

Food Systems Transformation in West Africa: Implications for Jobs and Policy

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1. The food system transformation

1.1. The Food System is transforming fast in West Africa over the past 25 years

a) **SUDDEN**, recent, rapid, not gradual

b) conditioned by “meta drivers”

... policy liberalization

... Public infrastructure investment

... increases in incomes and women’s opportunity cost of time

... massive private investments, some from large firms but most from SMEs – a Quiet Revolution

c) PULLED from **downstream** by

... Rapid urbanization

... Rapid diet change

d) FACILITATED by the **midstream** by SME investments in wholesale, processing, logistics

... as seen in Saweda's talk on the maize/feed/chicken complex in Nigeria

e) FED from **upstream** by farm investments in intensification, commercialization, diversification
... and investments by SMEs in supply of fertilizer, seed, antibiotics, feed, and equipment

1.2. The transformation is occurring in 3 stages

a) traditional (local, rural, semi-subsistence)

... probably 20% of West Africa food system

b) to transitional (urbanization, longer supply chains, Quiet Revolution of SMEs)

... probably 60% of West Africa food system

c) to modern (the supermarket revolution)

... probably 20% of West Africa food system

1.3. Employment opportunities and challenges DIFFER SHARPLY over stages

- The biggest youth jobs OPPORTUNITY is in the TRANSITION stage – that most of West Africa is in – and will continue in for 2+ decades**
- The biggest CHALLENGES for youth jobs are in the TRADITIONAL & MODERN STAGES**

2. The traditional stage: a drought for youth employment

- a) Food supply chains are short & local – few jobs off-farm in commerce & transport
- b) Little “value added” post-farmgate - few jobs in processing and street food preparation & vending
- c) Technology is traditional - it takes a lot of low-paid own-labor to grow & process their food

... and a lot of young women’s time in the compound spent **pounding grain – postponing their dreams**

3. The transition stage: the boom time for youth employment

**a) Food supply chains are now long – to
burgeoning cities! (ONE HALF TO TWO THIRDS
OF FOOD NOW GOES TO CITIES)**

**→ with lots of jobs off-farm in commerce &
transport & handling & storage**

... case of “overnight” revolution in SMEs in maize
trade/feed/chicken-egg complex in Nigeria

B) Urban (and rural!) diets have changed, and demand has SKYROCKETED for the products of labor-intensive horticulture & livestock

→ and youth are “following the money”

... case of Northern Nigerian young women in poultry farming, handling, retail

c) The spread of milling enterprises and other time-liberating technologies & products

→ frees young women to start rural & urban food preparation enterprises – to pursue their dreams

... case of Senegal (and Nigerian) women making & selling prepared millet dishes (“traditional dishes fast-food”) – fura da nono, thiakry

d) At the transition stage, the food system is growing value-added, jobs, opportunities ... but with entry requirements (skills, investment) relatively low..
... compared with the modern stage

4. The Challenging Modern Stage

a) In modern stage: challenges SKYROCKET for UNSKILLED youth workers

... supermarkets & large processing firms compete – hard – with SMEs

... mechanization/automation ALL ALONG THE SUPPLY CHAIN reduces demand for low-skill labor

... Quality requirements RISE and would-be entrepreneurs need to invest to “make the grade”

b) Requirements in skills & investments rise sharply

5. Conclusions

- a) Youth job opportunities rise sharply then tighten as we go from traditional to transitional to modern stages of food system transformation**
- b) The chances for inclusive growth in youth employment depend on meeting the DIFFERENT challenges faced by youth at each stage**
- c) Policy: encourage and facilitate the Quiet Revolution that has already taken off
... and help youth & women to participate**