two sorting exercises in sequence.[7]

Our original intention was to recruit into the study one of the parents of each young person who participated in the sorting exercises. However after identifying these parents, some of them could not or were not willing to participate. We therefore had to identify other, unrelated parents of school children of similar age through random visits to households located near the

Table 2: Study participants

Location	*Group*	*Participants (number)*		
		Total	*Males*	*Females*
Tepa	Young people	20	11	9
Tepa	Parents	14	9	5
Savelugu	Young people	18	7	11
Savelugu	Parents	20	16	4
Total		72	43	29
Per cent		100	60	40

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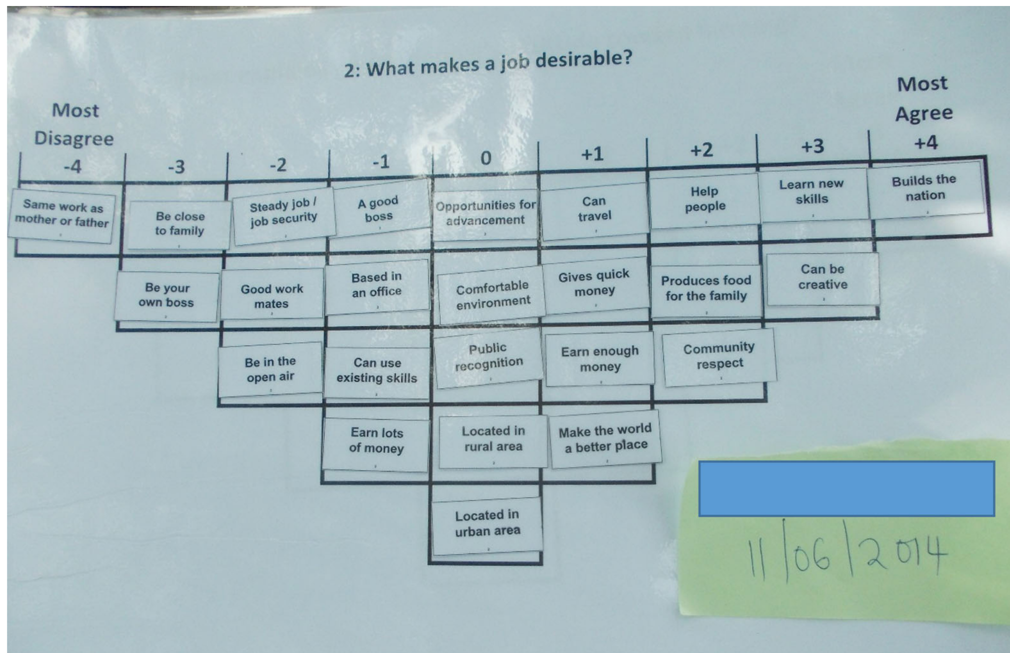

Figure 1: Example of a completed sort.

schools. This was done with the assistance of community leaders. The same research protocol was followed with parents as with students.

Statistical Analysis

Each of the eight studies was analysed separately. Analysis of the Q-sort data was done using the software PQMethod[8] and proceeded as follows. First, for each study, the statements and participants' sort data were entered using PQMethod. The sort patterns of the participants in each study were then intercorrelated. The resulting correlation matrix provided the basis for the extraction of factors – i.e. common sort patterns across a number of participants. For this study, we used the Principle Component Analysis module (QPCA) of PQMethod to extract the factors. Factors were rotated using the Varimax module (QVARIMAX).

For each factor that was identified, the Q-sorts of two or more individuals that contributed significantly to it (i.e. loaded on it) were selected and used as the "defining sorts" for that factor. The weighted average of these defining sorts was used to produce a factor array that exemplified the factor. For example, a factor array for the question "What is a desirable job?" took the form of a list of all of the statements associated with this question, with each statement having a weighted average factor score ranging from −4 (most disagree) to +4 (most agree). The factor array provided the raw material for a factor interpretation. To systematise the interpretation process, we used the "crib sheet" method described by Watts *et al* (2012). In essence, the process of factor interpretation "involves the production of a series of summarizing accounts, each of which explicates the viewpoint being expressed by a particular factor. These accounts are constructed by careful reference to the positioning and overall configuration of the

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items in the relevant […] factor arrays" (Watts and Stenner, 2005, p. 82). For clarity, in the remainder of this paper we substitute the word perspective for factor.

While each of the eight individual Q studies is complete in and of itself, we took the opportunity to compare and contrast results over the different studies to explore differences and similarities in perspectives across social groups and sites.

An important limitation of this study is that all of the students who participated were enrolled in senior high school. It follows that the perspectives of young people who for whatever reason are not in senior high school will not necessarily be represented in the interpretations presented in the next section. In 2014/15, there were 804,974 students enrolled in 863 senior high schools in Ghana, with an estimated gross enrolment rate of 45.8 per cent (EMIS, 2015). Another limitation is that we have only limited information about the family or socio-economic circumstances of the students and parents who participated in the study.

Results

Student Participants in Context

The reported occupations of parents are shown in Table 3. For both schools, approximately 30 per cent of parents were reported to work as teachers. The percentage of parents working as farmers was three times higher for students schooling in Savelugu (27 per cent) compared to Tepa; while the percentage of parents working as traders or business people was twice as high for students schooling in Tepa (24 per cent) compared to Savelugu. The percentage of parents

Table 3: Reported occupations of parent participants ($N = 34$) and non-participant parents of seven of the student participants

Parent's occupation	*Tepa*		*Savelugu*		*Total*	
	No.	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*	*No.*	*Per cent*
Teacher* (5)	6	29	8	31	14	30
Farmer* (5)	2	10	7	27	9	19
Trader/business person* (5)	5	24	3	12	8	17
Civil servant* (1)	1	5	1	4	2	4
Tradesman (carpenter/electrician)* (2)	1	5	1	4	2	4
Accountant*	1	5		0	1	2
Agent at microfinance institution*		0	1	4	1	2
Surveyor*	1	5		0	1	2
Cocoa marketing officer*	1	5		0	1	2
Pastor*	1	5		0	1	2
Youth centre volunteer*		0	1	4	1	2
Caterer		0	1	4	1	2
Researcher	1	5		0	1	2
Shop keeper		0	1	4	1	2
Susu collector	1	5		0	1	2
Tailor		0	1	4	1	2
Unemployed		0	1	4	1	2
Total	21	100	26	100	47	100

Notes: *Indicates that one or more parents of a student participant fell into this occupational category; if more than one, the actual number appears in parentheses.

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working in formal sector jobs was approximately 50 per cent for students schooling in Tepa compared to 35 per cent for students schooling in Savelugu. While both senior high schools are located in rural areas, they attract students from a wider catchment area. Nevertheless, the differences in the parents' occupations align with the view that livelihoods in the north of Ghana are generally more agriculturally-dependent, and more precarious, than in the south.

What is a Desirable Job?

Two perspectives were extracted from the sorts of students at each site (Table 4), and these perspectives were very similar across the sites. At both sites, the dominant perspective was that the professional jobs were most desirable and that the low-skill or manual jobs that might be expected to be more easily accessible in the rural context were least desirable. We illustrate this with the interpretation of Perspective 1 from students in Tepa, for whom the most desirable jobs were big, professional and prominent, like journalist (+4)[9] medical doctor (+4) and politician (+3). These jobs command respect in society (Gh11×7) and generate high income (Gh11×17 & Gh11×20). Other desirable jobs included police officer (+3), soldier (+3), nurse (+2) and

Table 4: Factors extracted for question 1 (What is a desirable job?)

Site	*Participant group*	*Factor/perspective*	*Eigen value*[1]	*Per cent of variation accounted for*[2]	*Number of defining sorts*[3]	*Correlation between factor scores*[4]
Tepa	Students	1. A big and professional job, with an eye to public service	11.8	42	6	0.30
		2. A realistic and local job, with an eye to public service	1.5	24	2	
Savelugu	Students	1. A professional job, little else will do	11.7	53	7	0.40
		2. A professional job, but there are many other options	1.4	19	2	
Tepa	Parents	1. A big, professional job, with an eye to public service	7.8	54	9	0.16
		2. A professional or local job, with an eye to public service	1.6	13	2	
Savelugu	Parents	1. A formal and salaried job, little else will do	8.6	32	7	0.24
		2. A local job that is within reach	2.3	24	5	

Notes: [1]The eigenvalue is a measure that reflects the amount of variation accounted for by the factor, and the relative magnitude of the eigenvalues can be used to order the importance of the factors. By convention, factors with eigenvalues greater than or equal to one are considered significant and retained (Rajé, 2007).
[2]The percentage of the variation among the individual sorts within a study (i.e. a question × site × participant group combination) accounted for by this factor. The factor accounting for the most variation is referred to as the dominant factor or perspective.
[3]The number of sorts that loaded significantly on this factor, the weighted average of which was used to produce a factor array that exemplified the factor.
[4]The correlation between factor scores provides an indication of how closely related the factors are. A low correlation indicates there is little overlap between the factors.

TV or radio news presenter (+2): these jobs were also seen as good sources of income (Gh11×5). With the possible exception of police officer and nurse, they are also jobs that would most likely necessitate leaving a village or rural setting. An orientation towards public service was also seen in the fact that jobs with seemingly greater potential for the accumulation of personal wealth, such as banker (+2) and business person (+2), were rated no higher than nurse. The ambition that underpins this perspective is reflected in the fact that a number of the local, low-skill, informal sector jobs open to young people were the least favoured: driver's mate (−4), charcoal maker (−4), street vendor (−3) and brick maker (−3). Respondents were damning about these jobs: they provide very little income (Gh11×1; Gh11×5; Gh11×20); are neither well recognised nor well respected within society (Gh11×17); are dirty (Gh11×7); require a lot of physical strength (Gh11×5); and have no future (e.g. a 16-year-old male, Gh11×1, suggested that with technology and modernisation people are shifting from charcoal to gas for cooking). Other local jobs were viewed only slightly more positively (i.e. farm worker (−2), livestock keeper (−2) and food seller (−2)), while other common jobs including driver, taxi driver, tractor driver and trader were all scored at −1. This perspective was neutral in relation to the desirability of farming as a job (i.e. it had a factor score of 0).

There were six students who contributed defining sorts to this perspective, four females and two males. Information on parents' education and occupations is available for four of them: two fathers are teachers (both with tertiary education), one a pastor and the other a carpenter; while the two mothers for whom information is available are both traders. The lack of engagement with agriculture is striking.

The second perspective, which was also shared across the two sites, again highlighted the desirability of professional jobs. However, in contrast to the first perspective, here a broader range of jobs, including some that are low skill, was considered desirable. We illustrate this with the interpretation of Perspective 2 from Savelugu, where students associated with this perspective highlighted the desirability of publically recognised, professional jobs like medical doctor (+4), nurse (+4), teacher (+3) and government official or civil servant (+3). Following these were a number of essentially local, low-skill and thus potentially accessible jobs: agricultural input dealer (+2), driver's mate (+2), taxi driver (+2), trader (+1), motorcycle taxi (+1), tractor driver (+1) and livestock keeper (+2). However, from this perspective a number of other local, low-skill jobs were not very desirable, including driver (−2), carpenter (−2), caterer (−1), and some were definitely not desirable: brick maker (−3), farmer (−3), charcoal maker (−4), fisherman (−4). In addition to limited income potential, these jobs were portrayed as dirty, hard and of low status. It is important to note that a number of professional or semi-professional jobs were seen as less desirable than some of the low-skill local jobs. These included: police officer (−2), soldier (−1) and politician (−1). Also there was relatively little interest in some jobs that might be expected to bring good remuneration and public recognition: journalist (+1), business person (−1), TV or radio news presenter (−1) and football player (−2). While Perspective 2 from Tepa was similar to that from Savelugu, one striking difference was that students at Tepa, an area of higher agricultural potential, were much more positive on the job of farmer (+3) than those in Savelugu (−3), where farming is a much more common parental occupation. There were seven individuals who contributed defining sorts to this perspective, five females and two males.

Two perspectives were extracted from the sorts of parents at each site. Parents who loaded on Perspective 1 in Tepa had much in common with their counterparts who loaded on Perspective 1 in Savelugu, and in both sites these were the dominant perspectives. Both strongly emphasised the desirability of professional or salaried jobs, to the virtual exclusion of any other jobs. Low-skill or manual jobs were not at all desirable (although both perspectives

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were neutral about the job of farmer). Indeed, these perspectives were very close to those of students in both Tepa and Savelugu who strongly favoured professional jobs over low-skill, low-pay, local jobs. The sixteen parents who contributed the defining sorts to these two similar perspectives included six teachers and a number of other formal sector jobs including accountant, civil servant and researcher. There were no farmers of manual workers amongst these defining sorters.

Parents associated with Perspective 2 in Tepa found some professional jobs desirable, but other local, low-skill jobs, including farmer (+3), were also desirable. Parents associated with Perspective 2 in Savelugu were even more locally oriented and pragmatic in terms of the jobs they found desirable. Indeed, from this perspective agriculturally oriented jobs – including farmer at +4 – and local professions were among the most desirable. The occupations of the seven individuals who contributed defining sorts to these two perspectives were essentially focused on the local economy, including three teachers, a surveyor, tailor, electrician and shopkeeper.

What Makes a Job Desirable?

In relation to the attributes that make a job desirable, three perspectives were identified from the sorts of students at Tepa and four from the sorts of students at Savelugu (Table 5). There is a common element to the three perspectives from Tepa: a job is desirable if it makes a contribution, e.g. by helping people, making the world a better place or building the nation. Beyond this shared orientation, there are some important differences between the three perspectives. For students associated with Perspective 1, what makes a job desirable was a combination of comfort (+4), cash (earn lots of money – +3; earn enough money – +2), community (help people – +3; community respect – +2; public recognition – +1) and family (produces food for the family – +2; close to family – +1). A 19-year-old female student whose mother is an accountant suggested that a comfortable environment was important since it allowed one to feel free and be productive (Gh11×11). The importance of making enough money to provide for one's family was stressed by some students (Gh11×4; Gh11×12; Gh11×13; Gh11×15). This orientation towards community and family may explain the relatively higher score for jobs located in rural areas (−1) compared to urban areas (−3), although this could not be read as a general endorsement of rural areas: for one 21 year-old male student, "no one" would like to work and stay in the rural area (Gh11×15). It is important to note that this does not appear as a particularly conservative perspective: same work as mother or father has the lowest factor score (−4). Gh11×12, a 16-year-old female, said that her mother is a trader but she would not like to follow her into this job because she earns little from her work. Other attributes that might be associated with traditional rural jobs or small-scale enterprise also scored low: working in the open air (−2) and being your own boss (−3). Despite this negativity, an 18-year-old male recognised that while farmers were not based in an office they were nevertheless proud of themselves for being farmers (Gh11x16). This perspective was neutral on "gives quick money" (0) and, at the same time, downplayed the importance of steady job/job security (−1), a good boss (−1) and good workmates (−2).

In contrast, students associated with Perspective 2 were ambitious to get ahead quickly; while for those associated with Perspective 3, the opportunity to contribute to society was what made a job desirable. A 19-year-old male put it this way, "My desire is to use my job or career to make the world a better place thereby helping other people" (Gh11×2), while a 17-year-old female echoed this same sentiment "Our nation needs to be built especially through our jobs. And our jobs must also help others" (Gh11×3). Augmenting one's personal development and

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Table 5: Factors extracted for question 2 (What makes a desirable job?)

Site	*Participant group*	*Factor/perspective*	*Eigen value*[1]	*Per cent of variation accounted for*[2]	*Number of defining sorts*[3]	*Correlation between factor scores*[4]
Tepa	Students	1. Having it all: comfort, cash and community	6.09	22	7	Factor 2: 0.26 Factor 3: 0.21
		2. Getting ahead quickly while doing good	2.74	17	5	Factor 3: 0.08
		3. Making a contribution	2.25	16	4	(As above)
Savelugu	Students	1. Comfort and respect	5.19	24	7	Factor 2: 0.15 Factor 3: 0.11 Factor 4: 0.12
		2. Money and a contribution	2.10	14	3	Factor 3: 0.02 Factor 4: 0.12
		3. Providing a stage	1.84	10	2	Factor 4: 0.14
		4. Broadly satisfying and fulfilling	1.78	12	2	(As above)
Tepa	Parents	1. Remuneration and respect	6.24	30	4	0.29
		2. Contribution and career	1.92	28	5	
Savelugu	Parents	1. Providing a means of getting on in life	6.16	24	8	0.27
		2. Making a contribution	3.39	23	7	

Notes: [1]The eigenvalue is a measure that reflects the amount of variation accounted for by the factor, and the relative magnitude of the eigenvalues can be used to order the importance of the factors. By convention, factors with eigenvalues greater than or equal to one are considered significant and retained (Rajé, 2007).
[2]The percentage of the variation among the individual sorts within a study (i.e. a question × site × participant group combination) accounted for by this factor. The factor accounting for the most variation is referred to as the dominant factor or perspective.
[3]The number of sorts that loaded significantly on this factor, the weighted average of which was used to produce a factor array that exemplified the factor.
[4]The correlation between factor scores provides an indication of how closely related the factors are. A low correlation indicates there is little overlap between the factors.

making use of creativity and existing skills were also important, as were relations at work (good work mates – +2) and a sense of job security (+1). Public recognition (+1) was ranked higher than the amount or speed of earnings. For this perspective, the relational and developmental aspects of a job were more important than job location (rural area −3; urban area −2), or immediate work environment. While this perspective is underpinned by a strong social ethos, family considerations did not appear to play a key role in determining job desirability (same work as mother or father: −2; be close to family: 0; produces food for the family; 0). Four of the five sorts that defined this perspective were completed by females.

The perspectives of students in Savelugu were very similar to those seen in Tepa. The desirability of being able to make a contribution to the community or the nation was again evident in all four perspectives. Building on this common core, Perspective 1 suggested that comfort and respect made a job desirable; Perspective 2 had a very strong focus on financial

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gain; Perspective 3 highlighted public recognition and being in control; and Perspective 4 was an idealistic, multi-dimensional perspective that valued the personal development and relational aspects of a job above remuneration.

Two perspectives were identified from the Q-sorts of parents in Tepa and Savelugu (Table 4). The perspectives that emerged from parents in Tepa shared a common interest in opportunities for career development. However, for those associated with Perspective 1, a desirable job was one that provided good financial remuneration (earn enough money – +4; earn lots of money – +3) and respect and recognition (+3; +1). For a 32-year-old male civil servant with tertiary education, "The sole purpose for prioritising a job is when the job earns one enough money in order to be responsible" (Gh12×2); while for a 33-year-old female *susu* collector[10] and secondary school graduate, "Any desirable job should be able to guarantee a person enough money to cater for the family" (Gh12×7). A comfortable environment (but not necessarily being based in an office) was also desirable, as were the attributes associated with professional development and career progression (e.g. learn new skills – +2; opportunities for advancement – +2; steady job / job security – +1).

No strong message emerged from this perspective about whether making a broader contribution made a job desirable. Given this perspective's strong orientation towards remuneration and public recognition, it is not surprising that being located in a rural area (−4; compared to 0 for located in an urban area), produces food for the family (−3) and same work as mother or father (−3) were not scored highly. A 32-year-old male civil servant expressed a clear view about working in rural areas: "There is lack of infrastructure in the rural areas so if a job is located in a rural environment it will make life uncomfortable" (Gh12×2). Neither were the relational aspects of work – i.e. a good boss (−1) and good work mates (−1) – considered to make a job desirable. Overall, from this perspective, money and recognition made a job desirable, as do other attributes of salaried, professional work. It would be difficult to meet these criteria in many rural contexts. In contrast, parents associated with Perspective 2 highlighted the importance of making a contribution to society or the nation.

Compared to Tepa, one of the perspectives of parents in Savelugu was more pragmatic while the other was more idealistic. Thus, parents in Savelugu associated with Perspective 1 emphasised the very practical aspects of a job – security, financial reward and a comfortable work environment – that allowed people to use employment to build a livelihood and get on in life. In contrast, those associated with Perspective 2 judged the desirability of a job by its potential to make a broader contribution. From this perspective, career and financial reward were secondary concerns. It is important to note that all seven sorts that defined this perspective were completed by men, whose occupations included teacher (×3), farmers, electrician, shop keeper and micro-finance agent.

Discussion

In each of the four studies, i.e. involving students or parents at each of two sites, the dominant perspective in relation to the question "What is a desirable job?" was that jobs that were formal, salaried and professional were most desirable. Many of these jobs are likely to be located in urban areas. The respondents associated with these dominant perspectives had no interest in the manual, informal sector, low-skill, low-paid jobs that might be expected to be most accessible in rural settings. Girls and women were marginally more likely to provide the defining sorts for these perspectives than boys and men. In each of the four studies, an alternative perspective was identified that was open to a wider range of jobs; but only among

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parents in Savelugu did this alternative perspective not also privilege professional jobs. Are parents in Savelugu less ambitious for their children, or are they rather reflecting the hard learned lessons of their own lives? The dominant perspectives among students and parents at both sites, oriented as they were towards formal, professional jobs, were neutral in regards to the desirability of being a farmer, with the exception of students in Savelugu who were slightly positive (+1) (on a scale from −4 to +4). In contrast, again with the exception of students in Savelugu, the alternative perspectives scored farmer at +3 or +4. While students in Savelugu who were associated with Perspective 2 did not rule out some non-professional jobs like agricultural input dealer, driver's mate, livestock keeper and taxi driver (all rated +2), farmer was scored towards the bottom of the list at −3, along with brick maker (−3), hairdresser (−3), charcoal maker (−4) and fisherman (−4). This may reflect the hard work and unpredictable results associated with rainfed farming in northern Ghana.

These findings suggest that for a significant proportion of the senior high students who participated in this study – boys and girls alike – there was a tension between the futures that they imagine for themselves, and the entrepreneurial, agriculture-focused future that policy and programming suggest politicians and development professionals imagine for them. The perspectives of parents are much closer to those of the students than they are to those of policy makers. While farmer was given a negative score in only one perspective, neither did it figure positively in any of the dominant perspectives, and over students and parents at both sites, in only one perspective was it scored at +4.

What makes a job desirable? Perhaps the most striking finding from these studies was that a job that helps others or makes a contribution to society or the nation was scored as desirable in all the perspectives of students at both sites. While there were clear differences in emphasis in relation to the importance of, for example, money, recognition, respect and opportunities for personal development, the idea of making a contribution permeated students' perspectives on what made a job desirable. Thus, not only were the students in the study ambitious in terms of types of jobs, but they seemed to imagine their future selves with a strong social ethos. Among parents, one perspective at each site also placed making a contribution at centre stage, but this was of lesser importance in the other perspectives, which emphasised jobs that provided remuneration and respect (Tepa) and a means of getting on in life (Savelugu).

The desire for independence and to be one's own boss is often associated with an entrepreneurial orientation. None of the three perspectives from students in Tepa suggested that being your own boss made a job desirable, with the dominant Perspective 1 scoring it only at −3. Students in Savelugu were somewhat more positive: while the dominant Perspective 1 scored being your own boss only at −2, the others scored between 0 and +3.

Conclusions

We introduced this paper with reference to the assumption by many policy makers and development professionals that entrepreneurship within the agricultural sector is the main hope for employment creation for young people in rural Africa. We also suggested that a better understanding of the perspectives of young people and parents regarding jobs – in effect their imagined working futures – should decrease the possibility of implementation failure of employment policy and programmes. A lack of alignment between the futures that young people imagine for themselves, and those imagined for them by policy makers, would suggest a need for further reflection and a different, and more radical, array of policy options.

The students who participated in this study were never meant to be representative of the population of young people in Ghana's rural areas. The fact that they are in senior high school already sets them apart, as do their parents' education and occupations. Nevertheless, they should not be dismissed as a small or irrelevant elite – there are some 370 rural high schools in Ghana,[11] and we have no reason to believe that the schools in Tepa and Savelugu, or their students, are in any way unique.

The dominant perspectives of the students and parents who participated in this study suggested that desirable jobs were generally formal, salaried and professional. Significantly, only in one perspective at one school did students "most agree" that being your own boss – which we used as one indicator of an entrepreneurial orientation – made a job desirable. However, results of a large-scale survey under the auspices of the GEM programme have been interpreted to indicate that the majority of young people in a variety of African countries, including Ghana, "consider entrepreneurship to be a good career choice" (Kew, 2015, p. 31). This is clearly an area for further investigation.

Within the dominant perspectives, there was little positive enthusiasm for farming as a job. While it is often said that young Africans are not interested in small-scale farming and rural life, our research provides significant new evidence of the gap between the work futures being imagined by young people and parents, and those imagined by politicians and development professionals.

One now widely accepted response to this apparent mismatch between the desirability and availability of formal sector jobs is to give young people training in entrepreneurship and work to build a stronger entrepreneurial culture. Before setting off down this path, however, it is important to recognise that in Ghana, and West Africa more generally, trading and marketing at all scales are extremely well-established avenues for economic advancement. Ghana's "market queens" are a particularly prescient example of the strength and dynamism of the existing entrepreneurial culture (Clark, 1994). The other pitfall with a policy approach that privileges the turn to entrepreneurship is that it runs the risk of doing little more than further fuelling the development of the informal sector. While there is nothing wrong with self-employment *per se*, in rural West Africa, it is too often associated with job insecurity and limited financial reward (Langevang *et al,* 2015; Overå, 2007).

The students who participated in this study imagine themselves making use of their education, joining and succeeding in the modern, formal world of work, and making contributions to their communities, society and nation. While it is obvious that every young person cannot be a doctor, nurse or teacher, it must be recognised that education has indeed provided these students, and presumably many thousands of others, with new horizons. Do the standard suite of policy responses to the challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment match the level of ambition of the young people they seek to serve? We have provided new evidence that for at least some rural senior high school students in Ghana, at the present time, this is far from the case. Existing theory provides little insight as to how the tension between young people's and officials' imagined futures – or what might be seen as an imagination gap – is likely to be resolved. Like the young men in the UK studied by Hardgrove *et al* (2015), the students we studied will need to mobilise the power of their possible selves and imagined futures, and many other assets and resources besides, to successfully negotiate a precarious labour market. There is an urgent need for research that analyses the next steps in the students' transitions, with a focus on the individual, social and spatial factors associated with more successful navigation of precarity. Here it is likely that an intersectionality perspective will be particularly useful. Perhaps the bigger question is whether the level of precarity can be reduced, and what kinds of imagined state and economy would be needed to do so.

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Notes

1. Transcript of President John Mahama's presentation at a youth work session in Cotonou, Benin on Ghana's experience with unemployment & job creation, Friday 13 September 2013, http://www.presidency.gov.gh/node/231, Accessed on 28 December 2015.
2. World Bank Data, Educational Statistics, available at: http://databank.worldbank.org/.
3. World Bank Data, World Development Indicators. http://databank.worldbank.org/.
4. For this reason, cross-country comparison of official youth unemployment statistics is not particularly useful.
5. http://www.yes.gov.gh/about.
6. The authors have between them more than 40 years of rural research in West Africa, including work on rural young people and agriculture in Ghana. Between 2010 and 2014, JS and NAA co-convened the Young People and Agrifood stream of the Future Agricultures Consortium (http://www.future-agricultures.org/).
7. In fact, each participant completed four sorting exercises which took on average 65 and 50 mins, respectively, for students and parents to complete, but here we are only reporting on the results from two of these.
8. PQMethod is a freely available statistical program tailored to the requirements of Q studies. See: http://schmolck.userweb.mwn.de/qmethod/#PQMethod.
9. For both questions 1 and 2, factor scores ranged from +4 (Most Agree) to −4 (Most Disagree).
10. *Susu* collectors provide a savings and credit service.
11. See: http://www.moe.gov.gh/emis/EMIS%20BASIC%20EDUCATION%20DATA/Secondary/2014-2015/SHS%20National%20Parameters.pdf.

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