

TH3.2: Livelihood Aspirations and Realities of Young People in a Myanmar Fishing Community

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Youth and Food Systems

- There is increasing attention on the apparent disengagement of young people from food-system livelihoods
- Focus on youth aspirations-‘generational break’
- Pluriactive and plurilocal livelihood realities (HLPE, 2021)



How the livelihood aspirations of young people are connected to their realities-
youth from a fishing community in the Ayeyarwady Delta of Myanmar

Understanding youth aspirations

- As 'orientations towards a desired future' (Huijsmans et al. 2021)
- Aspirations as a navigational capacity of the future (Appadurai, 2004)
- Constraints by limiting structures and relationships
- Aspiring under change and uncertainty: 'Judicious opportunism' (Johnson-Hanks, 2005)

Methods

- Fieldwork from November 2018 to August 2019
- Focus group discussions (seven FGDs)
- Semi-structured interviews with youth and other household members (73 interviews)
 - 15 female youth 13 male youth from fisher households
 - 5 male youth and 5 female youth from farming households
- Life histories, livelihood trajectories and the evolution of livelihood aspirations

Context

- Fisher households: Primary livelihoods in wage labour and fishing
- Poverty and social marginalisation
- Changes since 2010 associated with progress and improvement of socioeconomic standing of the villagers



Findings

‘I didn’t want to remain in the village. The only work in the village is in the fields...Even our (fisher) parents don’t want the children to become fishers. They want us to be educated and get other jobs.....It’s not like the farmer parents who expect their children to take over farming.’ (Young man, 19)

“They (the migrant workers) look very sophisticated, while previously they used to dress traditionally. They don’t look like us anymore, who have to work in the water the entire day... They have gold earrings and look fair (tanned skin denoting outdoor manual work and a lower social status)...They can even wear their slippers to work” (Young woman, 21)

New desired futures through education and expanded urban mobilities, particularly to Yangon

- Navigational capacities and material realities complicated a straightforward engagement with these new desired futures

-Knowledge and experiences through social networks

-Gendered material realities

- Aspirations are broad and vague and take shape based on opportunities that emerge

- Socioeconomic status and gender complicated a straightforward relationship with new desired futures
- Interaction with generational promise was through aspirations that evolved with opportunities encountered
- Engagement with foodsystems marked by a sense of temporariness

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