

**Report OFF N°3: *Youth Booklet N°1***

## **WEST AFRICAN RURAL YOUTH'S VIEWS ON THEIR PATHWAYS**

First booklet of the farmer research conducted by ROPPA's  
Observatory of Family farming (2019-2020)



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## Acronyms

<b>AFDI</b>	French Farmers and International Development
<b>AJAM</b>	Association of Young Modern Farmers of Benin
<b>ANOPACI</b>	National Association of Professional Organizations of Côte d'Ivoire (farmers' platform of Côte d'Ivoire)
<b>APEJ</b>	Agency for the Promotion of Youth Employment (Mali)
<b>ASFED</b>	Association for Family Welfare (Niger)
<b>BAC</b>	Baccalauréat
<b>BFEM</b>	Brevet de fin d'études moyennes (average school-leaving certificate)
<b>CEDEAO</b>	Communauté Économique des États d'Afrique de l'Ouest
<b>CFEE</b>	Certificate of Completion of Elementary Studies
<b>CNCR</b>	National Council for Rural Cooperation and Consultation (Senegalese farmer platform)
<b>CNOP/Mali</b>	National Coordination of Farmers' Organizations of Mali (farmers' platform of Mali)
<b>CPF</b>	Confédération paysanne du Faso (Burkina Faso Farmer Confederation)
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organization
<b>CTOP</b>	Coordination Togolaise des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs Agricoles (Togolese Coordination of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organizations) (Togolese Farmers' Platform)
<b>ECOWAP</b>	Agricultural policy of the States of the Economic Community of West African States
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>FENAJER</b>	National Federation of Rural Youth (Mali)
<b>FF</b>	Family farms
<b>FHB University</b>	Félix Houphouët-Boigny University
<b>FNFP</b>	Plateforme Paysanne du Niger (Niger Farmers' Platform)
<b>FO</b>	Farmers' Organization
<b>FUN</b>	Farmers Union Network of Liberia (Farmers' Platform of Liberia)
<b>GIE</b>	Economic Interest Grouping
<b>GOANA</b>	Great Offensive for Food and Abundance (Senegal)
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>OFF/ROPPA</b>	ROPPA's Observatory of Family farming
<b>OSC</b>	Organisation de la Société Civile
<b>PFN</b>	ROPPA national farmers' platform
<b>PNOPPA</b>	National Platform of Farmers' and Agricultural Producers' Organizations of Benin (Benin Farmers' Platform)
<b>REJEPAT</b>	Network of Young Professional Producers of Togo
<b>ROPPA</b>	Network of Farmer Organizations and Producers of West Africa

## Today's rural youth: getting to know them better to know what to



The issue of rural African youth is at the heart of the future of the rural world and our countries' communities. Today, it is of concern to all stakeholders, but for different reasons: **Northern countries** are mainly concerned about the consequences of demographic dynamics on the migratory flows they are trying to stem; **African States** fear the explosive political consequences of the economic and social marginalization of the majority of young people from rural areas. Youth underemployment, urban sprawl, sporadic protests, the rise of new forms of crime, extremism, and violence are all warning signs. **WHAT TO DO?** Everyone feels that current responses are not up to the challenges; otherwise, the problems would be solved.

**Farmers** live these questions on a daily basis in their families. They are very distressed when they see their children not wanting to continue their family farming, not finding gainful employment in other sectors and venturing into dangerous paths: then they fear both for the very uncertain future of their children and for their own future since they will not be able to count on them to support them. They also fear for the future of their family farms, which are already stretched thin and may be doomed to disappear. They do not know **WHAT TO DO**.



**As for young people themselves**, it must be said that they are given few opportunities to express their ideas on these issues: most of the time we think for them, and we do not know their point of view.

## Issues and challenges of the insertion/ installation of young people

The precarious situation of rural youth is a direct consequence of their underemployment, itself resulting from a combination of several factors that bring **three main challenges to ROPPA**.



### *A social and cultural issue*

The recognition of rural youth as a lever for economic and social development in general and for the transformation of family farms in particular;



### *An economic issue*

Massive creation of remunerative and sustainable jobs for rural youth in the agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sector;



### *A political issue*

The implementation of coherent public policies to empower rural youth, women and men, and their full participation in the governance of their communities at different scales.

**These issues give rise to three priority challenges**, which together will make it possible to create conditions favorable to the employability of rural youth and to their integration/installation.

### *To improve the status of rural youth...*

with family farms, local communities and the State;

### *Make available and accessible to rural youth, funding mechanisms*

enabling young rural men and women to develop sustainable employment in the agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sectors;

### *To promote the implementation of adapted, exclusive and coherent public policies...*

which facilitate sustainable employability and the massive integration/installation of young rural people in agricultural professions in general.

*(Regional Strategy 2019/2023 for the insertion/installation of young people in the agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sector - ROPPA)*

**Farmers' organizations** are looking for ways to break the current deadlock. ROPPA has cleared the ground by defining a strategy to promote the insertion of young people in the agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sector and their setting-up in the rural world. The main orientations are clear: challenges to be met are social and cultural, economic, and political at the same time. But when it comes to knowing HOW to DO, one is faced with the complexity of realities. It is necessary to stand back from the situation so as not to fall into the trap of ready-made solutions that solve nothing.

ROPPA has therefore embarked on a research project in order to enter into this complexity and to shed light on it, by relying on the **farmer knowledge production system** of its OBSERVATORY of FAMILY FARMING.

The basic option made, was **to give a voice to young people** in seven West African countries around their perception of family farming and life in the rural world and to confront it with that of farmers who could be their parents.

This research is based on these «words». It highlights the gap between what young people say and what adults say: this gap strongly reveals a lack of communication between generations and the weight of stereotypes and prejudices from which these young people suffer. For these two reasons, **today's rural youth are in reality not well known**; therefore, it is not surprising that the answers given to them often fall short of their expectations and have little impact.

As we presumed, it is confirmed that it is an abuse of language to talk about «the» youth: there are several youths, but conventional categories (age, sex, level of education, socio-professional categories...) are insufficient to differentiate them. This research has shown that young people define themselves in another way and has led to apprehending them in another way, that of their lived experience, in order to understand their differentiated relationship to family farms and to determine accordingly **how to effectively support the social integration of young people**, i.e. what connects them to society (with whom do they want to live? where? to share and reproduce which values). Indeed, this social integration appears to be the «mother of all questions», whether it is a question of education, employability, safety, delinquency, or the young people's connection to the rural world and to the family farming.





Research shows that the relationship of these youth to family farms is more **complex** and **ambivalent** than is often believed. It has revealed a whole range of situations (called «scenarios») based on practical cases, ranging from a total rejection of farming - in the broadest sense - and village life to resolute and imaginative involvement in the family farming and its transformation, and it shows that these **scenarios are not fixed but can evolve** according to the conditions that are created and the support that is offered.



**Views of young rural West Africans  
on their paths**



**West African Rural Youth's  
Perspectives on Family farms**

The initial plan was to focus the production of knowledge on the relationship of rural youth to family farms, but this research revealed that **youth's life course largely explains their relationship, positive or negative, to the family farming**, and it is on this course that action must be taken, at different stages depending on youth, to improve their relationship to family farms. This «discovery» has two practical implications for the use of this research:

- Instead of being presented in a single summary document, the results of this research are presented in the form of **two booklets**.

The second («**West African Rural Youth's Perspectives on Family farms**») corresponds to the initial project. It presents, most often using quotations, the visions that the young people who participated in this research have of their future and that of family farms, the different scenarios for the evolution of these young people, the obstacles that hinder them and the assets that promote a positive evolution for themselves and for family farms.

The first booklet («**Views of young rural West Africans on their paths**») details the contributions of this research on how these young people explain the construction of their personality through the stages of their life paths. Most of the outlines of these paths are already known. The contribution of this research is first in the very concrete way in which these young boys and girls tell their lives (a large place is given to the direct transcriptions of their testimonies), which reflects their sensitivity; then in the highlighting of the sequence of the stages of their journey. Here we find the foundations of their relationship to family farms and the keys to their process of social integration.

- *It is clear from the research that all young people long for change, but in different ways that have emerged at different stages of each person's singular itinerary: **the relevant support will therefore have to be differentiated according to each case.** The second very strong lesson is that only a **local dialogue** can restore the confidence that is indispensable for involving young people in the life of their communities and for them to invest in the trades of agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sector. While general lines can be identified, practical responses and solutions need to be developed at different levels (family, local, national, and regional) and according to each context. There is no global answer or recipe falling from the sky.*
- *The consequence of this obvious fact is that we have refrained from drawing up prescriptions on what to do and how to do it because they would be too general, and therefore illusory: the answers have to be «tailor-made». On the other hand, many milestones are given in the two booklets, and particularly in the second one, to identify who can do what and when. The use of these contributions is another type of work that can only be usefully done according to practical situations and with the stakeholders concerned. The present booklets provide documentation to do this work.*

*You can read these two booklets starting with the first or the second, but you will have to go back to the first in any case to deepen the analysis of **what needs to be done, when to do it, and who can do it** since the keys are in this booklet.*



## Abstract of the booklet 1: «Rural Youth's Views on their pathways»



Reconstruction of the rural youth's experiences described in this booklet is based on the life stories and discussions of 435 young people, including 190 girls, who participated in focus groups organized by ROPPA's farmer platforms in 7 West African countries (Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo) between August and December 2019. By shedding light on the elements that at each stage of their lives promote their integration into the family farming or keep them away from it, the knowledge of these diverse and singular pathways reminds us that there is not one single rural youth, but several, and that the responses to be made to the expectations of young people must be differentiated according to each case.

**All these young people were born and raised on family farms.** Their gender, the generation to which they belong according to their age, their social position in the family (eldest or youngest, mother's rank among wives), but above all the economic, social and cultural capital of their family (self-sufficiency or poverty of the farm, availability of land...) determine from childhood their first learning experiences, the harshness of their lives and the degree of hardship of their participation in the work of FF. For many of these young people, the premature death of their father or mother will have a major influence on the rest of their lives.



The vast majority of these rural youth, both boys and girls, are now attending school; many parents push their children to study so that they do not experience the same living conditions as they did. **Their often difficult schooling** path has lengthened and now leads some of them all the way to university, which is new. But the majority of them do not pass the high school diploma barrier. More than half of the young people who participated in this research were forced to drop out of school during their studies, either because of academic failures, the inability of the family to meet school fees, or for girls from early marriages or pregnancies outside of marriage. The opportunities that school opens up, which is the object of much criticism, are uncertain, which encourages some graduates to return to agriculture. Some of these young people have benefited from skills training, but they are not numerous.

The majority of these young people's path will **take them away for a time or permanently from their village and their parents' farms**. This is particularly the case when their studies are extended in the city. The consequences of this distance will vary from case to case in terms of the relationship of these young people to the family farming. Some of the reasons for these distances are part of the traditional rhythm of rural life and do not introduce a disconnect between these young people and the world of family farms.

For young girls in particular, these include marriage, the forced nature of which they are increasingly contesting, and seasonal exoduses that have become more adventurous than in the past when they lead to the city.

The risks of disconnection from family farms will be blamed in the more adventurous distances to gold sites, practice of illegal activities and migration out of the country. Nevertheless, according to their testimonies, many of the young people who embarked on these adventures to escape the poverty of family farms, and often in order to help their families, still keep links with them. They may return to family farms, especially when these usually difficult adventures have ended. Trials they have gone through and encounters they have had the opportunity to make will have been an essential time for them to build their personality, and sometimes to learn a trade.

These young people's circle of relations is often limited to their families. It widens and they come out of their isolation mainly when their path

allows them to distance themselves from them and to make happy or unhappy encounters that have influenced them and built the current fabric of their social relationships. These are essentially **encounters** between young people because they keep an avoidant relationship with adults with whom they do not feel confident, and they generally do not have a very good relationship with customary and religious authorities. Their network of friendships, when it exists, is of great help to them, but their social capital remains weak.

At the stage of their path where this research has found them, **they seek to integrate** where they can best develop, talk, and have the right to be seen by others. Most of the time these are «peer-to-peer» spaces where they find young people who have the same aspirations, codes and activities as themselves, but the most vulnerable are at the mercy of manipulators and integrate into spaces that marginalize them socially (sects, extremist groups, criminal organizations).

This research seeks to find out to what extent family farming can be an area of integration for these rural youth. **Four main scenarios** emerge from their comments: (i) some do not believe that FT has a future, and will seek to integrate elsewhere; (ii) others have failed in their journey and have no other solution than to find refuge in the family farming; (iii) some, who believe in family farming, have never cut with FT and will continue to live within it as long as it evolves; (iv) others who also believe in farming will seek to create a farm outside their family's farm to develop a new family business model



**Introduction :**

**WHY AND HOW HAS ROPPA PRODUCED  
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RURAL YOUTH  
ON FAMILY FARMS WITHIN THE  
FRAMEWORK OF ITS OBSERVATORY?**

ROPPA has been concerned about the future of rural youth since its creation

### The future of young people: a particular concern in West Africa

- Worrying because the demographic growth will give this issue increasing importance in the years to come. The fringe of the population in the 15 to 19 age group is significantly more numerous than in previous age groups. For example, in 2017, children under the age of 15 accounted for 49.2% of the population in Niger, 47% in Burkina Faso and 43% in Benin.
- Worrying because, according to the IFAD's 2019 Rural Development Report («Giving Rural Youth a Chance»), which uses a typology of countries' structural transformations to establish the employment opportunities offered to rural youth throughout the world, these opportunities are particularly low in West Africa: 9 ECOWAS countries are in the lowest range (low-bottom: Benin, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone and Togo), three in the low-high category (Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria), two in the high-low category (Gambia, Senegal), and none in the highest range.

### A constant subject of concern for ROPPA

ROPPA Since its creation, ROPPA has positioned itself as a tool for the defense of family farms (FF). Mindful of the future of these family farms and the well-being and development of each member: men, women, girls and boys who compose it, since **2006**, the ROPPA Convention has made recommendations for the creation of Youth Colleges, as a space for reflection on their specific concerns and proposals. Since then, at the country level, colleges have been set up and many initiatives for the support and installation of young people have been developed. In **2017**, the network began capitalizing at the regional level on the numerous initiatives/experiences to support young people. This capitalization underpinned the development in **2018** of a Regional Youth Strategy. In **2018**, the ROPPA Convention held in Banjul adopted the Regional Program 3 of the Five Year Plan **2019-2023**, on «The promotion of economic activities carried out by women or young people within, downstream or alongside family farms».

The choice to develop a theme around the issue of rural youth in the third report of ROPPA's Observatory of Family farms is in the same line of thought.





ROPPA has chosen a path that «goes off the beaten track» to produce knowledge on the relationship of rural youth to the FFs.

### Why ?

To try to shed new light on the issue of rural West African youth. As a matter of fact :

- Everyone is talking about youth today: we must avoid repeating what is already being said about it.
- Rural youth, who are the first to be concerned, do not always have the opportunity to be heard in the reflection on youth, and we risk missing their experiences. Too often young people were interviewed based on a ready-made analysis of their situation. On employment, migration or security crises, their own analysis of their situation, their expectations and their vision of their future and that of their family and community were rarely questioned.
- The majority of approaches focus on the theme of employment, favoring certain targets likely to enter into an entrepreneurial approach to agricultural transformation, with the risk of obscuring other dimensions of the problems of rural youth and forgetting the majority of them. In fact, it is only a part of the currently neglected youth who, in the wake of the new agricultural enterprises, will find a job, often not very rewarding, as a worker or subcontractor in the enterprises created. On the other hand, by giving priority to selective interventions that in practice will promote new rural elite that can easily be integrated into the dominant economy, there is a risk of accentuating the disconnection with the greatest number of rural youth, whose distress constitutes the greatest cause for concern for the future of West African societies.

### How ?

#### ○ Giving a voice to rural youth

We chose to start from the words of young people (435 rural youth from 7 countries, including 190 girls, freely expressed themselves among themselves in focus groups) and to compare these words with those of adults who run family farms in different sectors and agro-ecological zones. Several young people underlined the interest of this approach:

### Interest in OFF's Approach

*«In general, the knowledge produced on the situation of youth is limited and rural youth are insufficiently involved in the data production processes that affect their lives and the future of the family farms they will inherit». (synthesis CPF, Burkina Faso)*

*«It's the first time we've been asked for our opinion on what we are and what we want to be» (focus group young people Koulikoro, Mali).*

*«The methodology used is excellent, and we need to expand on that because there are also other young people who have other suggestions» (youth focus group North Senegal).*

*... "I thank the people who took this initiative to take an interest in us Talibés. And I hope that these surveys will lead to something, not like the previous ones. (youth focus group Segou region, Mali)*

### ○ Building farmer research: an 8-month process (August 2019/March 2020) in 3 steps:



#### - **A topicalization workshop that resulted in the development of 12 «research questions»:**

In August 2019, the leaders and the ROPPA Executive Secretariat team defined 12 questions to be answered through youth's or adults' words collected in the focus groups (these questions were not intended to be asked directly, but to guide the interpretation of the content of the interviews), and produced a «methodological guide» to train the endogenous facilitators who would conduct the research.

#### - **Youth focus group:**

The research was conducted in 7 countries whose farmers' platforms volunteered to implement it (Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Togo). Five of them have been financially supported by ROPPA, and two of them have entirely financed this research on their own. In each country, from 3 to 12 «focus groups» of a dozen participants bringing together separately boys, girls and parents were set up to

allow exchanges, discussion and collective reflection in relation to the research questions. Trained endogenous facilitators who conducted in-depth interviews with some participants moderated these focus groups. The content of these exchanges was used by each farmers' platform that produced a research report.

- ***A regional workshop for sharing and enrichment***

The regional youth/FF/OP workshop brought together in February 2020 in Nyéléni (Mali), young people from the 7 countries where the focus groups were held and young people from Benin and Côte d'Ivoire, some leaders and partners of ROPPA. Panel and working group discussions enriched the research inputs of the 7 National Farmers' Platforms. This workshop immediately preceded the constitutive assembly of ROPPA's COLLÈGE RÉGIONAL DES JEUNES and was followed by a first meeting to assess the results of the research with some members of ROPPA's Board of Directors (Bamako, March 2020).

○ **Approach centered on the rural youth/family farming ratio**

It is this relationship between young people and family farms that interests the Observatory of Family farms. Its observations focused therefore on this dimension. Very little knowledge has so far been produced on this particular aspect of the problem of youth and family farming.

○ **Dynamic input from pathways**

Youth is a phase of life during which a man or woman builds himself or herself. It is marked by great mobility (these young people move in space, change status...) and static categories (age, sex, school level, socio-professional category) freeze their feature on a moment of their evolution and do not allow to understand its realities. It is therefore necessary to try to apprehend them in movement. This is what this research sought to do, based on the life stories that young people told each other.

**EIGHT QUESTIONS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE POSITION OF YOUNG PEOPLE FROM FAMILY FARMS:**

- 1) Who are these young people?
- 2) What are their life paths?
- 3) What is the background of their social relationships?
- 4) What is their type of social integration?
- 5) How do they see their own future?
- 6) How do they see the future of family farms?
- 7) What vision do they have of peace and security?
- 8) What is their understanding of the current dynamics of youth support?

**FOUR QUESTIONS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND THE POSITION OF ADULT MEMBERS OF FAMILY FARMS WITH RESPECT TO YOUNG PEOPLE:**

- 9) How do adult members of family farms view young people?
- 10) What are the concerns and hopes of adult members of family farms in relation to their children and the youth of today?
- 11) What responsibilities do the adults feel towards today's youth?
- 12) How do they see the future of the family farms and their community?



# 01.

## YOUTH, IN THEIR DIVERSITY

*«In practice, it should be noted that there is not just one youth, but several youths, and this is what marks their difference and classifies them into several categories. In fact, when we speak of youth, we are talking about young boys or girls, illiterate/literate/schooled/out-of-school, married or not, young farmers, fishermen, pastors, having known or not exodus/migration, integrated/marginalized youth, turned or not towards risky activities: lucrative and dangerous activities such as gold panning, prostitution, drugs, terrorism etc.»*

*However, most often, all these subgroups are drowned under the single term «youth», which gives little chance to differentiate them in order to offer them adequate answers to their concerns.*

*Policies are defined and homogenous responses are proposed in their place, which makes many of these actions towards them fail. These young people need to be better known and understood before any intervention. Their diversity, their specificity and their backgrounds must be taken into account to define the types of support needed by young people».*

(Excerpt of the research report on PFPN youth, Niger)

## 1.1 : Clarify what we are talking about when we talk about rural youth and their relationship to the family farming.

As a result of this research, the first question of which dealt with the description of rural youth<sup>1</sup>, knowledge arose: ***we know more about rural youth and their relationship to the family farming.***

### **We say «young people», but there are several types of rural young people**

Rather than starting from an initial classification defined by sociologists or demographers, ROPPA opted to let itself be guided in this research by the way in which young people spontaneously presented themselves to each other in their exchanges in order to apprehend the way they define themselves.

#### **{1} The way young people introduce themselves**

*Analysis of the “self-introductions» of 135 of the 435 young people who participated in the focus groups reveals the traits of their identity that they value. It also provides insights into some of the characteristics of the rural youth population who participated in this research<sup>2</sup>.*

- They **all** introduced themselves by **name**, which individualizes them (unlike the elders, they do not present themselves as «sons/daughters of such» and do not define themselves by their filiation).
- They **all** also define themselves by their attachment to **rurality**, thus affirming their specific identity as «rural youth». They do this in three ways:
  - o specifying from the outset what their **living space** is: 93% live in rural areas on family farms. 63% are still in their parents' FT, 30% have left it either to join their husbands' or in-laws' FF (in the case of married girls) or to settle in the FF they themselves founded (in the case of married boys who have left their families). The remaining 7%

*1 First research question: WHO ARE THESE YOUNG PEOPLE? How do they define themselves spontaneously? The hypothesis is that there is not one, but several youths. The relationship of these various young people to family exploitation, to employment, to adults, to various types of socio-economic actors, their projections for the future will not be the same. - 2 These 135 young people were the ones who provided the most details on their pathways. This sample seems to be representative of the rural youth evolving in the environment of ROPPA member POs. It includes young people from agro-pastoralist, fishermen and agro-forestry environments, but does not include young nomadic pastoralists. Some marginalized youth may have been associated with the research, but they are not in a position of extreme marginalization (banditry, terrorism ...), or if they approached, it did not display it.*



are either young people continuing their studies in the city, or young people driven out of their families, girls employed as domestic servants in the city, or young people pursuing an adventurous life (especially on gold panning sites).

- o By specifying their **parents' occupation**: When they refer to their parents, it is from their profession. With a few rare exceptions (2% civil servants, military), these parents work in the agro-sylvo-pastoral or fisheries sector (farmers, etc.)
- o By presenting their **own activity**. In 84% of the cases, their main activity is in the ASPH sector, most often in the context of family farms. In the cases where the young person defines himself by a profession in this sector («I am a farmer, I am a market gardener, I am a poultry farmer...»),
- o He usually does it with pride<sup>3</sup>. 52% of these young people have several activities, and in the majority of cases, their complementary activities are carried out in the rural world (seasonal workers, charcoal burners, gold diggers, animators, etc.).
- Almost all (94%) define themselves in relation to their **level of education** by specifying their level of schooling or their illiteracy, which shows the importance that rural youth today attach to education. 90% of these young people have attended school (French or Franco-Arab school)<sup>4</sup>. 52% did not go beyond primary education, but 10% went on to higher education (HND, bachelor's degree, master's degree). 44% had to abandon their studies for family reasons (pregnancies, inability to pay school fees) or as a result of repeated failures (the high school diploma barrier seems to be the main factor in the skimming off of these rural youths).
- The **majority is defined by age** (84%). This age varies from 14 to 42 years (average age: 28 years), which confirms the extent but also the low relevance of the age criterion in defining youth (a 39-year-old Senegalese participant presented himself as a «young herder»). Some participants indicated that they occupy an elder position in the family.

*3 This seems less true in TOGO focus groups, where the profession of farmer is not described as rewarding, unlike that of farmer or market gardener, and where non-agricultural trades are highly valued (teacher, mechanic, motorcycle cab driver, driver, painter, hairdresser, scrap metal worker, shopkeeper, hairdresser, seamstress, etc.). However, the link to the land of these young Togolese people is still kept through their participation in the subsistence farming of their parents' FF.*

*4 The schooling rate of young people who participated in these groups is undoubtedly higher than the national average. Thus in Liberia, where 51% of young people aged 15 to 24 are illiterate, this is the case for only 14% of the young people who participated in the focus group (27% of girls, 0% of boys).*

- A little over **three quarters** highlight their **marital status** in their presentation of themselves (only 23% do not talk about it). 57% of those who mention this status are **married**. Several cases of early **divorce** following forced marriages are reported. 58% of girls and boys already have **one or more children** (between 1 and 7) and 30% are **single fathers or mothers**. The image of the family among these rural youth seems difficult to build.
- **20%** of these young people immediately highlight the **difficulties of life** they have faced: extreme poverty of the parents, illness, and death of the father or mother.
- **20%** of these young people report that they belong to an **association** (youth association, professional organization, farmer organization). On the other hand, some of them (especially young girls) spontaneously state that they do not belong to any organization. It will be confirmed that they are weakly organized in formal settings.



Analyses made from these interviews between young people from different ROPPA national platforms led them to highlight five factors that differentiate rural youth, refine and update the knowledge of rural West African youth today:

- ***within the same family, all young people are not «the same»: a distinction must be made according to the gender of the young person and his or her social position in the family***

The CNCR (Senegal) suggests defining youth «according to the principles of relations between «young» and «social elders»»; the FNFP (Niger) explains this definition, which «certainly depends on age, but also and above all on social position and the level of responsibility and decision-making within the family. Thus, a young person becomes an adult, assuming certain responsibilities, once married». In the same line of thought, for the CPF (Burkina Faso) «young people define themselves according to their age, but also according to their socially and culturally constructed position in relation to other generations and in relation to access to attributes and resources that give them the power to 'speak out'.

The status of **elder** or the status of **wife of the mother** in a polygamous family will be important here. By examining the life paths of these young people, we will see that the death of the father will have a direct impact on the young person's status in his own family, particularly for the eldest who then becomes the head of the family, but also for the heirs, who are unequally endowed according to their mother's status: polygamy is a major issue among many young people in rural areas today.

**Marriage** is a decisive and often brutal step marking the end of the transitional period between childhood and adulthood for young girls («a girl becomes a woman, once married, whatever her age» - FNFP Niger). This has become much less true for boys, who can continue to live with their wives for a long time in their parents' household and under their authority, which is often a source of conflict («Young people like to work on family farms, but when they reach a certain age after marriage, the fathers have to let them go because they also have to feed their families. But it's not easy» - a Malian mother in an adult focus group).

- **renewing the approach to the issue of schooling for rural young people**

*«Today there are more young people going to school than 10 years ago,» observes CNOP/FENAJER (Mali). The observation that access to school has become generalized, including for girls, whose level of schooling is nevertheless lower, is shared by the other platforms.*

*One of the novelties brought by this research is to highlight the increasingly frequent access of rural youth to university, including for some young girls: «schooling is no longer as decisive in the characterization of rural youth. There is a massification of education (French or Arabic), and rural areas have been enriched by young graduates from universities and higher education schools» (CNCR, Senegal). It will be seen that this rise in the level of schooling does not have the automatic effect of driving young graduates away from the family farming: most of them «plan to make agriculture a second activity, but several have already chosen to make it their main activity» (CNCR).*

*On the other hand, the content and quality of the education provided is the object of much criticism, particularly from adults, but also from young people who regret that it is not sufficiently professionalizing.*

*Specifically vocational training is often appreciated, sometimes criticized («some young people have not been able to complete their apprenticeship due to lack of means to honor the training contract and others, despite obtaining the diploma at the end of their apprenticeship, find it difficult to settle in because they lack the means of support» - CTOP, Togo), There is a differentiating factor and inequality between rural youth, who will find it more difficult to complete or continue their studies in the city, and urban youth from more privileged backgrounds who will have access to private institutions and pursue higher education abroad*

- **Beyond the age of the young person, take into consideration the generation to which he or she belongs**

It has long been known that biological age is not a relevant criterion for defining African youth, and it is now observed that «the transitional period of youth tends to be longer for boys» (CNCR, Senegal). The CNOP/FENAJER (Mali) draws an enlightening consequence from this, linked to the recent acceleration in the schooling of rural youth; it invites, because they have not been subject to the same influences, to distinguish two sub-categories among these young people: «there are those who are older and those who are younger. The mode of learning of the younger ones is different from the mode of learning of those who preceded them. Those who are older have a different vision than those who are not because of the advent of democracy or the development of new technology».

• **a differentiating factor whose influence is important: the economic, cultural and social capital of the family farming of origin**

Already the «self-introduction» of young people draws attention to the frequent reference to **the poverty** of the parents' family farms, which will have direct consequences on their ability to pay for the young people's schooling or to provide for their needs: we will see that it is a determining factor in the propensity of young people to «go on an adventure», often with the aim of supporting the family.

The **availability of land** in the school will also be a determining factor in whether or not the young people have access to land and whether or not they can stay in the village.

The head of the family must be **open-minded** enough not to make an opaque management of his farm, to share his resources with his children and to dialogue with them.

Analysis of the profiles of the young people who expressed themselves finally shows that most of those who declare belonging to a formal organization have parents who are themselves involved in POs and that they often benefit from the network of socio-political relations carried by these organizations.

It can be seen that the **quality of the relationship** between the young person and his/her parents is essential in the construction of the young person's personality and largely determines his/her attachment to the family farming. Both youth and adults in the various exchange groups organized in the framework of this research will emphasize this factor.

However, the **sector of activity** does not constitute a significant differentiation criterion because it is usually not definitive. The affiliation of the parents to one of the branches of the agro-sylvo-pastoral and fisheries sector - very rarely to another sector (army, civil service) - can be specified, but it is not a determining factor in the orientation of the young person, who often does not want to reproduce the family professional scheme.

The youngest still define themselves as «students». It is generally the older ones who define themselves from a profession (farmer, stockbreeder, poultry farmer...), however the majority do not speak of a profession but of «occupation» («what I am currently occupied with is ...») or source of income («I live from ...»), and most often they have several simultaneously, agricultural and non-agricultural. They are not idle, they are always looking for activities, but they may have long periods when they

cannot find any. They are not prejudiced by the sector in which they accept them: they take advantage of the opportunities that arise. When they talk about a profession, it is most often in terms of ambition to achieve («I would like to be a great businessman»; «I want to be an engineer»; «I will be a model entrepreneur») or disappointment («I would have liked to be a teacher»).

Some people want to get out of ethnic professional specializations and go beyond the traditional divides<sup>5</sup>.



*5 This aspect will be taken up in the booklet 2 (Views of young rural West Africans on family farms, Part 4: assets for the evolution of family farms)*

1.2 : Consider the origin and background of young people to understand their relationship with the family farming.

### **The influence of economic and socio-cultural conditions of the region**

In Senegal, Togo, Mali and Burkina Faso, where NPFs have organized focus groups in areas that are clearly contrasted from an agro-ecological, climatic, historical and socio-cultural point of view, we see that the socio-economic factors surrounding the family farming play a very different role in the relationship of young people to family farming depending on the specific features of each region.

#### **{2} Three different visions of agriculture among young rural Senegalese according to the region to which they come from**

- ***en CASAMANCE, a region with strong agricultural potential but scarred by the war, there is hope to be found again***

*«Le The real problem in agriculture today is its low profitability: this is what pushes some young people to work in other sectors of activity despite the low pay. Some young people see agriculture as an «old-fashioned profession traditionally practiced by our parents. To overcome this, we need a collective awareness. But if communication within the family is improved and if young people are involved in decision-making, agriculture will move forward.»*

- *Here the adults focus on a type of agriculture that guarantees food security, while young people who attended school focus on enhancing the value of agri-food production and its marketing.*

- ***in the center of the groundnut basin, despite the crisis in groundnut farming, an attachment to traditional values***

*«What we like in agriculture is the solidarity-based management of family farms, support in manpower and mutual aid within the family: for example, a young person works in Dakar to fund the family's agricultural activities in Mbadhiou, or in a family where two brothers can farm and one has a good yield and the other has a bad one, this does not prevent people from living together and sharing their income. It is necessary to perpetuate tradition and transmit family knowledge. Children educated in a family farming system adapt more quickly.*

*Young people from family farms are tougher, hardworking and have a greater sense of responsibility even in training and education because they know the pain that parents have faced in producing and paying for their education. But it is up to the young person to survive to keep the cap of double employment, i.e. to combine service activities and agricultural production».*

➤ *Here young people know that they cannot rely only on agriculture, and their parents do not encourage them to go into agriculture, but to train for better-paid jobs.*

- ***in the NORTH, in irrigated areas where agriculture has been modernized and the economy is dynamic, there is an optimism and a will to succeed***

*«All young people want to live in dignity, otherwise we will do everything to survive no matter what the means, even if we have to abandon FF and move towards agribusiness. All we want is to live like everyone else and have what the young people of the city have and even more. We do not want to have to envy anyone anymore. Young people are motivated to succeed. Therefore, if the young people can succeed in the FF, they will never leave their homeland. Therefore, we need to stop having biases about young people and try to support them and understand their motivations. Young farmers, breeders and fishermen have overcome the old quarrels that existed between parents working in different sectors. Young people are tending to become more and more entrepreneurs, which could lead to an important change in the FFs. Especially since there are more and more people in FFs who have done advanced studies.»*

➤ *Here young people and adults tend to favor a corporate farming model.*

(Excerpts from the report of focus group from Southern, Central and Northern Senegal – CNCR)



## Young People at the Crossroads of Two Eras

Rural youth are therefore still rooted in family farms. «The levels of Koranic or academic study do not influence this anchoring» (comments on the first synthesis of the NPF research reports).

However, this anchoring is not of the same nature as that of their parents: it is more **fragile**, because new constraints (greater land tensions, climate change, increased competition on markets, rising insecurity, loosening of family and community ties...) have weakened family farms of previous eras, but also, as we will see in the second booklet of this research, more **open** because it is possible for new generations to reinvent new forms of family farms, provided certain obstacles are removed. «According to the groups of young people we met, they see themselves as rural people who find themselves perpetually confronted with many difficulties. According to the testimonies collected, many young people feel that they are a point of fragility, but also a point of innovation in an agricultural system that has benefited previous generations but no longer offers opportunities for the empowerment and emancipation of young people» (research of CNOP/FENAJER, Mali).

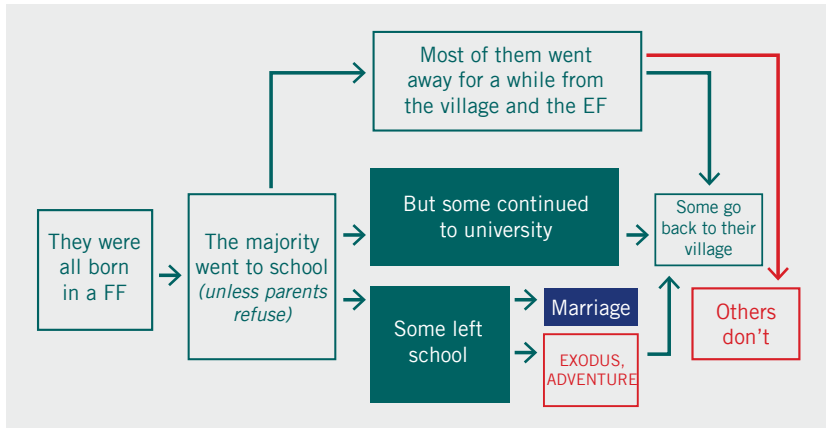
The critical issue of **generational conflict**, which is addressed in Booklet 2 of this research, is illuminated by this tension between two eras. «Young people and adults share the same space but live two different realities» (research CNOP/FENAFER, Mali).

## Young women and rural youth «to be»

Through their shared hopes, fears and uncertainties, the rural youth of West Africa who freely expressed themselves during the interviews conducted in the framework of this research give a moving image of themselves and it seems very insufficient to know these young people to try to lock them into static categorizations (by age, gender, level of education, employment ...) because their personalities are under construction and their destinies are not fixed: through their words, they appear as much as the fruit of the accidents of their history and the way they lead their lives as of the determinants inherited at birth. They can evolve towards the best as well as the worst.

These young people are «developing», and in order to understand their relationship with the family farming, it is necessary to try to apprehend them in a dynamic way, in the movement of their evolution. This is the reason why the second question of this research is to know their life paths by inviting them to share their «life stories» with each other»<sup>6</sup>.

By confronting these life stories in February 2020 during the regional sharing workshop in Nyéléni s(Mali), we were able to sketch out the main lines of these itineraries in the following way:



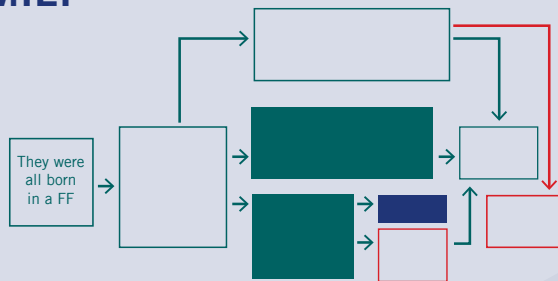
Exploring these routes will allow us to better know where these young people come from, where they have been, and how they fit or do not fit into the family farming today. Indeed, **West African rural youth are the product of their stories.**

*6 Research Question 2: WHAT ARE THEIR PATHWAYS? These pathways shape the identity, learning, frustrations and aspirations of these young people. They start from the family nucleus, go through the relationship - differentiated for boys and girls - to life and work in FF, in some cases through school, the city, adventure, migration, access to Internet, religious conversion, confrontation with danger, death, drugs or criminality, some significant encounters, marriage, discoveries, small trades ... It is also possible that some young participants have experienced an initiation.*

*Knowledge of these pathways makes it possible to identify the resources (symbolic, relational, cognitive and cultural, financial) that these young people have or are seeking to have access and the difficulties they face.*

# 02.

## A STORY THAT ALWAYS STARTS WITH THE FAMILY



Like the majority of rural youth, those who participated in this research were all born and raised on family farms in the agro-sylvo-pastoral or fisheries sectors. Through their exchanges, we can identify what marks them in this first stage of their lives.

The path of rural youth depends a lot on the social conditions of the young people in the FFS. Access to resources (productive, but also cognitive or affective) and the redistribution of these resources within the FF seem to be decisive in the path. (first summary of research reports).

## 2.1 : Family is the First Learning Space for Children

### **{3} It all starts in the family**

These different learnings and practices are those that guide their lives and take their source from the family or the environment of their childhood (CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).

*«I didn't have the opportunity to stay longer at school, but I learned a lot from my parents. They taught me agricultural production techniques since I left school and until now I have been working with them because for me the family comes first (unity is strength)»* (a young person from the Koulikoro region, CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).

In general, parents think that young people should be taught to work, it is a duty for every head of household (Senegal research). They are the first to instill in the young people the love for agro-sylvo-pastoral or fishing activities and to pass on to them the knowledge and values that will attach them to the rural world.

### **{4} The head of the household can encourage youth to enjoy their activities.**

We found this in a fish farming where a fisherman used to come daily with a young person who was in charge of driving the canoe, of catching fish, and it is from this association that the young man was able to learn about the notions of fishing. He knew that not just any time is the right time to go to the river to fish. He learned with this fisherman the kind of fish to catch and the other young people questioned him to find out how he did it. This shows the positive role that the adult fisher played in the love and learning of his son to one day take over the fish farm (FNFP research, Niger).

**{5} A young Togolese reproduces and adapts what he always used to see his mother do when he was a child.**

*« I was born in Gbato in the prefecture of Yoto, Coastal Region of Togo. I am the third son of a family of 09 children. Since I was born, my mother only knows how to do one activity. It is the processing of cassava into gari and tapioca. Unlike the other young people of my generation who followed and helped their fathers in the fields after school and on weekends, I assisted my mother, like my other brothers and sisters, in this cassava processing work. After we finished processing the cassava from our own field, mother was asked by the cassava farmers around us and even those a little far away to buy their produce. Before the year 2000, we did not have access to the cassava grater. So we used to grate the cassava by hand. With this activity, we were able to eat and take care of ourselves. Mother would pay for our school supplies. My brothers and I often received pocket money in return, and my brothers and I helped mother in her activity of processing the cassava into gari and tapioca.*

*(...) When I finished my studies, I went back to the same uncle who had encouraged me to continue them, to tell him that I would feel rather good about farming because, as I was about to complete my studies, one thought came to my mind, that of being able to develop my mother's cassava processing activities into gari, with innovations, of course. (...)”.*

*(excerpt from the story of Afantchawo KOU DASSE, told during the regional sharing workshop - see the full story in box {26} of booklet 2)*

However, they find the jobs their parents are doing to be boring.

### {6} Strenuous jobs

Liberian youth are not interested in low-value, labor-intensive commodity production, and indeed, one young woman said, *«I don't want to work hard,»* and another said, *«It makes people older sooner. Young people pointed out that when they get involved in agriculture, their hands are damaged, so they prefer to invest in transportation or other enterprises and have a quick financial return to meet their basic needs. If an alternative investment program that could provide employment opportunities were available in this community, they would forget about agriculture because the work is difficult* (FUN research, Liberia).

*“We want to develop agriculture to reduce drudgery. To move towards a more modern agriculture, using tools that are more advanced. We want family farming to be more profitable to help and finance all the activities of young people»* (interviews between young people of the Groundnut Basin - CNCR research, Senegal).

Parents note that their children are becoming less and less receptive to their authority: *«According to the mothers, some young people work with the parents in the family farming, they show respect for the elders, they participate in local community activities. But according to the fathers, only one-third of the young people help the parents on family farms, and they do not listen much to what their fathers tell them»* (Research CPF, Burkina Faso)

Passing on values and knowledge by parents is no longer the rule. *These parents experience enormous difficulties in taking care of their children's education* (CTOP research, Togo). Young people then learn by other means than through their families: *«Many girls say they have learned more with their friends than with their families»* (FNFP research, Niger).

## 2.2 : Youth experience close relationships with their families that can be happy or sad.

According to many young people, their respective families are all they have and they come first (CNOP/FENAJER research - Mali). They are the ones who feed them. They particularly appreciate the human dimension and the relationships of solidarity that unite its members (Senegal), but they are worried that they will deteriorate: what worries them is the social context in which the families are. Seniors no longer meet their expectations and the situation can be tense. (CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).

### {7} **Compromised family cohesion**

It often happens that there are permanent conflicts between the wives of the young brothers and between themselves as testified by young Daouda “Difficulties are a lot. Indeed, my little brothers refuse to work with me for family reasons (their wives’ refusal to collaborate with me), which does not favor communication within the family, each one pulling the string leading to frustration and loss of confidence. This clanism does not promote consultation and the full participation of family members in all the initiatives that are launched, because, he said, «I cannot promote these initiatives alone». Throughout these ordeals, Daouda persisted and is hopeful that he will be able to overcome these social difficulties by soliciting the goodwill and wisdom of the village to help him rebuild trust with his younger brothers.

This was also confirmed by the interviews with adults for whom clanism between family members has become a virus that has a great influence on social cohesion, which is an important dimension of family exploitation that young people should ensure the continuation of and where the transmission of social values should take place. In addition, because of the bad climate between them and the lack of their support, young people make their decisions without bothering to consult their parents.

(FNFP research, Niger).

## 2.3 : For most, they feel exploited by their families

On family farms, young girls and boys are considered «family helpers», who work but are little involved in major decision-making and are not (or only slightly) taken into account in the distribution of resources generated by the family farming (FNFP Niger research). They essentially provide most of the family labor, but do not receive appropriate remuneration when they participate in the family's agricultural or pastoral activities, even though they may receive «gifts» in kind or in cash. This raises the question of governance within the FFS (CNCR research, Senegal). Young rural women, in particular, «are often trapped in unproductive jobs, typically carry heavy loads of unpaid work within their households, and are victims of traditional beliefs about the type of work they should do and restrictions on their mobility. (CPF research, Burkina Faso).

These young people suffer from lack of consideration towards them, except when they provide financial support to their families, which encourages them to leave the family farming to look for money elsewhere (Togo research). Adults do not see them as important actors in their families or in society; they are marginalized in local communities and feel a sense of insidious injustice» (Guinea Bissau research);





## {8} A big frustration

### **Dependence**

*Agriculture is the key to development and decisions made for youth should not only be made by the old, but the old do not respect the young and do not make them responsible. **Older people use young people as staircases to get up to a higher level.** (interview in the groundnut basin - research from Senegal)*

*«**We are dependent on our parents who do not make us responsible.** Even young people who are in a couple are always under the control of their parents» (interview between young people from Imasgo, Central West Burkina Faso).*

Feeling of injustice (discussion among young people from Casamance)

- The farm managers make decisions but their implementation depends on young people. Young people are essential for the survival of the farms, so they feed the family. Therefore, they must be listened to when decisions are made. (Seydi Sonko)
- There are also difficulties between decision-makers and young people: some decisions are often made without the youth being involved either in the family or in governance (Ibrahima Sorry Djiba)
- We must focus on the fact that some parents refuse to give the young people their share of the harvest when it is rightfully theirs (Souleymane Sagna)
- “The real problem with FFs lies in the fact that young people are the ones who work and parents are the ones who take the harvest revenues. But the socio-cultural relations are such that we don’t even dare to give our opinion on the functioning of the family and the elders are always right in front of us: this makes us uncomfortable»
- “Jealousy and discrimination are a reality in FFs because some parents take the money collected by their daughters or sons for their personal expenses or even to marry another woman» (Mamy Aissatou)

(focus group Casamance, Senegal)

The exclusion of young people, particularly boys, in the redistribution of income from FF or in decision-making is a factor that determines the path that leads young people to leave agriculture and emigrate (first synthesis of research reports).

**{9} Excluded from its benefits, young people will leave the farm of their families, and in doing so weaken it even more**

*“I worked for a long time in the family without taking advantage of it; when I got married I received no help from anyone, which is one of the reasons why the family was abandoned. I would have liked to stay in the family for the work in the fields, and when I saw my friends leaving the village for other places I wondered, but I told myself that they were right somewhere». (son of a farmer who became a gold panner - CNOP/FENAJER research - Mali)*

*«From the point of view of young people, they have nothing of their own. Fathers make young people work, use the money and products from the farm to meet their needs, including marrying more women. These are such burdensome factors that create among rural youth the desire to migrate to find an additional activity to help cover unmet needs» (CNCR research, Senegal).*

*“Young people do not find their place in FFS because, after the harvest, they are far away from all sales and profits. This frustrates them. So, the young people in their villages are not interested in agriculture, but rather in studies, which means that farm managers are obliged to have employees to look after their fields (analysis during exchanges in northern Senegal by a 26-year-old rural youth who is preparing his master’s degree in sociology/criminology).”*

2.4 : For many of them, from childhood, they experienced difficult living conditions in the village and the burden of poverty in their families.

« *Poverty can make it difficult for parents to provide a daily meal* » (a student in ninth grade in Batié, southwestern Burkina Faso). The family farming does not allow their parents to have money all year round. It does not allow them to cover some of the family's needs. The family farming only covers primary needs, but when the children grow up, it does not cover other needs (CTOP research, Togo).

In addition, parents do not have enough income to help their children with school fees at university or vocational training schools.



### **{10} Young people from Tiano (central-western Burkina Faso) discuss the poverty of their families' farms.**

All the boys say that there is lack of financial means to support all the needs of EF and the family

- *«Poverty is so disgraceful when your neighbor's children are able to support my FF and my family, especially at the beginning of the agricultural season».*
- Zongo Lassané says, *«The harvest is not enough for my family. We have enough land, and it is on the same land that our father worked that we are still farming. The family has grown very big. Working with coal allows me to have a little more money which allows me to take care of the family».*
- Nignan Talibou adds: *«as the crops do not sell well, so we have only 3 ha (which is not enough), I learned the trade of tailor and I manage with that to support my FF and the family».*
- Kahg Boureima: *«The lack of financial means compels me to go out to look for something to feed the FF and the family, because the land has become poor, you need a lot of fertilizer to earn something. Even if you get maize, the price is too low; you don't make any profit.»*
- Kadio Taminou acknowledges *«The sale of cattle is very beneficial (1 well-fed and healthy beef, you can have 250,000 to CFA F 350,000), but there are a lot of illnesses and we don't have enough financial resources to treat them and develop this activity.»*

(focus group Tiano, Centre-Ouest Burkina Faso)

## 2.5 : They can experience the hardships of life very early in their families

Most of the young people mention specific moments or particular situations that have influenced their paths: the death of parents calling for the resumption of farming, illness, forced marriage or pregnancies for young girls, the misunderstanding following the arrival of a new wife in a polygamous family, the precarious situation of the family, etc. (CNCR research, Senegal). The death of the father is very frequently evoked as a major event that will mark the young person's destiny

### {11} The shock caused by the death of the father

#### **Deprived of support**

*«When I started the Franco-Arab studies, my father died and a year later my mother also died. I did not have anyone to pay for my studies, so I decided to give up for lack of means and go to Bamako to look for work as an ice-water seller, then Kati Coro as a worker in a market garden. I was paid 15,000 f/month. This adventure was an eye-opener for me» (young Malian, 19 years old, Sikasso).*

#### **the young person must take on new responsibilities**

Since the death of his father as a child, young Daouda (Niger) has been struggling to earn an income to support his family. *«All I know is that I was born into a fishing family. I am 27 years old and I lost my father at a young age. Now I live with three of the younger brothers and **I am the farm manager**».*

*«I work in the fishing sector and I go to the neighboring village where fish farming is practiced; I sell the fish and the smoked fish in the communities. I used to live in Monrovia but I returned here because my father died and my mother is old. **I had to come back to take care of my mother.** My husband has been in hospital for 4 years now and I have to work harder to support my mother and my husband in hospital» (Young woman from Liberia)*

**this event often causes a shift in the young person's life path**

What can also influence the paths of young people is the death of the guardian. Especially the deaths of heads of families. So young people **are forced to change their activities to serve the family** (panel of the regional sharing workshop).

*“Even after my father’s death in 2004, I had not experienced any difficulties in continuing my education. However, this event influenced the choice of my university career. At first, I had wanted to go to law school and become a lawyer. Seeing that this was going to be a long journey, I returned to the History Department with the intention that I would become a teacher very early on and make up for the disappearance of my father with my financial support to the family»* (excerpt from the story of Afantchawo Koudasse, Togo).

*“My father passed away in 2014, on the eve of my bachelor’s degree exam. My father’s cancer treatment had financially weakened the family, having become the manager of this family farming by constraint, and since **I am the oldest member of my family, I had no choice but to take on this challenge.** The dilemma was whether I would continue my education or work on my father’s farm. After some time to think about it, I decided to pursue both. I set to work.* (Excerpt from the story of Sekongo Zié Zoumana, Ivory Coast)

*« After the death of my parents, **I had little brothers and sisters; I had to leave school to start sharecropping to support my brothers.**”* (Young man from Lama-Tessi, Togo).

**loss that disrupts family life at the time of sharing**

A young man testified about his own case, recalling that because of the death of his father, he found himself responsible for his three younger brothers who worked on the family farming like him. Initially, there was an agreement on management because the father coordinated the activities, but after his father's death, his younger brothers' wives pushed them to demand a division of the farm's assets. ***This is how problems began to emerge*** in the family and it was the basis for the breakdown of social cohesion. Thus, the dialogue that existed with the father did not resist after his death because of the brothers' wives who did not share the same social values. This automatically had an impact on the family farming (presentation of the Niger research during a panel discussion at the regional sharing workshop).









**{12} The story of a Talibé (student of Koranic School)**

*«My name is Adi Bah. I was born in Sanankoro and I live in Ké-Macina. I am 18 years old, single and unemployed. I am a talibé student; I am learning to read the Koran. I am begging in the village. I have no friends. During the winter, we work in the master's rice field. We go up to 15 kilometers to look for wood to cook and make fire to have light to study at night. And when you refuse, the Koranic master punishes you. Apart from the parents, in our work it was not easy to find help. My right foot has been hurting for more than 8 years and it has not been able to heal. I would like in the coming days to be a Koranic master. When a student behaves well in these studies, his future is secure. I thank the people who took this initiative to take interest in us talibés. And I hope that these surveys will lead to something, not like the previous ones.»*

(Interviews with youth in the Segou region of Mali)

Illiteracy and low schooling are found especially among girls and influence their path (first synthesis). However, young girls find that there is a change in behavior among parents who are increasingly interested in their future by sending them to school. Many believe that «other generations have not had this opportunity» (CPF research, Burkina Faso). Access to general education is tending to increase among rural youth, and the characterization of young people according to whether they are in or out of school seems somewhat outdated (CNCR research, Senegal). What is new is the appearance, with the generalization of schooling for rural youth, of long schooling paths, up to university.

### 3.1 : The school record of rural youth is often difficult, but deeply impacts the youth

Parents very often do not have enough income to help their children with school fees at school, university, or vocational training schools. A young person from Tiano (Central West Burkina Faso) explains: *«I am waiting to sell my sesame and go to Koudougou to continue my university studies. These difficulties seem to be particularly acute for young girls»*

#### {13} Working in the city to pay school fees

- **In Mali:** *“After my first degree in my village, I went on to study in the city, at my maternal aunt’s house. I still remember what it means to fight to be able to study in the city. I have bad memories of that time and remember that the main challenge I faced was the food problem. I didn’t have enough to eat and could only see my family in the village after long periods of time»* (Sounoukou Diarra, Mali - testimony at the regional sharing workshop).
- **In Niger:** *There are young girls in Niger who are forced to engage in small businesses to earn income and often contribute to family expenses or pay for supplies for their own education. There is the example of a young girl who sells agricultural products such as mangoes and oranges to pay for her studies (FNFP research, Niger).*
- **In Senegal:** *“I used to go to Gambia during the vacations to work as a housewife and then buy supplies when classes opened. It was painful for me. I continued my studies until the fifth grade when I decided to stop going to school»* (Fatoumata Diémé, a young Casamance girl orphaned before her birth - research Senegal South).

The children can also be entrusted to a guardian or a relative and suffer from abuse, like this young Malian girl who is in her 7th year living with her aunt: *«According to her explanations, she often goes to school without breakfast and also suffers a lot of torture. During the weekends, she works in her aunt’s market garden and does not benefit from anything at harvest time. She is not listened to when she wants to exchange ideas with her. All her actions are considered bad»* (CNOP/ FENAJER research, Mali).



### 3.2 : School changes the young person's life, especially the girl's life

Several of the girls interviewed said they were proud to be in school, believing that it is the way to learn first, but also to be independent and live far from their parents, who deprive them of certain freedoms. Schooling also changes the relationship between newlyweds; for example, Rahina, a young 21-year-old Nigerien woman, a student in her 12th grade class, considers herself luckier than Rahina, a young 21-year-old Nigerien woman, a student in her 12th grade class, considers others who do not attend school: *«I help my husband with his accounts, I keep him and often manage his money. So we manage our family farming together»*, (PFPN research, Niger).

Among the young people met are young boys and girls with high levels of education (from secondary school to university level). Some pupils show their sense of satisfaction by telling their life story: *«going to school has allowed me to better frame/direct my ambitions»*. *«Studying saved me from a life on the street.»I am fighting to study so that I can help my family. I realized that only education can make a difference for me.»*

### {14} The obstacle course of a young Nigerien fighter, Aminatou Garka Mahamadou

*"I am now thirty-seven years old. Going to school has allowed me to get a job and to be financially stable despite the difficulties I faced: I think I can have the life I want because I went to school, but I had a fighting career when I was in school. I still remember that frustration and lack of financial resources were frequent problems during a good part of my studies. I know what it means to fight to study, but I always kept the hope that one day I would overcome these obstacles because I knew that studying would make me a better person and make my future better too.*

*After high school in an institution close to my neighborhood, I continued my higher education in a Rural Animation Training Institute. Suddenly my mother died when I was twenty-five years old. I then had to fight for resources to be able to continue my higher education. I started income-generating activities that I had seen my mother carry out since I was a child (making scarves, braids, making juices from local products, etc.), and I was able, by selling these products in the neighborhood and at school, to pay my school fees (schooling, supplies, transportation, clothing)."*

(excerpt from the story told by Aminatou at the regional sharing workshop - see full story in Box {22} of Booklet 2)

### {15} The building of success in agriculture of Ali Ouattara, a young Burkinabe, through his vocational training path

*"My name is Ali OUATTARA and I am 27 years old, married with one child; I am a young agricultural producer living in Farakoba, a village attached to the municipality.*

*I hold the Lower School Certificate (BEPC) and a second grade level. After passing my BEPC (2014), **I oriented myself towards the agricultural sector by enrolling in a training center** where I obtained a Certificate of Professional Qualification (CQP) **with a major in agricultural farmer** (2 years).*

*At the end of this training in 2016, I settled on an area of one hectare in order to implement the knowledge I had learned. My father gave this plot of land to me.*

*I started producing corn because this speculation is advantageous in terms of productivity and marketing. My eagerness to work and the results obtained in terms of yield encouraged my father to increase my production area by 5ha.*

However, I quickly faced my low capacity to operate the 6 ha. To overcome this situation, ***I took the initiative to create an association of young farmers from the same training center as me.*** (10 young people). Upon obtaining the receipt for the creation of the association, we approached the Hauts Bassins regional council to ask for material and financial support. After studying our request, the council responded favorably to our request by providing each member with a plough, inputs and draught animals. This support was estimated at one million CFA francs. We also approached the Regional Chamber of Agriculture of the Upper Basins (CRA/HB) which put us in touch with the Chamber of Agriculture of Lozere. This partnership consisted of South-North/North-South study tours.

Since January 2020, ***I joined the mentoring program developed by the Confédération Paysanne du Faso.*** I am followed by a mentor who is a confirmed farmer leader in his field and who is in charge of sharing with me his experience in the agricultural field, to equip me, to inform me about opportunities. He is a privileged interlocutor for the development of my activities.

“At the beginning of my installation, my comrades of the village did not believe in my activity. They considered the return to agricultural activity as a failure.

In 2018, the Ministry of Agriculture nominated me as a young model in my region. Currently I am farming an area of 10 ha, of which 8 ha are devoted to maize production and 2 ha to banana production. During the national youth forum, the national radio and television of Burkina made a big report on my farm and my activities, and orders came from everywhere. People have also called on my services to set up banana fields. Today I am able to support my father through the income from the farm and pay for my brothers' studies.”

(story written and told by Ali Ouattara, Burkina Faso, during the regional sharing workshop)

### 3.3 : Parents push their children to study so that they do not experience the same living conditions as they do

School, explains Omar Diatta (Casamance), has meant that no one wants his son to stay at home. **The parents pray that their children do not become farmers.** They are the ones who do not encourage their children to be farmers. He himself encouraged his daughter to train as a farmer, but at first, his mother was reluctant.

#### **{16} An Ivorian father who advises his son not to interrupt his higher education**

*(...) At one point, things started to get complicated for me; my results at the university department (SHS) started to drop. I appealed to my father and said to him:*

*- «Dad, what if I stopped studying to follow your farm?»*

*My father replied negatively:*

*- My son, you are mistaken; this field is very complex because we are not accompanied by our States; banks refuse to grant us loans on the pretext that agriculture is not a stable activity, that everything can change from one moment to another; those who accept to help have a very high interest rate». He added: «it is better to continue your studies, to have a paid job; you can use this money to develop the family farming».*

*I had no choice but to work harder to continue my higher education.*

*Young Sekongo Zié Zoumana is now preparing a doctoral thesis in archaeology at the University of Abidjan. At the same time, he has transformed his father's poultry farm from 4,000 to 16,000 laying hens. (excerpt from the story Sekongo Zié Zoumana, Côte d'Ivoire, written and told at the regional sharing workshop - see full story in Box {28} of Booklet 2)*



### 3.4 : Problem of school dropouts

It should be noted that 44% of the 135 young participants in this research who provided information about their studies had to interrupt their schooling. 12% of these young people went all the way to the final year of high school, but more than half of them dropped out of school because of repeated failures at the high school diploma.

#### Academic failure

##### **{17} A young woman from Casamance who has failed her high school diploma three times**

Mariama Dianké Sonko was born and has been living Mahmouda Cherif (Diouloulou/Ziguinchor) near her parents. She attended the elementary school in her village and passed the CFEE (final elementary school examination). Then she was sent to the Boukott Sud secondary school in Ziguinchor where she obtained her BFEEM (junior high school final examination). Being part of a modest family, she worked as a maid during vacations to buy school supplies and clothes. She continued until the final year of high school and sat for the final secondary school examination twice without success. She got married in 2008.

She stayed for two years without doing anything but taking care of her household and during this time, she gave birth to her first child. The following year she repeated the final secondary school examination and failed for the third time. She remained seven long years without activities. After that, she began to become more interested in her agricultural activities (broiler chicken breeding, sesame cultivation) and joined the AJAC (Association of Young Farmers of Casamance). She was trained in the processing of local products (bissap, bouye, made, ginger). She intends to continue with her husband her agricultural activities and wishes to set up a processing unit of local products.

(CNCR research South Senegal)

### Lack of means and life accidents

A large proportion of the young people interviewed justify their current situation by the fact that they were forced to drop out of school very early because, due to their poverty, their parents (farmers) did not have enough means to take care of them. They were forced to stop school in order to work and support their families. *“It was difficult for the family itself to find food, let alone finance my studies”* (young Malian gold panner, focus group from the Sikasso region).

We have mentioned the **death of the father or mother, illness**, among other reasons for dropping out of school.

There are also **administrative** difficulties (paper problems) or the **child’s lack of interest in studies** from which he or she expects nothing: time is no longer sufficient, most training courses have no outlet and activities are planned without objectives. As a result, the young person, before the end of his training or the beginning of his activity, wants to become rich quickly without going through the important stages of life. Moreover, when expectations are not met, most make bad choices (CNOF/FENAJER research, Mali).

### Early marriages and pregnancies outside of marriage

However, the most frequently described reasons for abandonment for young girls are **early marriages** and pregnancies outside of marriage, which can be a cause of conflict with parents, but are also events that often make young girls more mature. For example, in Liberia, where they are common among the working class, two-thirds of households reported pregnancy (and related childcare) as the main reason for girls dropping out of school. Nevertheless, some girls said that early pregnancy was an important stage in their lives where they learned valuable lessons (FUN research, Liberia).

These pregnancies **outside of marriage** may also cause the boys who made the girls pregnant to leave school and the village to escape adult disapproval (CTOP research, Togo).

## {18} Distress of Young Single Mothers

### ***Hope for a second chance***

Aïcha is a bubbly girl who was in eighth grade in a high school in the locality of Farakoba. This locality is located 10 km from Bobo-Dioulasso, the second largest city in Burkina Faso. The introduction of new technologies, the opening of cinemas and video clubs, and the increased interest of young girls in soap operas propel Aïcha into a world of freedom, drifting and will bring about a change in her behavior.

A year before obtaining her high school diploma, she got pregnant. She is the victim of an unwanted pregnancy resulting from the association with local boys. The direct consequence of this pregnancy is her dropping out of school. She sees her dreams fly away from her. Her future then takes on the dark color of uncertainty.

Today she has become aware and responsible for her current situation. She is convinced that not all is lost for her and would like life to give her a second chance. Therefore, she wants to resume her studies in order to realize her biggest dream: to be an executive secretary one day (Burkina, told during the regional sharing workshop).

### ***Disavowal***

*«I am 21 years old. I have three children. I went to school in the city at my uncle's house. I got pregnant and my uncle sent me back to my parents in the village. I dropped out of school in the fourth grade and have been out of school for six years. The father of my three children and I are no longer together. My parents are the ones who help me. I am currently in the production of rice, vegetables and charcoal» (T\_Girl F. Liberia)*

*«I was attending school and dropped out because of a pregnancy. I dropped out in grade 2. I have two children but the father does not provide support for the children. I am currently in a vocational sewing apprenticeship school to support my children. I am 22 years old and my children do not go to school» (Rebecca S., Liberia).*

### ***Family shame***

“I am a farmer. I am 18 years old and single with children. I am a 5th grade student; I dropped out after taking the child’s pregnancy. My parents got angry with me (neither of them went to school), and since then I have not been able to go back to school. I am in rice farming and cassava production. (Esther F., Liberia)

« Today I regret having dropped out of school, my daddy hasn’t forgiven me so far...when I have a problem with my husband, I can’t call him to my daddy’s house, and he doesn’t want to hear anything from me. After giving birth, I wanted to go back to school, but my father-in-law objected and the girlfriends also advised me not to do it because it is shameful. «(Young woman from Vogan, Togo).



### 3.5 : There is uncertainty about the opportunities that the school opens up, which encourages some graduates to return to agriculture

Young people who have attended up to a certain level and managed to complete their studies find that in the **tertiary sector, employment opportunities are no longer plentiful**, and that most service or administrative jobs are only accessible with training that is very often provided in the city. (Research PFPN, Niger and CNOP/FENAJER, Mali). In the focus group of Tiano (Central West Burkina Faso), a young Burkinabe testifies as follows: «*For this year's civil service competitions, for **5,000 places, we had more than 1,600,000 candidates**. I am afraid and I doubt for my future*».

For these unemployed young graduates, the situation is critical: the longer unemployment lasts, the more families turn away from them and the problem of young graduates has become a burden for them. They must therefore fend for themselves: some will seek to create their own jobs in the city, try their hand at adventure or become marginalized, but others will return to the village and develop activities related to the agro-sylvo-pastoral sector (CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).



### **{19} Two testimonials from rural youth who have completed higher education**

#### ***a Malian teacher who earns more in agriculture than in teaching***

*«I am 39 years old, married and father of four children. I was born in Dombila and live there with my family. I am the son of a farmer and I went to school up to the higher level. School has taught me a lot in my life but also the people I have met during my school and professional career. Today I am a teacher in my village, but it is in agriculture that I earn the most. It is not only for a question of money that I till the land, but it is also an inheritance that I love very much».*

(Testimony of Naman KEÏTA, focus group in Koulikoro, Mali).

#### ***a young Senegalese company executive who shows his father that he can earn more in poultry farming than as an employee***

*« After my higher education in administration and business development, I went to companies to put teaching theories into practice until I became an administrative and human resources assistant for a local company.*

*At the same time, I was thinking a lot about agricultural entrepreneurship. To do so, I started to practice poultry farming, which was not my family's activity, but which I thought could be complementary and diversify the activities of the family farming. This sequence of my life is very important because it allowed me to have a place in the family farming after having been introduced to it.*

*Before deciding outright, I took the time to compare and demonstrate to my father the difference between my salary in the company and what I earned with the hens. I managed to convince him to build on his land so that I would have the (local) resources to produce on a large scale.”*

(Excerpt from the story of Alioune Badara Dioungue, President of the CNCR Youth College - see full story in box {19} of booklet 2).

This tendency for young people with higher education to return to agriculture is still exceptional, but it is a **new fact** that is highlighted by this research.

### 3.6 : The education system is more and more criticized

Both some youth and their parents express criticism about the modern school, but the criticism is not always the same.

#### {20} The quality of education has declined

##### **Observation by youth**

*“After the CEP (end of primary education examination), young people **remain ignorant**. School confused us a lot”*

*«I believe that **school weakens youth**: the young person who has been to school wants to win before he comes to suffer.”*

(excerpt from focus group Burkina Faso)

*Les Young people think that school has changed, that there is not enough rigor in school, in teaching and also in the evaluation of students «so much so that even in the exam if you are asked questions, if you manage to be in the logic or in the context, if the question is at 3 points you can have at least 2». They also say that the curriculum has changed.*

(CTOP report, TOGO)

##### **Observation by Adults**

The privatization of education, the resignation of parents from children's education, the anarchic recruitment of teachers, have contributed to the degradation of training. **Diplomas today are only papers, which everyone can get by paying.** Quantity has overpassed quality because if all children can be or are in school, few of them manage to complete a cycle. Scholarships to study abroad were initially intended for the most deserving pupils and students, today they only benefit the children of the wealthy (directors, ministers, high councilors, high-ranking officers of the Malian army).

(research CNOP/FENAJER Mali).

**{21} Training does not automatically give access to a trade.**

**Youth disappointments**

Young people complain that curricula are not adapted to their concerns or expectations. They criticize the current training programs for not taking into account vocational training for professional trades.

(FNFP research, NIGER)

*«I graduated from the University of Cotton with a Bachelor's degree in General Agriculture. I am 31 years old with two children and am in the production of oil palm, rubber and vegetables, but I am currently forced to drive a cab to survive.»*

(Cooper Sackie, focus group Liberia)

«I was trained as a midwife, but I do «orange money». I sell small materials. (...) I regret my choice of training as a midwife. I cannot find even a simple internship and others take advantage of you during the internship. They are in need but as they find trainees, they do not recruit. Do not mention the midwife's field to me! «

(Ouma Cisse, 28 years old, married and mother of 3 children, focus group of Ségou region, Mali)

**Adult disappointment**

Every parent's desire to see their child work in the Public Service is a challenge, hence the enrolment of young children in school - all resources are mobilized so that the child can go to school until completion of the elementary, secondary and university cycles.

However, disappointment is great when the child returns home without having had a job...

(CPF research, Burkina Faso)

*«The law compels us to send children to school, we don't have anyone to help us in the fields, and the expenses only increase as they go to school. School becomes very expensive for us poor people. Either we take them out of school because there is no more money, or we are forced to sell everything we have to support them and when they finish their studies, they are out of work. As a matter of fact I have my child who passed his BEPC (final junior high school diploma) 2 years ago, but he is now in the gold panning business.»*

(Sawadogo Mounimi, focus group of parents of Tiano – West-Central of Burkina Faso)

Many of the parents who participated in the adult focus groups in this research also blamed the education system for increasing the disconnect between them and their children.



## **{22} Modern education on trial by Parents**

### ***Education system devalues the family farming in the eyes of the children***

Most of those who do not complete the cycle no longer value their parents' activities. (CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali). When the child has studied, even if later he is excluded from the school system or even attending school, it is very difficult for him to return to the land or to follow his father's work. Young people increasingly cultivate a complex about their parents' activities, which they think are demeaning, dirty, outdated, humiliating and not sufficiently remunerative. They are even ashamed of their parents' jobs.

(FNFP research, Niger)

### ***Modern school instills values that take children away from their parents***

Fathers think that they are the first youth educators by sending them first to the white school, but some young people do not want to listen to them when they come back from school, (CPF research, Burkina Faso).

La The situation of adult disrespect, for the parents, started with the school. For them, young people are taught Western civilization, which according to them does not work well at home, «When white people vote their laws at home and it doesn't work, they transpose it to us. And we apply it, starting with the youngest». They blame the African authorities who facilitate this situation and do nothing to preserve African values.

(CTOP research, Togo)

So, they advocate a review of school curricula and make various suggestions, all of which are aimed at better taking into account the realities of family farming, with an emphasis on the issues of transforming production systems.

### {23} Reviewing the education system

*«Diakit  Daouda, Zaliatou, Alizeta as well as Ido Kassoum think that the education and training system for young people must be reviewed so that they leave school with a job that will allow them to ensure a better future for their families, parents and the community»*

(focus group of adults from Tiano, Burkina Faso).

It is now necessary to give young people a more technical schooling, to give them a know-how that will allow them to improve the operating conditions of FFs. Agricultural and rural training must correspond to the specificities of the farming profession. Most farmers are multi-skilled (diversity of production, combination of livestock and crops) and often multi-skilled (processing, carpentry, masonry, etc.). This means that training must include dimensions related to rural craftsmanship, so that young people can earn income during the dry season. Beyond technical knowledge, sustainable integration of young people also requires skills in literacy, management, health, environment, etc.

(CNCR research, Senegal)

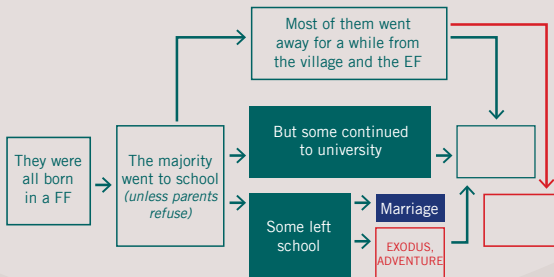
They wish to interest young people in the land and ensure the future of family farms, to bring back school fields and insist on civic and moral education. It is necessary that at school young people be taught the love of working the land. *«Before there were school fields, it must come back. This reinforces the children's knowledge of agriculture.*

(CTOP research, Togo)



# 04.

## A TIME AWAY FROM THE FAMILY FARMING



Young people tell how new stages in their lives have followed the transition to school. In most cases, they will *take young people away, definitively or for a time*, from their parents' family farming and frequently from their village. They will most often be opportunities for new encounters and discoveries.

It will be observed that these times of distance from the family or village are not new in the life course of young rural of West Africa: young pastoralists have always known them through transhumance, young fishermen through fishing campaigns, young girls when they married, young navétanes through seasonal migrations. These times of remoteness were perfectly integrated into family life and planned by the heads of families.

What is new in the «stories» that these young people told themselves is, on the one hand, the appearance of long-term schooling (up to university) which lengthened their stays in the city, and on the other hand, the evolution of exodus and migration, which have become more perilous and increasingly concern young girls.

New fields of reference have appeared with the new communication technologies that give a greater opening to the world and that escape from parents, and families have largely lost control of the new forms of mobility that have appeared and of the escape to other worlds or to their children's imaginations.

Among these, drug use among rural youth is known to have taken on a disturbing importance, but there was very little mention of it in these interviews, as if the participants wanted to avoid a hot topic. Similarly, there was little discussion of new communication patterns or familiar social networks.



## 4.1 : A traditional reason for keeping girls away from their parents' family farming: marriage.

« ***Our youth is abandoned when we get married;*** marriage is a real evolutionary stage in our lives,» explained one young participant in the Niger focus group, while another said: «Here, apart from going to the market every week and doing housework, there is no other alternative but marriage. **Besides, all our lives we are trained only for that.** «Look carefully, when you are at your husband's house you will do this or that»: that is what our mothers tell us all day long. We have very little contact with our dads. Except that they send us to do small tasks».

Several young girls who were given in early marriage, often against their will, participated in this research. They deplored this situation because they had been forced to leave school to go to their husbands' homes. Some found support in marriage, however, because their husbands helped them develop their activities, but most suffered the consequences of early or forced marriage, and the inconveniences associated with this type of marriage (early motherhood, obstetric fistula, miscarriages, difficulties encountered in their in-laws). Overall, what we must remember from the stories of these young girls is a feeling of suffocation, lack of training, lack of employment and even lack of prospects. Many have had to abandon certain activities (such as agriculture) to care for their young children

(research reports by the FNFP, Niger, and the CNCR, Senegal).

### {24} Married against their will

« *Often we get married in our absence or without consulting us*»  
(focus group girls Niger).

« *I'm 17 years old, I'm in upper sixth. My parents have helped me until now in my studies. **I was married to a man I did not love,** the marriage was done without my consent and my husband is a delinquent. My mother-in-law shows me all kinds of anger because my mother is sick. I am shocked. I do not know what to do and I often feel like abandoning the family to come to Bamako. But my mother's situation worries me a lot so I can't abandon the family.*».

(focus group from the Ségou region, Mali)

« I'm 20 years old, I have a child, and I didn't go to school. I was adopted by my aunt and married to her co-wife's disabled son. He cannot farm. I came to Bamako to work as a maid and to get the cooking utensils for the wedding, but at the same time my aunt got sick, my utensil money was used to treat her. Unfortunately, she passed away. I had no more money to face my wedding, which was postponed. My husband did not give me for cooking and I could not make a good soup anymore. His family members started rejecting my food and **I was later expelled from my husband's family with my child and then excluded from the village.** My aunt who was my hope is no more. I have no means even to feed my child. I will return to Bamako to work as a maid and feed him».

(focus group Segou region, Mali)

« I am 28 years old. I am divorced and mother of 3 children. I was born in Doubabougou and I currently live with my parents in Sébédiana. I like to be financially independent and have something to do to be able to take care of my children. I do not like my current situation, i.e. single mother with children. I was married to a man without my consent. I was my husband's third wife and we lived in the Sarakolé area in Kayes, and **I suffered a lot because my in-laws and I did not get along at all.** This marriage taught me a lot as a woman not to involve children in marriage against their will. The problem I had was first with my family, even though they supported me. It is important to know that being divorced and coming back to live with the family with the children is not always accepted in our community. I did not go to school but I want my children to be able to go to school. What blocks me is the lack of means to develop my activity. I am afraid because of poverty that I won't be able to provide schooling for my children ».

(focus group from the region of Koulikoro, Mali).

However, most of the girls interviewed prefer to marry and live elsewhere rather than go to school. «I've seen too much of my village. Always the same faces, the same words, the same sounds, the same tastes, the same gestures. It is enough! **I'm going to go far away from here through**

**my marriage,**» says Mariama Boubacar, 18 years old, who is getting ready to get married. Another participant in the same focus group declares: **«We become freer with our husbands, who trust us more, make us responsible and take our opinions into account. This is not the case with our parents.»**

(FNFP research, Niger).

Still, it is necessary to find a «good husband,» as this 17-year-old Malian girl hopes: *«I wish to have a husband who will be able to understand and respect me and who will know how to use the income from his farm well. I am afraid of shame and misunderstanding in my village. What I am waiting for is a good life together».*

(focus group from the region of Segou, Mali)

### {25} Meeting the man of her life

*« I am 19 years old and married without children. I was born in Klanabougou in the rural municipality of Dombila cercle of Kati. I currently live in Kégnéba in the Kati cercle with my husband. I went to school but I did not go far because of my parents' lack of means. I stayed with my family while others went to school. However, I thank God today for allowing me not to give up. Doing something is always better than doing nothing.*

**Being a young girl especially in a rural area is not easy.** *Once you leave school and no matter what the cause, parents propose marriage and you have no choice. Therefore, to delay this a little bit, as soon as I left school I went with my sister to do the small business by her side. A few years after I learned the workings of the trade, I decided to work on my own. What was most useful was that this activity allowed me to discover the world around me: during this activity, I got to know many people and discovered many places, and it was afterwards that I got married. The most precious thing **was to meet the man of my life with whom I live today.** What I love first is my family and to earn my living in this business without living at the expense of others. However, what I hate the most is failure.*

*I see myself in the future as a successful entrepreneur who will make my family, my community and the youth in general proud. To do so, I would like to have the means and the information*

*about my activity and in this case, not only will I succeed, but I will create jobs for other young people who are in the same situation as I experienced».*

(Focus group of Koulikoro, Mali)

*« I am 30 years old. I studied up to the 9th grade and got married in 2005 at the age of 17. Today I am the mother of 5 children. **What made my marriage easier is that my husband is sympathetic.** Whenever I have opportunities, I take advantage of them with him. Even my financial means are shared with my husband. My only problem is the fact that I am a development worker and a housewife at the same time, which requires a lot of sacrifice, especially since I live in the same compound as the wives of my husband's brothers; when you return from the activities you are compelled to share your per diems with them so that they can help you with the household chores when you are away ».*

(Focus group Northern Senegal).

However, several participants in this research urged their sisters not to be satisfied with their situation: *«As girls, we young girls need to be more active, stop having the only dream of becoming married. In addition, we need more respect for young girls because we do almost all the work on family farms. In the GPFs, too, it is necessary that older women give way to young people, while at the same time supervising them. Young people must also be able to negotiate with the elders».*

(focus group Nord Senegal)

*« People must stop considering married girls as women even if they are 18 years old.»*

(focus group Casamance, Senegal).



## 4.2 : A Recent Reason for Removal: Continuing Education Elsewhere

12% of the participants in this research have left their families to continue their studies in the city, in a high school or university (all of them did so in their country, except one who benefited from a long-term internship at the Songhai Regional Center in Porto Novo thanks to ROPPA).

### {26} Afantchawo Koudasse's academic career before returning to agriculture

*« Even after my father's death in 2004, I had no difficulty in continuing my education. However, this event influenced my academic career choice. At first, I wanted to go to law school and become a lawyer. Seeing that this was going to be a long journey, I returned to the History Department with the intention to become a teacher very early and make up for my father's passing by providing financial support to the family.*

*However, after graduation, I did not want to continue with History because everything seemed to me that I had missed my vocation. Following the advice of a friend, I finally agreed to continue in History to prepare first the master's degree, of course for the form. This friend even paid my tuition fees in fourth year to encourage me to continue.*

*Afterwards, my uncle called me and advised me to do a master's degree in **Human Resources Management** to become a human resources manager in a company, which I accepted. But after I finished, I went back to the same uncle to tell him that I would feel pretty good about farming».*

(Excerpt from the life story told at the regional sharing workshop by Afantchawo Koudasse, Togo - see also above {5} and the full story in Box {26} of Booklet 2)

In addition to the intellectual knowledge they acquire during their studies, these young people open themselves to other realities and discover new social practices, like this former Senegalese student, son of a farmer leader, who was able to confront the forms of commitment of his father with those he discovered in student unions: *«I was able to continue my studies up to University where I was fortunate enough to also play a leadership role in the students' associations. That helped to develop my experience».*

(Testimony from Alioune Badara Dioungue, Sharing regional workshop – see full story in box {19} of booklet 2).

For some, it is a stay abroad that «trained them a lot in terms of learning, through the fact of discovering for themselves, going to see with their own eyes what works elsewhere, especially in agriculture» (presentation of the findings of Senegalese research during a panel at the regional sharing workshop). High-level training can also help young people see their lives in a new light, as a 34-year-old Senegalese youth in the groundnut basin focus group testified. After a long search (a chaotic school career that nevertheless enabled him to obtain the BEFEM, numerous competitive exams - customs, gendarmerie, army - many failures; work in several projects and NGOs), this young Senegalese man found his way after training under an IFAD project: **«I hated agriculture, but after this training I liked agriculture, which is why I paid 200,000 CFA francs from my own pocket to get trained agronomy».**

However, this happy outcome is not automatic. *«When young graduates don't find the job they were hoping for, the longer unemployment lasts, the more families turn away from them and the problem of young graduates becomes a burden for them. If these young graduates do not succeed in self-employment in their villages or towns, the only paths open to them are those of emigration to foreign lands, or the drift towards theft, drug and alcohol consumption, prostitution, gold panning, in short, crime».*

(research by CNOP/FENAJER, Mali - already cited).



### 4.3 : Adventurous remoteness

By observing the situation in their families, seeing that their families are unable to provide for their needs and that their hopes have been disappointed by school, these rural youths will look for a better life elsewhere and set off on an adventure that exposes them to danger. Some of them will go to the gold mining areas where they will face the risks of diseases related to the use of chemicals, the collapse of mines, prostitution, drugs and alcohol; others will try the luck of emigration and expose themselves to the dangers of crossing the desert, then the Mediterranean, and human trafficking (presentation of the research of the FNFP/Niger and the CNOP/FENAJER during a panel of the regional sharing workshop).

For their parents, these young people *«are attracted at a certain age by a taste for adventure. They dream of becoming rich and think that this is only possible outside»* (research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali). The confidences they share with each other show that their motivations are more complex.

Some are indeed attracted by the illusion of the «lights» of the urban centers and the image of success and change in social status that those who have left and come back laden with prestige hold in store for them. This is what was testified in a focus group by a young Nigerien farmer who chose to go on the road of exodus *«for the simple reason that one of his friends back home from the exodus had brought back a big radio, four batteries. This young person was admired everywhere and was a reference and model of success in the village»* (FNFP research, Niger). Participants in the focus group in southern Senegal felt that young people who emigrated to the big cities are the most highly considered in the society and are often consulted on family matters, and that this encourages the phenomenon of rural exodus. One of them added that *«to woo a girl in the village, the young person who lives in the city is more likely to have her compared to young people practicing agriculture»*. Young people can also encourage each other to leave, as this young Togolese woman testifies: *«During my apprenticeship, a friend wanted to confuse me by offering to run away to Benin because we are suffering with this training. After reflection, I did not listen to her and she left alone. Today she has no training. She came back from Benin with nothing, and she regrets it deeply»*.

(CTOP research, Togo)

In some cases, parents themselves encourage young people to leave. For their parents, these young people «are attracted at a certain age by a taste for adventure.

### {27} Forced departures of young girls

Unlike most young boys who voluntarily set out on adventure, many girls were pushed to leave by their own parents. **Those who resisted had huge disputes with their families and are now abandoned and left behind.** Two participants from the sea region gave their testimonies: «*I was disowned by my father because I refused to take into account the fact that I had a cousin in Lomé to do the work of a maid,*» said one. «*My parents chose to send me at the age of 10 to Côte d'Ivoire in search for money instead of sending me to school,*» said the other.

(CTOP research, Togo)

When young people organize their own adventure, they often see it as a simple transitional step that will allow them to put money aside to carry out a project. This is the case, for example, of many young Togolese who «have experienced the adventure in Nigeria, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, etc.» The objective of their departure is most often to seek the necessary means to enroll in an apprenticeship or even to go and learn a trade in order to return to their communities. This is how many of them have attempted more than one trade before finding themselves in their current profession».

(CTOP research, Togo)

These departures are most often only a stopgap measure, a response to poverty that is devoid of courage and dignity. There are young people who accepted to leave knowing that this path was not the right one, that leaving is not the right solution. They say that «**they prefer to risk their lives rather than stay with the family without being able to contribute to the expenses**» (FNFP research, Niger). This is for example the comment of Diakité, a young gold panner from Burkina Faso, who says that «*gold panning is better than stealing or working in the city to have only 100 to 500 FCFA at the end of the day*» (PFPN research, Niger). He adds: «**when I returned to the village at the beginning of the campaign, I had more than FCFA 200,000. With this money, I looked after my own family of more than 5 people** and I bought herbicides, fertilizer for my father. I

am sure that what they will harvest can be enough until next year. They will have something to eat. One of his comrades who was participating in the same focus group said that after the harvest he would join Diakit  at the gold panning site (CPF research, Burkina Faso).

### The seasonal exodus

Especially in the Sahelian and Sudano-Sahelian zones, in families who have no means because the food cultivated during the rainy season is not enough to feed them, all the children go out during the dry season to get something to eat and send money back to the family. Girls go out to cities as domestic workers, to do laundry for money; boys often go out to work in the gold panning industry to help parents who are in the village (CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali). Parallel to the migration flows of rural youth to the cities, there are also flows from rainfed production areas to developed or irrigated areas (CNCR research, Senegal).

Compared to exodus, which is not a new phenomenon among young West Africans, exchanges between young people provide two insights.

On the one hand, this exodus, which has increased for young girls, is dangerous for them.

#### {28} Poor reception conditions for young girls gone to town or to gold sites

The participants in the focus groups noted the exodus of young girls where young girls whose age varies between 25 and 30 and who migrate to the Urban Community of Niamey in search of the resources they transfer to their families. These resources will be used to supplement the family's diet. However, the question is to know the hosting and working conditions of **these young women who migrate to urban centers without social protection.**

(FNEP research, Niger).

Some young girls, anxious to prepare for their wedding (looking for cooking utensils and other female accessories), travel to the city to do domestic work in the host families, where in some cases they experience a lot of hardship. **They have experienced many difficult situations in these places with the bosses, the men.**

(Research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali).

Often in gold panning for food, men propose sex to you.  
**Some come back with children who are not recognized by their fathers.**

(research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali)

On the other hand, for young boys the city is a learning space

### {29} Town Schooling

To see their dreams come true, these young people have embarked on an apprenticeship. They still have a connection to the land through subsistence farming, but claim above all to belong to other trades learned in the city, including motorcycle cab driver, mechanic, painter, hairdresser, driver, hairdresser, scrap merchant, seamstress, etc...

(research CTOP, Togo)

*« I had a lot of problems with the family, which led me to leave Niono. I went to Bamako and saw how hard people work for a living, which motivated me. **It was the city that taught me that a boy has to fight to earn a living.**»*

(focus group région de Ségou, Mali)

## Gold panning

Gold panning leads to a particular form of remoteness, sometimes close to the family farming, but which plunges the young person into a society whose organization and culture are very far away from that of his village. This activity has recently taken off considerably in countries where veins are being discovered (Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger) and where it has become a social phenomenon; it has been strongly discussed in the focus groups of these countries.

In its research report, the CNOP notes that gold mining activities, like all other production activities, have negative impacts on the ecosystem (destruction of plant cover, relief modeling, landscape transformation, degradation of riverbeds, and exposure of living beings to dust). The consequences on the human environment are characterized by the risks associated with the different stages of gold production, i.e. the risks of landslides, the risks associated with living conditions, the risks associated with the consumption of amphibians, the risks of exposure of the population to dust and attacks by criminals along the routes leading

to the various sites, the risks of cyanide and mercury inhalation. Wild and domestic animals are also exposed to the spread on the ground of chemicals that plants can also capture and that end up in the food chain (comment in the research report of the CNOP/FENAJER, Mali).

### {30} Gold panning: a risky trade

#### **For boys**

In the focus group, there were young people who abandoned their families and started gold panning activities because the young people who did so came back with materials. However, the experience showed that there, they made holes more than 50 m deep with all the risks, that is, the earth could subside on them.

(Presentation of the Niger research during a panel discussion at the regional sharing workshop)

*«**We are aware of the dangers of gold panning**, but we have no choice. I see that this activity will not guarantee my future. If they even help me tomorrow, I will abandon it»*

(intervention in the focus group in the region of Sikasso, Mali).

*«My life and that of my family are not stable. My parents are nomadic, and I live in another community (that of the gold panners). I believe that my future is in God's hands: with my very risky job, **I fight daily to survive. I am still afraid of the landslides on the site.** I would like the gold panning trade to be properly regulated, that mines be created to reduce the risk of landslides»*

(focus group South-West Burkina Faso).

#### **For girls**

*"I went to the gold panning, where I learned a lot. At the gold panning I lived through many difficult situations, **men offered me money, food in exchange for sex.** I had my first child there. I went back to Kati to do the laundry and other domestic work, where I later had a second child. I learned during these difficult times that you have to be careful when looking for money «*

(Intervention by a 23-year-old girl not attending school in the focus group in the Sikasso region, Mali M112)





In the same report, the CNOP notes that gold panning also has positive effects because it is a source of income for some people during the lean season. Young people inject the revenue generated by gold panning into agriculture.

The economic aspect is reflected in the inflow of money in terms of taxes and duties from this activity. In addition, for young people in the area, gold panning uses local labor and is therefore a factor in the fight against unemployment in rural areas (comments in the research by CNOP/FENAJER, Mali). In addition, there are certain social effects of gold panning that are appreciated by the young people who practice it.

### **{31} Human experience of solidarity on gold sites**

*« I've been a gold digger for a few years. I had to drop out of school because of poverty. It was difficult for the family itself to find food, let alone finance my studies. As soon as I arrived, **important friends hosted me providing me with housing, food, and helped me get the daily work.** This helped me to become what I am today ».*

*«I am the son of a farmer who became a traditional gold panner. Cultivating the land and gold panning are my income sources. When I first came to this site with my team to work during the dry season, **if I could earn anything, it was thanks to the help and relationship of my mates: carpenters, diggers, wire pullers with whom I shared the hut.** This even allowed me to send salt, sugar and cereals to the family from time to time. These friends were invaluable to me because I had no resources when I arrived here ».*

(interventions in the focus group in the region of Sikasso, Mali)

## **The practice of illicit activities**

In the majority of cases, unemployed youth are willing to engage in any activity to survive. Some are painful but legal (sharecropping, bricklaying, etc.), others are illegal. These are always high-risk activities (CTOP research, Togo). These reprobated practices marginalize the youth, thus distancing them from society.

Some participants in this research had themselves been involved in various trafficking practices. The dangers they represent were particularly mentioned in the focus groups in Togo and Mali.

### {32} Commodity and drug trafficking

#### **Adulterated fuel traffic**

As a result, some have found themselves in high-risk activities such as selling adulterated fuel. A 24-year-old young man living in Lama Tessi in the Kara region confided this to the focus group: *«... Also with the intention of earning some money and starting business, I did everything I could to get by but alas. Currently, I sell fuel with all possible risks. To be able to find this fuel, I go to Benin. In the meantime, the soldiers came to spill my fuel that I sell on the roadside. It is my only source of income. I am disgusted with life! However, as we often say, «he who lives hopes», and I tell myself that one day my situation will change. I wish to be a great merchant in my future, but I am afraid to remain in this chronic suffering...».*

(focus group from Kara, Togo)

#### **Drug trafficking**

Others have activities dominated by drug trafficking and face the danger of death with customs officers and gendarmes firing live ammunition to stop them. These traffickers were taking goods (cigarettes, motorcycles, clothes...) in Guinea Conakry at lower cost to come and resell them in Mali.

(research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali)

#### **Cigarette trafficking**

*«My parents couldn't feed the family anymore so I dropped out of school in grade 11 for a job that allowed me to feed my family. I went to Guinea Conakry as a trafficker (this job was to traffic cigarettes and other goods). There was a very good collaboration between young people to get around the customs officers. I managed to take care of my family with this activity, which I left later because of the risks. The customs officers pushed me to leave the traffic. Today I am a rice and onion producer in the Bèwani area in the Office du Niger. I am a member of the Farafansiso cooperative. It's my own effort through rice cultivation and my uncle ».*

(focus group Segou region, Mali)

The prostitution of young girls was more discreetly mentioned: *«it used to be a taboo in our society, but today it has become a source of pride for some girls who use it as a temporary source of income. On the other hand, some also do it because of the difficulties of life: death of parents, abandonment, trafficking, etc...»*

(Research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali).

### **{33} Prostitution in towns**

Girls who do not find work in the city are left homeless and exposed to prostitution or rape.

(research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali)

## **Migration departures**

*« Migration is an element of strategies preparing young people for social and economic autonomy. They make it possible to raise the financial resources necessary for changes in the educational system». (CNCR research, Senegal).* However, they are increasingly perilous.

### **{34} The adventures of the story of a smuggler who in turn tried to emigrate**

*«After elementary school I came to Ross Betio. I was an unruly and very disruptive student. After my BEFEM (final junior high school examination), I stopped my studies to go to Dakar to do business with my father's brother. Then I learned the trade of transport driver on heavy vehicles.*

*After sharing my grandfather's land, I saw that the surface was small so I started to have adventures. In 2005 with the phenomenon of illegal immigrants, I went to Mauritania, where I tried to travel 3 times; since I am a driver, I went to Nouakchott for 1 month as a mason, then I went to Ata, Souk, Souadip, Nouadhibou.*

*Nouadhibou is the economic capital of Mauritania, I was a private driver for 6 months, as it did not suit me, I started to work as a cab driver. Now I started to get in touch with some sinner friends who were in Senegal. They came there and started to make people cross to Europe. Since I was a taxi driver and I knew more*

*about Mauritania than they did, I was the one who went to pick up the customers. We formed a team and to win the confidence of the customers, I accompanied them in the dugout. Because it is not easy to give your CFAF 500,000 to anyone, but when he saw me, who had my own cab, leaving it there to go in the dugout, he had more confidence in us.*

*Our first attempt was limited to Morocco, we had an engine problem, and we were caught and pushed back. Then I left a second time (it was at the time of the GOANA plan), but I was pushed back again. I was turned back to Richard Toll but I did not pass at home: so I did not keep in touch with my family to avoid that they ask me to come back. The only person I was sharing with was a cousin who is in Dakar. In addition, when people insisted that he tell them where I was, I stopped contacting him and deleted that number. I was very close to my father and I knew that if I ever heard from him or spoke to him on the phone I would come back, but now I did not want to be discouraged. Then I gave my number to another cousin shortly afterwards so that he could keep me informed of what was going on in the family.*

***I experienced unspeakable things on these three trips.*** *We stayed for a week without eating or drinking. This allowed me to build up a strong morale and unshakeable convictions.*

*In 2010, I was informed of my father's death, which was the trigger for my return to Senegal with my family.*

(focus group North Senegal)

*«They went off on adventure without knowing that there are things they cannot see and do not know. It's good to go on migration based on the economic considerations, but there are things that are hidden and that people do not say,» said a young Nigerien herder who had migrated to Benin and Nigeria in the past. Indeed, «**some people have lived through hell in migration**, they have been turned back, imprisoned and deprived of their property because of the civil war in the country of residence».*

(research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali).



**{35} The risks of emigration**

*«After sharing the inheritance from my father, my share was misused, so I was no longer considered in the family. I dropped out of school for lack of means. I went to Côte d'Ivoire as a well-digger because the family had no means, then I went to Niger to join Spain. I was refused entry to Gao and spent 40 days in prison. On my release, I returned to Segou and went back to Algeria with 5 other companions and **2 died in the sea**. I always had problems with the authorities of the countries where I stayed. As I could not advance, I returned to Ségou. I learned that the adventure was miserable and I decided not to go back there anymore. It was the Agency for the Promotion of Youth Employment (APEJ) that helped me to become what I am».*

(Moussa Traoré, focus group from the region of Ségou, Mali).

Some of the girls came back from adventure with children. This 30-year-old girl narrates: *«...There (in Nigeria) I still did domestic work in order to survive, and I was impregnated by a young man from Vogan who was also there on an adventure. In this situation, life was complicated for us. I moved in with him and we had had three children over time. I decided to return with my children because life in Nigeria was not easy for us...»*

(CTOP research, Togo).

However, the young Senegalese who told of the ups and downs of his migrant route invited him to **reconsider his prejudices about emigration** (box {36}): *«A broader analysis of the rural exodus and emigration is also needed, because people who are outside or outside their communities can contribute much more to the family farming than young people who have stayed in their homeland»* (focus group North Senegal). They themselves will have been able to forge their personality through this experience.

**{36} A learning path**

*« I was born from a Fulani father and a «kourteye» mother and I currently live in Kollo SONA. Eleven people make up my family, including seven men and four women. I was a student and I have the third level, which is the level at which I dropped out of school due to difficulties I encountered in my family. I told myself: «My shitty life is over; I'm going to build my future». Indeed, tired of life in the village, I decided one day to take the path of exodus that led me for the first time to Cotonou in the hope of finding a better life. The reasons that pushed me to exodus were mainly the search for a better situation. I had been motivated to go there by the example of other young people who went and came back with radios, with articles that made of them models for the whole village. Unfortunately, once in Cotonou, I found **myself facing reality**, contrary to my hopes. I spent the first night without food. It was the first night of my life that I went without eating. After Cotonou, I continued on to Nigeria. As I am a young farmer, **I found myself at a slaughterhouse**. The first difficulty was not finding a place to sleep. It was so difficult that if I keep telling my story, I will cry. However, I still learned some skills in Nigeria. **I learned** with a friend how to make cattle feed, and today I have decided to build my future in my community. I will not leave anymore. I started a small business, and I rent equipment for the production of animal feed. This means that in my path I learned a trade. »*

(focus group Niger).



## 4.4 : Importance of Encounters and Relationships

We will see that the fabric of social relations of young people has a direct impact on their social integration. This is why OFF/ROPPA had drawn the attention of the national platforms that organized and exploited the focus groups in their countries on the identification of what the interviews between young people learned about their social relationships.

Overall, rural youth have little social capital. They remain in an avoidant relationship with adults who have little interest in them. They did not have a good relationship with customary and religious authorities and the State, which they felt oppressed them. They feel marginalized by local authorities (first regional summary).

While the authorities (state, customary, religious, etc.) undeniably influence the lives of these young people, it is an «ingrained» influence. Indeed, young people see themselves «ignored by society, frightened by the forces of law and order and indoctrinated by the religious, some of whom are fanatics. According to these young people, most of these stakeholders take advantage of them or their efforts. The environment in which they live means that some of them are isolated in an environment that is not favorable to them, and this is one of the reasons that pushes them to abandon family farms in search for a better life in another environment» (CNOP/FENAJER Mali research).

The majority of the young people surveyed therefore have a circle of relations limited to their family (siblings, cousins), friends, and sometimes groups. It diversifies for those who have had the opportunity to go elsewhere, for example to stay in Côte d'Ivoire (CPF research, Burkina Faso). The life stories they tell each other show that ***it is by leaving their families that they can broaden their circle of relationships and «learn» from the other young people they see.***

### {37} Young people learn a lot outside the family through their friends.

For Daouda Alhassane, his relational fabric has played a key role in his life. *«I owe everything I am today to my friend Ali Sorey, from a neighboring village, who taught me professional skills.»* Daouda explains, *«My friend opened my eyes. He taught me how to drive a motorcycle and helped me acquire a motorcycle cab worth 200,000 francs. It is thanks to this motorcycle that I started to take my first steps. He also taught me other small trades, including the techniques of ploughing the fields with a plough».*

Amadou, le jeune éleveur nigérien Amadou, the young Nigerien farmer who set off on an adventure to change his life (see above {36}) *«learned trades in Nigeria. He learned with a friend how to make cattle feed,»* which he then did as a trade. He says, *«my best friends are those who are in the same business as me, but mostly old ones, in order to make their experiences my own. **The fabric of my social relationships is exclusively made up of people with expertise where I have something to learn, but not a simple collaboration. Of course, I also have other friends, but only to participate in social ceremonies (baptisms, weddings, etc.)».***

Selon les According to the girls' testimonies, weekly markets, public squares, weddings, baptisms and traditional celebrations **are the preferred places and times for exchanging, making friends and even learning about issues. During these meetings they talk about several subjects**, such as sexual education, their life in the household, their roles, their future life as married women and mothers.

Many of the girls say that **they learned certain things more with their friends** than with their families. For example, young Nafissa says: *«I learned to sew with one of my friends (...) Currently I have a saving of CFAF 45,000 but I also make a tontine with my friends where I deposit CFAF 500 every week»*

(recherche de la PFPN, Niger).

*«Some youth reported that the fact that they had developed friendships with their peers contributed greatly to their life path. Others went further, saying that they had collective experiences that greatly shaped their personalities»* (presentation of the NCRC research during a panel at the regional sharing workshop). It is through these relationships that they undergo influences, favorable or unfavorable, that will guide their life choices and build their personality.

**{38} Help from friends**

*«It was on the advice of a friend that I finally agreed to continue in History to prepare for my master's degree; (...) He even paid my tuition in fourth year to encourage me to continue.»* (excerpt from the story told at the regional sharing workshop by Afantchawo Koudasse, Togo)

*(...) «I was quickly confronted with my low capacity to cultivate the 6 hectares. To overcome this situation, I took the initiative to create an association with ten young farmers from the same training center as me.»* (excerpt from the story told at the regional sharing workshop by Ali Ouattara, Burkina Faso)

*«As soon as I arrived (at the gold site), I was welcomed by important friends who provided me with accommodation, food, and helped me with the daily work. It helped me become what I am today.»*

*«It was thanks to the help and relationship of my classmates with whom I shared the hut that I could get something. (...) These friends were invaluable to me because I had no resources when I arrived here.»* (interventions by two young gold panners in the focus group in the region of Sikasso, Mali)

*«I was encouraged by a friend who lives in Niana (and therefore elsewhere) who works flattening-up. He gave me some money that allowed me to carry out my activity.»* (Mamadou Sangare, focus group Sikasso).

*The hardships shared by the young Senegalese smuggler with illegal migrants (box {34}) have «enabled him to forge a strong morale and unshakeable convictions»* (focus group North Senegal).

It is the cohesion of the young people in the same group or in other groups that helps them overcome difficulties (CNOP/FENAJER Mali research). This cohesion is not based on a formal associative fabric (it was indicated in the introduction that only 20% of the young people who participated in the focus groups indicated that they belonged to an association: youth association, professional organization, farmers' organization, and that several spontaneously stated that they did not belong to any organization; the research report from Togo notes that they are not familiar with the farmers' movement). «The organizational

dynamics of the young people visited are characterized by a lack of formal structuring (in associations, cooperatives, groups), in addition to some semi-formal temporary collective savings experiences such as tontines, which seem to give some results and in which the young people (especially young girls) who participate regularly find a certain advantage» (FNFP research, Niger).

Their collective practices are linked to their ways of living together, which are different from those they have with adults. Their meeting places are those of their activities: markets or parties, trade groups such as associations of motorcycle cab drivers, carpenters, mechanics, etc. (FNFP research, Niger). They also often meet to discuss different topics, for example, bribes in cabarets or bars (CTOP/Togo research and presentation of this research at a panel of the regional sharing workshop) - in the «grins» in Mali (panel of the regional sharing workshop).

Social media have caused those who share the same space to become less close than virtual correspondents (CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).

It should be noted that the practice with other youth of dangerous or marginal activities also strengthens ties: the young Malian smuggler who traffics with Guinea emphasizes that «there was very good collaboration between the youth to get around customs officers». Solidarity on gold sites among carpenters, diggers, and wire pullers is very strong. «For some young people, the network of relations of boys is strong, and particularly that of the gold diggers who went on an adventure and who succeeded». (CPF research, Burkina Faso).

These peer relationships within age groups have always been part of social integration mechanisms: «in many areas, society had previously developed methods that allowed young people to maintain true relationships» (CPF research, Burkina Faso). Today, the relationships between young people are not yet much degraded: «they communicate well with each other. However, individualism undermines their mutual trust. Social relations can also be strained between young people because of a lack of trust; personal interest takes precedence over the right way» (CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).

The most worrying deterioration from the point of view of social integration is that of the relations of these young people with adults. There are those who say that in most cases seniors are no longer setting an example for young people. If they have to refer to them to maintain good relationships, it would be a bit difficult» (presentation of the Malian research during a panel at the regional sharing workshop).

Fortunately, constructive relationships with adults still exist, but the problem is that they are no longer the rule.

**{39} Two examples of encounters with adults that were decisive for a young man**

*«I live in Finkolo. I am a hunter but my main activity is agriculture. That is what my life is all about. I work with the association of hunters (dozos) which I like very much...it is very difficult for us to hunt because there are no more wild animals because of the disappearance of the forests. Hunting is my passion. In my life, I have been helped by the group of hunters, they showed me everything I needed: secrets, advice, etc.»*

(focus group from the region of Sikasso, Mali).

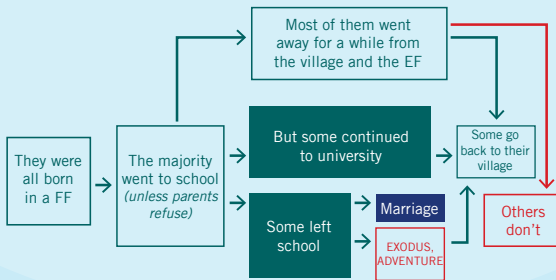
*«At the end of 2016, I met a man who saw me on the outskirts of my field and after discussions he asked me if I knew the Togolese Coordination of Farmer Organizations (CTOP). Not knowing anything about the latter institution, the man offered to take me there. Being young at the time, the CTOP technicians redirected me to a youth umbrella organization called Réseau des Jeunes Producteurs Professionnels Agricoles du Togo (REJEPPAT). It is from these moments that, thanks also to my level of education, I was often associated with the various activities of CTOP and REJEPPAT, especially in terms of capacity building. »*

(extrait de l'histoire de Afantchawo KOU DASSE, Togo ; voir histoire complète dans l'encadré [26] du livret 2)



## 05.

## THE ARRIVAL POINT: THE CURRENT INTEGRATION OF THESE RURAL YOUTHS



These pathways began for all these young people in their own families. They then often moved away from them. The question that interested the Observatory of Family farms in launching this research on rural youth was to find out what their current type of social integration was, i.e. where they like to live and share the values of their integration environment, and whether their pathways would allow them to stay or return to the rural world and to the family farming. Through the life stories they have

told each other, these young people have built their personalities. They have opened up to new horizons, they have enriched their experience, been influenced, adopted values and internalized behavioral models; they have acquired knowledge, discovered technologies, learned trades... This research has made it possible to find out where they currently live and how they are integrated into their living spaces<sup>7</sup>.

## 5.1 : Factors that promote Integration

In addition to the quality and density of their social relationships, five main factors of integration were highlighted in the focus groups:

### **(1) being able to achieve, succeeding**

Youth will seek to live in the environment that best enables them to achieve and succeed.



*7 Fourth Research Question: WHAT IS THEIR TYPE OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION? This is the key question of this research and the previous questions already shed light on this point, but it goes beyond them. It is that of the modes of attachment of an individual to society on the basis of their «wanting to live together».*

*Adults often feel that the «youth crisis» carries a threat of social disintegration. It is rather that young people - or at least certain categories of young people - refuse the mode of social integration proposed to them, but they necessarily aspire - in order to be able to live - to a type of social integration. The questions that arise are then those of who do they want to live with? Where do they want to live? To share/reproduce what values? What promotes or prevents their integration? What is their perception of community life?*

*The problem lies at the level of what are called social integration matrices (family, school, media, work, religion, civil society organizations, associations ...) which convey behavioral models accepted or rejected for reasons that remain to be better understood.*



**{40} Live like everyone else, and if possible better**

All young people want to live with dignity, otherwise we will do everything to survive, no matter what the means, even if we have to abandon FF and go into agribusiness. *«All we want is to live like everyone else and have what the young people of the city have and even more. We do not want to have to envy anyone anymore.»*

Young people are motivated to succeed, that is why they sometimes migrate, take up other activities and even risk their lives just to succeed. Therefore, if the young person can succeed in EF he will never leave his homeland.

(synthesis focus group North Senegal)

*«I want my children to become someone tomorrow because I want my child to be better than me and to be somewhere else»*

(Alizeta, Sadia – focus group from Tiano, Burkina Faso)

**(2) feeling useful, carrying out responsibilities**

Participating in community service work reinforces the youth's sense of belonging to a community.

**{41} Getting involved in the community**

Several young people are members of self-help groups to cultivate larger areas with the support of other members.

(CTOP research, Togo).

Holding positions of responsibility in an association has contributed to the broadening of relationships at the community level.

(research CNCR, Senegal)

The fact of being *«well employed»* constitutes when this is the case (which unfortunately is not frequent) a powerful factor of social integration: *«For young graduates, access to employment is a problem. They cannot understand a situation that challenges the State. According to them, **integration in the workplace is of great concern to them** because it determines their social integration. This is why some young graduates have turned to farms»*

(CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).

### (3) being supported and considered in his or her community

Material and moral assistance provided to the youth by the family or the community gives him a feeling of well-being that promotes his integration.

#### {42} Benefiting from material and emotional security

A young man participant said, *«if young people like family farming, it is because it provides food, it provides income (even if the income is low), it strengthens family relationships and solidarity, and it brings love to our community»*

(FUN research, Liberia).

«Boys recognize that their families (wife, children and family) are a great responsibility for them to live happily and comfortably»

(CPF research, Burkina Faso).

The question for these young people is whether the family farming is still able to provide them with this security.

However, beyond that, the social recognition of the young person is a condition for his integration into his family or his community. Today, *«young people are often humiliated by society»* (panel discussion, regional sharing workshop, Mali). *«We feel excluded because of the unwillingness of some people. We want to feel alive for our country and we must not be oppressed.»* (Support Diarra, focus group Koulikoro, Mali)



### {43} Being accepted and respected

#### ***Economic achievement***

The economic factor (finance) is a fundamental element for a real social integration of the young person. Anyone who can help his parents financially, especially during the winter period, is accepted and respected by all. The example of Diakit  Daouda (gold digger) who spent more than CFA F 200,000 to help his father for the 2019-2020 agricultural season, has won the consideration of the family and the community. The young person, who therefore invests in other income-generating activities that can enable him to supplement the earnings from his production, is easily integrated.

(CPF research, Burkina Faso)

#### ***Recognition***

The girls in the FF have a very great contribution, so we must respect them and help them as well.

(synthesis focus group North Senegal)

#### ***Marriage***

The young person who sets up a home with a wife and children is also integrated because he or she is considered a responsible person. For the young girl, the home is fundamental for her integration into her family, but also into her husband's family

(CPF research, Burkina Faso)

Not all children are integrated into their families in the same way: the distribution of roles and tasks within the family shows a feeling of injustice that marginalizes those who are discriminated against and feel excluded (elder/younger relationships, relationships between children of different wives in a polygamous family, status of girls).

#### {44} Role assignment favors the integration of some children at the expense of others

The head of the family now sends all children to school in the majority of cases, but makes a classification of the work (herdsman, cotton farmers, etc.). ***It is these relationships within families that determine the integration of young people into the family farming.***

(presentation Mali, panel discussion regional sharing workshop)

Young rural women, in particular, are often trapped in unproductive jobs, typically carry heavy loads of unpaid work within their households, and are ***victims of traditional beliefs*** about the type of work they should do and restrictions on their mobility.

(CPF research, Burkina Faso)

#### (4) Being able to communicate

The first condition for building trust is the existence of dialogue and sincerity in relationships. However, «*interaction between generations is weak because elders do not trust the young*» (CPF research findings, Burkina Faso). In the past, parents used to spend time with their children and transmit life skills to them, «*but now the trends are changing. The head of the family does not discuss certain topics that concern youth. For example, puberty, early marriage, pregnancy, etc., are not discussed by the head of the household.*»

(Niger's intervention during a panel at the regional sharing workshop)

#### {45} The difficult upholding of dialogue

##### ***Within the family***

«*The confidence of youth in family farms, communication and listening among family members regardless of your category. Taking their concerns into account in decisions and orientations is very important*». (focus group Imasgo, Burkina Faso)

«*We talked with young people but also with adults. **There was a situation of rupture.** When I talk about this rupture, I am talking*

*about communication within the family. This communication, which used to be maintained in families in previous years, has deteriorated greatly. This is due to certain behaviors and everyone blames themselves.» (Regional sharing workshop, Niger intervention).*

**«Dialogue among family members is fundamental** to facilitate understanding and social cohesion. One young man testified about his own case: after the death of his father, the wives of his younger brothers urged them to claim a share of the farm's assets. This is how problems began to emerge in the family and this was the basis for the breakdown of social cohesion. It then became difficult to talk about the future of the family farming. In summary, the behavior of family members is also a key factor for the social network and the integration of young people into the family farming» (panel discussion, regional sharing workshop, Niger intervention).

### **Among young people**

*“In many areas, the company had previously developed methods that allowed young people to develop sincere relationships. Today, the relationships that exist between young people are not yet very degraded, but in most cases, there are difficulties that stand out among the young people such as lack of trust and lack of consideration from some elders.» (Panel regional sharing workshop, Mali).*

## **(5) Sharing the same values**

This is where the major difficulties are observed. Indeed, *«the times in which these young people live have lost the values that guaranteed good relations in the communities. Some adults say that it is because of neo-colonialism, the advent of democracy misunderstood by our society, the western media, among others, that the societal values that fostered harmony in communities have been lost. For their part, **young people are worried that the elders no longer give them aspirations** ».*

(CNOP/FENAJER research, Mali).

#### {46} Some values are often tough to reconcile

##### ***Prevailing values among youth***

**Modernity** plays a very important role in the life of some young people who take it as a reference point. (CNOP/FENAJER Mali research)

It appears that young people (boys and girls) are influenced by modernism in their daily lives and a life similar to that of urban youth (wealth and financial prosperity, having means of locomotion, having a well-stocked wardrobe, especially for girls, having a decent diet - having a varied and balanced diet). (CPF research, Burkina Faso)

##### ***Prevailing values among adults***

Culture and traditions have an impact on the integration of youth into their families and communities. The rural environment is characterized by hierarchical relationships where young people are expected to obey and respect older generations.

Participants in the youth focus group in the Southwest region stated, «African culture makes young people fear their elders and they are not free to express themselves. (CPF research, Burkina Faso)

## 5.2 : Integration areas for rural youth

### {47} Les jeunes recherchent les espaces où ils peuvent s'épanouir

The environment in which these young people live causes some of them to be isolated because the environment is not favorable to them, which leads them to abandon family farms in search for a better life in adventure (...).

In order to escape this lead weight that constantly hovers over their heads, they go where they can talk, where they can blossom, where they can judge. They go where words are no longer silenced. They go where, in front of them, they have the right to look at each other. (research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali)

We have seen that the **FAMILY** is, from childhood, the natural matrix for the social integration of the young person. However, an analysis of the first stages of young people's trajectory shows its current inadequacies.

### {48} The family, an imperfect integration matrix

It emerges from the interviews that the first area of integration is the family, even if their development and level of responsibility is not yet perfect. It works particularly when there is support from family members, especially from the farm manager (case cited of support for installation through the investment of the head of the family in buildings to accommodate the son's poultry activity) and other members such as (case cited of a young woman who received support from her co-wife in the development of her professional activities) - (intervention Senegal in a panel of the regional sharing workshop).

Family is what matters most to rural youth. However, what we have seen today is that in the era in which we live in which we have the elements that guarantee good relations; social cohesion has lost much of its values.

(intervention Mali in a panel of the regional sharing workshop)

Because the family no longer functions well as a space for integration, young people create their **OWN SPACES** of integration.

#### {49} « Peer-to-peer » Integration Spaces

##### ***Groups of friends***

The relational fabric among friends is also a determining factor in the profiling of young people. Some youth reported that the fact that they have developed friendships with their peers has contributed greatly to their life path. Others go further, saying that they have had collective experiences that have greatly shaped their personalities. (CNCR research, Senegal)

They often find themselves in groups of young people who have experienced the same experiences (adventure in the same country with the same results, learning, etc.) and according to the categories in which they are classified by the community (young delinquents, unemployed, thieves, etc.). (CTOP research, Togo)

##### ***Trade***

As a result, many of those who have learned or practice the same trade belong to more or less formal associations of professionals. ***They find themselves in trade associations, some of which are trade unions.*** Many young people belong to associations or unions of carpenters, hairdressers, motorcycle cab drivers, associations of former apprentices from training centers, etc. (CTOP research, Togo)

##### ***Youth associations***

As far as integration is concerned, the young people we met are, among others, in associations, in cooperatives, in MSEs, in «grins» for community and economic reasons. In addition, in these different groups, their integrations take place at different levels and they maintain relations among themselves through this in order to determine their roles. (research CNOP/FENAJER, Mali)

Life stories of the youth and their conflicting relationships with adults in their communities led the youth to group themselves into different interest groups. (...) In some areas where we have organized focus groups, young people do not recognize themselves in farmers' organizations or producers' associations. They think



they are adult organizations. (...) They participate very little in adult organizations and respond very little to their call. «Today, when we ring the bell, young people don't go out anymore». (CTOP research, Togo).

### ***Meeting and leisure spaces***

***In order to exchange on subjects that are not discussed in the family, young people are forced to do so among themselves.*** They take advantage of public squares on market days to develop their network and facilitate their integration. (...) What also emerged from the discussion was that certain social events, such as weddings and baptisms, are places for communication and exchange to strengthen the social fabric and integration of young people (Niger's intervention in a panel at the regional sharing workshop).

The youth also gather in discussion groups on different themes. They often discuss music and soap operas (which other youth think have a negative influence on youth).

Many others often meet in bars and cabarets to drink alcohol to such an extent that the adults accuse the authorities; this is what this adult thinks in his own words: «the non-regulation of alcohol consumption means that young people do not do anything anymore. They drink and steal». (CTOP research, Togo).

These spaces of integration between peers are beyond the control of adults, who, as the last quotations show, are wary of them. Surprisingly, sport is only mentioned once as a space for integration in youth focus groups («Local authorities must help sport in villages and municipalities as a factor of social cohesion» - youth focus group Senegal groundnut basin), but is considered negative in the focus group of adults from the same region («with entertainments such as soccer and wrestling, young people are too dispersed, not concentrated enough»).

The current concern is that some youth are being dragged into **MARGINAL or DEVILING SPACES OF INTEGRATION** that cut them off from their communities.

## {50} Spaces of Desocialization

### ***Extremist movements and religious fundamentalism***

One important fact emerges from the interviews. This is the young people's involvement in terrorist movements, which has brought the issue of religion and young people in Burkina Faso to the forefront. Religion has been a factor of integration in the regions for several decades.

In recent years, the country has experienced an intense religious profusion, affecting in particular young people, many of whom have converted to «independent» churches and to a different form of Islam than that which has existed in the country for centuries. As in other areas, young people are often described as a population that is «confused» and therefore easily «manipulated» by these new religious currents. While there may be a certain instrumentalization, the young participants also stressed that religion was a useful mode of expression for young people in their desire for social integration. (CPF research, Burkina Faso).

### ***The world of criminality***

«It is difficult to welcome and/or integrate some young people who return from migration (Nigeria) and who begin to adopt negative behaviors such as smoking drugs and/or engaging in banditry (robbery, etc.)». (Benin intervention in a panel of the regional sharing workshop)

However, several youth interventions urge people to avoid making amalgam too quickly. Some positive values are acquired in marginal spaces (Box {31, 37, 38}), and former adventurers to whom «adventure has opened their eyes» will return to their communities (reported in research from Mali, Senegal, and Togo).

## {51} Understanding the Motivation of Young people

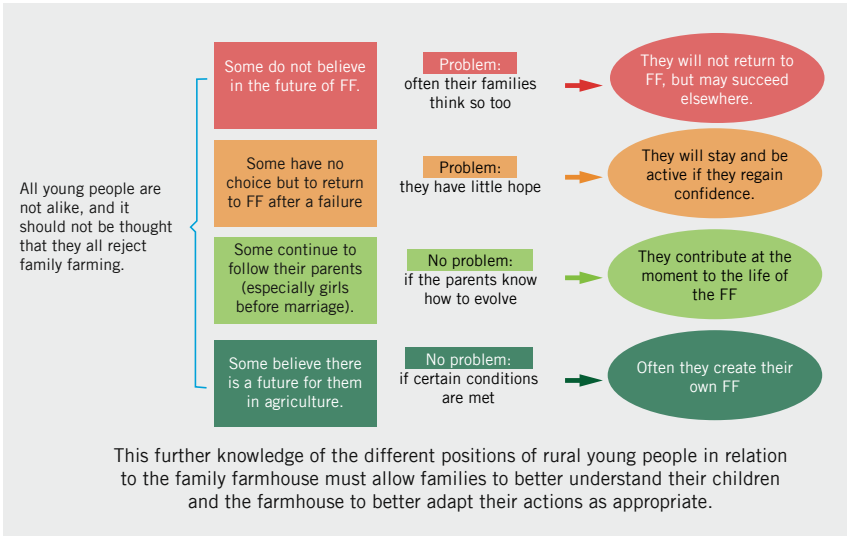
*«Older people need to stop being prejudiced against young people and try to support them and understand their motivations. Sometimes we do not understand the elderly, when we emigrate they complain and tell us that we have run away, and when we stay they take us as objects, overexploit us and if we refuse, they accuse us of being lazy».* (Synthesis focus group North Senegal).

### 5.3 : Conclusion: Will these young people return to the family farming or not? Lessons to be learned from knowing their life paths

***The return or non-return to farming and family farming is actually played out at each stage of their path.*** For some it is decided from childhood according to their experience of the economic and social model that their parents' family farming confronts them with (we heard young people say that they prefer to risk their lives rather than stay with the family without being able to contribute to the expenses - FNFP research, Niger). For others, it will be played out during or at the end of their schooling, depending on the prospects it has offered them. For many, it is played in the part of their path where they have moved away from the family farming, according to the encounters, learning, opportunities or failures they experience.

The lesson that can be drawn from listening to the stories of rural youth and from their analysis at the regional research-sharing workshop launched by OFF/ROPPA is that the family farming remains a reference point for all, whether positive or negative. Most focus group participants currently live on a family farming or are connected to their parents' farm. Some will stay or return if they have moved away from it, others will not. Their connection to the family farming is different depending on their individual histories. Indeed, some of the stories these young people told each other that they feel well, but often they go badly: this is what makes young people love or flee the family farming (synthesis of the regional sharing workshop).

The responses to be given to the expectations of young people to encourage their integration into family farms must therefore seek to make these stories go better, and be adapted to different situations. OFF research highlights four of them:



Here are four basic categories to characterize rural youth and to answer, from the perspective of their relationship to the family farming, the first question of this research: «who are rural youth?» We can define them according to their position with regard to the family farming. ***Nine scenarios for the evolution of rural youth*** have been identified by OFF based on these scenarios.

The second «youth» booklet of the third OFF report («Views of West African Rural Youth on Family farming») deepens the knowledge produced around these scenarios, particularly with regard to their causes and the consequences to be drawn from them in order to bring young people closer to family farms.

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