Call for Papers
For a special issue of the quarterly journal *Afrique Contemporaine*

**Youth in Rural Africa**

A special issue edited by Bénédicte GASTINEAU, (IRD, Population-Environment-Development Lab, Aix-Marseille University) and Valérie GOLAZ, (INED, Population-Environment-Development Lab, Aix-Marseille University)

Abstract:

This special issue of Afrique Contemporaine will analyze the living conditions of rural African youth – family life, economic situation, and path to adulthood and independence. Among all young rural Africans, this edition will pay particular attention to young farmers: their means of land and knowledge acquisition, and the new agricultural practices they pursue, among other subjects. Increasingly educated and connected rural African youth use all available resources – familial, cooperative, governmental – to build their future in agriculture or in other sectors.

This special issue of *Afrique Contemporaine* will focus exclusively on rural African youth. Contributors need not start by defining “youth” or “young people” in terms of age or any other single parameter; forms of “the young” vary according to social context and historical circumstance. We ask authors to study youth, for instance, by looking at the social conditions surrounding the passage from adolescent to adult (Galland, 2009), or by focusing on young people’s families and means of establishing themselves in their professions. Similarly, no single definition of “rural” applies to all of Africa. Rural spaces certainly share farming and herding as significant activities and sources of income, even though borders shift and change. By rural, we mean more than just farming regions; we also mean non-urban areas that host non-agricultural activities. However, within a country or a region, we may delineate spaces considered rural or “the countryside”; we wish to study such places without isolating them.

**Youth and social change**

More than 230 million young people aged 15-24 live in sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations, 2013). Nearly 60 per cent live in rural areas, acting as important agents of change in the countryside (Losch, Magrin and Imbernon, 2013). Rural youths pursue increasingly varied activities and change traditional intergenerational relationships (Bryceson, 2002). They differ from their parents: better-educated, they grow up in increasingly monetized economies and occupy increasingly open worlds, thanks to mobile phones and roadways. They have plans for their lives and seek independence, new aspirations that may lead them far from the countryside (Daum, 2014; Dia, 2008; Porter et al., 2012). Young people may see migration as a necessary step, especially when they find it difficult to acquire land, face significant poverty and food insecurity, confront wildly fluctuating commodity prices, or see climate-related events threaten
farming and herding incomes. Youth may also see migration as a way to free themselves from their elders, and so achieve economic, conjugal, and residential autonomy.

Even without migrating, young Africans hold a central place in the relationship between city and country, relations that intensify as the countryside integrates with the market to meet growing demand from urban areas. The expansion of some secondary cities also allows youth to have “one foot in the city and one in the village” (Rakotonarivo et al., 2010).

Youth and agriculture

Young people may have difficulty finding their place in family farms: they often remain financially dependent, under-employed, and confined to caretaker status. They find it hard to access capital, credit and land. When they finally become independent, their inherited or purchased farm or herd often proves smaller than that of their parents (Andriamanalina et al., 2014).

Many African youth do not wish to become farmers because they find it difficult and poorly-paid work. In addition — and especially for those who have gone to school or vacationed in cities — life in rural areas can seem unattractive, with few basic services, malfunctioning communications networks, and other hardships. However, in regions where larger-scale farm and livestock operations have expanded and provide at least some employment (even with few jobs on offer), young people are less inclined to leave the land and the agricultural professions (Ouedraogo and Tallet, 2014). Although little documentation exists to date, we might imagine that some youth initiate technical or work-related innovations, participating in current-day transformations of smallholder agriculture.

Furthermore, economic activity has expanded beyond agriculture in rural areas: young people end up working in all available sectors of activity. Greater openness to outsiders goes hand in hand with population densification and employment diversification (Golaz, 2009).
Transportation systems that reach ever-larger stretches of (previously isolated) rural Africa facilitate new, non-agricultural commercial activities, bolstered by the dynamism of young people (Porter, 2014).

In regions undergoing decentralization, the development of healthcare and education services creates skilled-job opportunities in or near rural areas. Young Africans, rather than passively waiting for their future, actively take advantage of opportunities and connect with one another; in this way, some manage to invest and settle in the countryside. Young people can link up through professional, cultural, political, and/or young-farmer organizations. In doing so, young Africans – especially women – can strengthen their independence and develop social, work, and solidarity networks that extend beyond the family (Piraux, 2000).

The editors welcome papers on the following subjects:

(1) Living conditions for youth residing in rural areas, whether they were born there or not.

(2) The ways and means that rural youth employ to achieve economic and social independence: access to land, a first job, financial or residential autonomy, and so forth.
The paths that young farmers follow in acquiring land, know-how, agricultural techniques, and so forth.

Actions that improve living conditions for rural youth, such as securing land tenancy rights, expanding agricultural training and life-sciences education, improving communications between the capital and the countryside, and so forth.

This call for papers addresses a wide array of specialists from the social and human sciences. The editors will give priority to proposals featuring case studies and interdisciplinary perspectives.

Submissions:

Interested authors will submit an article proposal composed of a one-page summary, describing the topic, argument outline (in brief), and the relevant data or fieldwork.

Articles must be 35,000 characters in length at time of publication, including spaces, footnotes and bibliography. Submissions must include an abstract of 800 total characters, key words, and a 150-character author(s) biography.

We especially welcome articles that feature maps, drawings, chronologies and photos.

Each article will be blind peer-reviewed by two anonymous referees, the Afrique Contemporaine editorial board, and the special issue editors.

Please submit your response to this call for papers via our online Editorial Manager: http://www.editorialmanager.com/afriquecontemporaine/

For questions or clarifications, contact Bénédicte Gastineau benedicte.gastineau@ird.fr, Valérie Golaz valerie.golaz@ined.fr and Isabelle Fortuit fortuiti@afd.fr

Timeline:

Submit article proposal by 30 October 2015 at latest.

The editors will select article topics and notify authors by 15 November 2015 at latest.

Selected authors must submit a first draft of their articles by 15 March 2016.

The special issue will be published in the 4th quarter of 2016.

Bibliography


