



“To Become Somebody in the Future”: Exploring the Content of University Students’ Goals in Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

What ends do young people in sub-Saharan Africa aspire to? What economic, social, political, and environmental factors shape their aspirations? Research on aspirations has gained traction globally during the last four decades, with varying emphasis on production and reproduction of different types of life outcomes and the roles of structure and agency in the formation of aspirations, strategies, and potential for their achievement (Weiss, 2012; Hart, 2013). Recent research in this area, particularly in the field of international development, includes an emerging body of work exploring the relationship between aspirations, wellbeing, and youth transitions to successful adulthood (Copestake & Camfield, 2010; Davids, Roman, & Kerchhoff, 2017). This interest in youth aspirations stems firstly from a desire to understand the lives of young people, their developmental experiences and trajectories, and their values (Honwana, 2012). Secondly, it

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stems from an interest in drawing on what youth value in designing policies and programs and measuring their life outcomes as an axis of policy evaluation (te Lintelo, 2012).

Youths' goals are closely aligned with the ways in which they act and the things they prioritize. Goals show the directions in which youth might want to take their lives, and give an indication of how they contend, incorporate, and deal daily with structural or systemic factors that might affect, prevent, enable, or disrupt the achievement of their goals (Locke & te Lintelo, 2012; Vigh, 2006). Furthermore, goals provide the grounding for understanding young people's resilience and how they deal with threats and challenges to their wellbeing, how they mitigate risks, and how they assess their lives (Emmons, 2003). A young person's goals can be influenced by factors within their environment, and these could be related to constructs such as materialism, altruism, biological drive, or simply survival instinct (Honwana, 2012; Massey, Gebhardt, & Garnefski, 2008).

Moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, understanding goals helps researchers to connect youths' past, present, and future expectations at various stages of their lives. Scholars have made these connections in varying ways, through theories that argue for the role of cultural capital and experience in the formation and pursuit of aspirations (Appadurai, 2004; Bourdieu, 1986) and human motivation (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). In this milieu, there has also been an interest in how young people strategize to achieve their goals (Honwana, 2012). The study of goals often also includes an exploration of the strategies that youth adopt toward achievement, particularly in contexts where they face risks of stagnation and structural constraints (Honwana, 2012). While important, however, the strategies that youth adopt in pursuit of their goals are not an explicit focus of this chapter. The study presented in this chapter will help to illuminate an understanding of a specific group of youth who are studying within the geography of Nigeria's Niger Delta, and will enhance the understanding of the lives of this group of youth in an environment that is historically fraught with conflict and best known for its oil and the associated resource curse (Okonta & Douglas, 2003). It also contributes to the scholarship on youth living in conflict and post-conflict regions (Weiss, 2012; Sommers, 2010; Utas, 2012; Vigh, 2006).

An understanding of youth both as a concept and as a demographic group is crucial for enabling countries to avoid generational tensions

attributable to resource scarcity and competing needs of different sub-population groups and positions them to attain the demographic dividend.¹ The need to mitigate such tensions is apparent given the increasingly limited resources and opportunities for youth to actualize their aspirations, a situation exacerbated by intensifying global inequality, a redefinition—and changing world—of work, resulting in shrinking numbers of unskilled jobs and concomitant opportunities in the formal sector. Compounding these structural constraints, state antagonism in the form of policies and regulations that criminalize the informal sector economic activities that youth tend to pursue for lack of alternatives—for example, restrictions on motorbike transport operators and street vendors, in cities such as Lagos and Kigali—further limits the space for young people to envision, and act toward achieving, life desires and ambitions (de Gramont, 2015; Rollason, 2017).

The aim of this chapter is to explore dimensions of youth aspirations from a sample of university students in Nigeria’s Niger Delta by analyzing the content of their goals. It explores these goals, categorizes them, and contrasts them across gender. The analysis is drawn from research on goals, as a specific aspect of aspirations, and aims to show the different types of goals of students in a university in the Niger Delta. It offers insight into how university students in Nigeria see their futures, which could offer a baseline for further work exploring the aspirations of the general population of youth. The students’ goals could have important implications for theorizing on youth goals in Nigeria, aiding in the design of educational, health, economic, and general youth policies and programs and facilitating the monitoring of such programs for effectiveness along with the evaluation of outcomes. Understanding youth goals would inform assessments of the degree to which policies and programs that target them either approximate or diverge from youths’ expected or desired future lives (te Lintelo, 2012). In this way, goals and evidence of their satisfactory achievement, or progress made toward them, could serve as indicators of whether public policies and programs targeted to youth are consequential and responsive.

¹The demographic dividend is the projected economic output a country is positioned to achieve due to changes in the structure of its population. Based on the experiences of countries in Southeast Asia, it is suggested that where a country has a large and productive working population, the majority of whom are youth, it is positioned to have better economic growth and development (see Bloom, Canning, & Seliva, 2003).

UNDERSTANDING YOUTH GOALS

In this study, *youth* is defined as any individual between the ages of 15 and 30. This definition derives primarily from the age range of the students in the study cohort, rather than convention or theory. This definition is, however, used with the cognizance that youth is a contested concept and lacks a common definition. For example, international organizations such as the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2009) define youth as those aged 15 to 24, and the African Union (2006) uses the ages 15 to 35. In Nigeria, the National Youth Policy defines youth as any individual between the ages of 15 and 29 (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2019).² Despite this, the country's national youth service sets an upper age limit of 30 for participation. In this chapter, university students are treated as a subcategory of youth and, thus, a part of the wider population of youth. As used in this chapter, youth refers to the wider population of young people aged 15 to 30 in the region, whereas *students* is used when referring to the study participants whose goals are described.

The goals of these university students are analyzed as specific aspects of their aspirations. As distinguished from goals, aspirations are a broader category comprising all the things that young people desire to be or have, including things they are working toward achieving and things that they simply wish for (Staats & Partlo, 1993). In this sense, aspirations are seen as being mainly cognitive, which may or may not result in action and may or may not be actively pursued (Ibrahim, 2011). Perhaps with this idea in mind, Copestake and Camfield (2010) define an aspiration as "perceived importance or necessity of goals" (p. 618). On the other hand, goals are understood as desired future states toward which people are working (Kruglanski & Kopetz, 2009). One key distinction between goals and aspirations is the emphasis of goals on action. Goals are linked to actions toward achievement; as such, they are more pragmatic in their outlook and orientation. In this respect, goals have been analyzed in relation to personal projects and plans (Little, 1983). Goals are also distinguished in the literature from other aspirations-linked concepts such as ambition and hope (Ibrahim, 2011).

The possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986) provides a useful organizing framework that illustrates the centrality of action in the conception of goals as distinct from aspirations. The possible selves theory analyzes individuals' disposition in relation to their envisaged potential

²At the time of this study, the National Youth Policy (2009) defined youth as individuals aged 18 to 35. This was changed in mid-2019 with the adoption of the new youth policy by the government.

future selves and is focused on how people’s behaviors are shaped by what they want to have or become, as well as what they do not want to have or become and, therefore, avoid (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In a sense, this theory is an extension of the approach and avoidance achievement literature—where behavior is directed by either positive/desirable or negative/undesirable potential outcomes (Massey et al., 2008), and shows that people typically move toward their desired end states and withdraw from undesired ones (Markus & Nurius, 1986).

Possible selves theory also illustrates the ways in which different goals are linked, forming an important way of thinking about instrumental and terminal functions of goals. Instrumental goals are linked to other ends and may or may not be ends in themselves. For example, the desire to become financially stable may motivate a person to seek education or training or migrate, based on the belief that those actions would enhance their prospects for upward social and economic mobility. These goals are often precursors to other envisaged outcomes in a person’s life and underpin decisions on education, migration, and other important life choices. On the other hand, terminal goals are those that are considered as end states in themselves, which are not necessarily linked to others. The dichotomous characterization of goals as found in the possible selves theory is somewhat similar to other ways of thinking about the concept as discussed in the sections that follow.

The goal content theory, one of five subtheories within the self-determination theory of motivation, is also a useful theoretical framework for understanding goals. This subtheory posits that goals are either intrinsic or extrinsic (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Intrinsic goals are those that are focused on one’s self and relations with others such as community, romantic relationships, and personal growth. These goals are suggested to enhance the achievement of the three basic needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness and increase the wellbeing of individuals (Deci & Ryan, 2000). On the other hand, extrinsic goals are outward looking and include material attainments, fame, and wealth, and are suggested to result in lower wellbeing, and possibly contribute to ill-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The goal content theory has been operationalized in exploring the specific goals of individuals in different contexts (Davids et al., 2017). The use of binary lenses in the analysis of goals somewhat limits the range of possible categories that can be deciphered from the variety of future expectations and plans that youth have for their lives.

In various attempts to operationalize the goal content theory, goals have been described in ways that extend beyond this binary and include

multiple categories. An example is the aspirations index (Kasser & Ryan, 1993), which organizes people's aspirations into four categories of self-acceptance, affiliation, community feeling, and financial success. Emmons (2005) also organizes goals into four distinct categories: intimacy, spirituality, generativity, and achievement. This, he suggests, is consistent across a range of studies which also explore the concept of goals from the perspective of meaning, personal strivings, and life narratives (Emmons, 2005). In a similar vein, Gabrielsen, Ulleberg, and Watten (2012) developed a taxonomy of goals in Norway, based on interviews and focus groups, which has the same four categories. Some of the individual goals included in the categories of the above studies include having meaningful work, relationship with God, belief in the afterlife, having an intimate relationship, family, and achieving higher education, among others (Emmons, 2005; Gabrielsen et al., 2012). Further studies of youths' goals in Nigeria could therefore be guided by the notion of goals being multi-dimensional, diverse, and different for different categories of youth who live in and experience life from different perspectives.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

The Niger Delta is situated in the southernmost part of Nigeria, bordering the Atlantic Ocean. It has a population of 32 million people (or 22% of Nigeria's population) and produces almost all of Nigeria's oil, which contributes around 90% of the country's export earnings. The region is mostly known for its place in the resource curse literature, widespread violence, and entrenched mass poverty despite the region's oil wealth (Obi, 2009; Okonta & Douglas, 2003). The prevalence of violence in the Niger Delta is generally associated with restiveness of youth (Adebanwi, 2005). Thus, while there are many political, economic, and social analyses done on the region, these often focus on youth involvement in violence (Obi, 2006, 2009). Consequently, not much is known about the goals of the youth living in or associated with the region. Yet, restiveness could be linked to youth agency and aspirations, given that this can be seen as a form of protest against conditions which are not consistent with what the youth envision for their lives or as a strategy to survive prevailing conditions in their environment (Vigh, 2006). This type of conflict agency is well documented in the literature from elsewhere in Africa and illustrates the agency of youth in adopting strategies to adapt and navigate contexts of conflict and advance the achievement of their goals (Utas, 2005; Vigh, 2006).

Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta has often been linked to the desire for better distribution and allocation of resources for the sake of investments in social and economic outcomes (Adebanwi, 2005). The so-called resource control argument, with citizens of the Niger Delta demanding self-determination and direct management of their natural resources, comes from the need for more equitable mechanisms of benefits sharing of natural resources gains that lead to improved quality of life in the region (Adebanwi, 2005; Bryan & Ejumudo, 2014). A study conducted to explore the aspirations of youth in the Niger Delta found that youth in the region want better investments in education to improve their future opportunities, livelihood, and other aspects of human development such as health (Foundation for Partnerships Initiatives in the Niger Delta [PIND] and International Youth Foundation [IYF], 2011). These findings of the PIND and IYF study are consistent with much earlier, even dated, work on the Niger Delta, the UN’s Human Development Report for the Niger Delta (United Nations Development Programme, 2006), which emphasized a central gap in the development of the region as being a result of the absence of systems to advance human capital development that should position the youth from the region for opportunities.

Like most in Nigeria, youth in the Niger Delta face many intractable challenges. During the 1980s, the region experienced, along with the rest of Nigeria, the stagnation of human capital development, occasioned by the World Bank mandated structural adjustment program, which significantly stunted the development of skilled manpower for the regional oil and gas economy (Anyanwu, 1992). Furthermore, in recent years, it was hit by Nigeria’s jobless growth, during the boom years leading up to economic stagnation in 2007, and even further job losses in the recent economic recession (Ajakaiye, Afeikhen, Nabena, & Alaba, 2016). Nationally, the labor market participation rate of young university graduates has significantly declined since the 1970s, with as many as 22% of graduates being unemployed by official statistics, although this could be much higher (Akande, 2014). Youth unemployment and underemployment rates combined stood at 67.3% in the third quarter of 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017). There is also an increasing marginalization and stifling of young voices, with universities actively working to proscribe student activism. This is a major shift from the historical involvement of Nigeria’s youth since the 1920s, and university student activism through the early 1990s, aimed at addressing economic and social imbal-

ances that have an impact on individual lives and the wider society. Youth activists and student movements were vocal against Nigeria's adoption of the structural adjustment program and attendant cuts in resources to social services, or changes in policies which resulted in higher commodity prices.

While students' agency is still exercised through protests and the rejection of policies that affect them negatively, student movements have also become increasingly co-opted to advance political ends of university administrations and electoral candidates. Students have also participated in protests in which they were the ultimate victims, such as supporting university lecturers' strikes. While students/youth still have "social weight" (Rollason, 2017), in the political space, their voices are diluted by different intended political ends. Irrespective of the short-term or intermediate ends that students seek through protests, for the most part, their aim is to become "better persons in life," to become people who have achieved something, with economic, social, and political means to live the good life in Nigeria. A study commissioned by the World Bank as part of its Voices of the Poor project in 2000 found that people in different parts of Nigeria described a poor life as one that lacked electricity, water, education, health, self-esteem, and employment, among others (Ayoola et al., 2001). Inversely, the presence of these, reflecting people's goals, could be conceived as constituting the good life.

University students in Nigeria present an important population for a study on youth goals for a variety of reasons. Unlike other education systems in which university education is largely tuition based, public, federal, universities in Nigeria are tuition free (at least by the official federal government policy), which implies that almost every category of youth, including those that are economically and socially disadvantaged, can aspire to university education. This however does not discount the fact that those who are admitted to universities only represent a small portion (25%) of those applying to enter higher education, which makes them a relatively privileged group within the Nigerian context. Since 1999, following Nigeria's transition from military to civilian democratic rule, youth from more affluent backgrounds typically study either in local private or overseas universities. Thus, while university students may be generally perceived, accurately, as having more opportunities and potential, they face many of the same realities and share similar outlooks on the future, as their peers who do not pursue university degrees.

METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis in this chapter draws on data collected from July 2012 to September 2013 as part of the author’s doctoral study on the measurement of youth quality of life. That study entailed analysis of an extensive dataset comprised of six rounds of qualitative and quantitative data from undergraduate students aged 15 to 30. Fieldwork included the collection of qualitative and quantitative data using purposive sampling techniques—consistent with the process of data collection for the validation of new psychological measures, which samples those who meet preset criteria (in this case, primarily being students aged 30 and below). The process of data collection included initial interviews, with a follow-up with a select group of initial interviewees, focus groups, administration of a pre-pilot questionnaire, pilot questionnaire, final questionnaire, and further interviews with some of the final questionnaire respondents (see MacIkemenjima, 2018, 2019 for a detailed description of the methodology). For this chapter, only qualitative information from two data sources—initial interviews and focus groups—are discussed in detail. These analyses and related results are augmented by some descriptive statistics from the quantitative data from the pilot survey.

A total of 23 initial individual interviews (13 males and 10 females) were held and broadly focused on the question “what are the things that you consider important to your life which you are working towards achieving?” This question is consistent with the conception of goals in the study which is linked to action. The initial set of goals identified using these interviews were then subjected to further exploration in 7 focus groups with a total of 43 participants (25 males and 18 females), where further issues which were missing from the initial data and their analyses were identified and included. Prior to the commencement of the study, ethical clearance was secured from the researcher’s home university, the University of East Anglia, as well as the universities where data was collected. In addition, all participants were assured that data would be treated with confidentiality and anonymity and they were free to discontinue at any point.

The qualitative data was analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is an approach to data collection and analysis in which data is coded for theory or conceptually meaningful categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Data for this study was coded using the three-step process of open, axial, and selective coding. The initial interview data was first analyzed to generate a set of broad categories through open coding. In

this step, chunks of the data which relate to a general idea are labeled based on how they occur in the data. In this step, over 60 initial goal-related codes were developed. These were then subjected to focus groups, where participants both critiqued them and filled gaps in terms of meaningful goals that they considered missing, not adequately presented, or repetitive. This process allowed a broad set of participants to contribute to the review of the initial set of codes. Following these focus group discussions further open coding was undertaken with the new data.

This was followed by the axial coding stage of the analysis, in which relationships between several open codes were identified and similar codes were grouped to form a category. This second stage of the analysis formed the basis for determining the specific goal items that are discussed in this chapter. In the third stage of selective coding, the analysis identified theoretically and conceptually meaningful categories, which were mainly used as organizing categories for the several individual goal items that were developed in the earlier axial coding stage. The categories from the selective coding stage are described in the findings in this chapter. In the section on findings, relevant quotes from the qualitative data as they were analyzed in the open coding stage of the analysis are presented. In each case, the data has been anonymized using pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

Based on the analysis of the qualitative data, a set of 40 goals, described later as items, was developed and administered to 267 participants in the pilot study. The 40 items were explored based on two overarching questions: “how important is it to you?” and “how satisfied are you with achieving it?” In line with the aim of this chapter, which is exploring the content of students’ goals, only the results of the importance question are presented. The use of importance scores is consistent with measures of aspirations such as the aspirations index and the adolescent life goals scale (Gabrielsen et al., 2012; Kasser & Ryan, 1996), where item importance is used as the basis for measuring goals, in addition to attainability.

WHAT GOALS DO YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE?

In this section, the goals identified by the students in the analysis are described. As indicated earlier, based on the analyses of the qualitative data, over 60 codes initially derived as areas important to the students were narrowed down to 40. Many of these goals related to students’ education, relationships, opportunities for livelihood, and desire to have

Table 5.1 Demographic characteristics of survey respondents

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>n (%)^a</i>
<i>Sex</i>	
Male	101 (37.8)
Female	163 (61)
Missing	3 (1.1)
<i>Year of study</i>	
1	17 (6.4)
2	55 (20.6)
3	50 (18.7)
4	145 (54.3)
<i>Age</i>	(<i>M</i> = 24.53)
15–21	38 (14.2)
22–25	120 (44.9)
26–30	93 (34.8)
Missing	16 (6)
<i>Marital status^b</i>	
Married	30 (11.2)
Single	232 (86.9)
Missing	5 (1.9)

Source: Author's analysis of fieldwork data

^a*n* = 267

^bMarital status is used here to imply whether the participant is married or unmarried at the time of the study and does not consider other types of relationship status

consumer or material goods. For purposes of the study, these goals are organized into four broad categories—achievement, relationships, generativity, and material goals—which are described in the subsections that follow.

Achievement Goals (Becoming Somebody)

The first category of goals is focused on personal achievement within the overarching idea of having a successful life. The notion of “becoming somebody” is defined here as attaining, through a systematic process, a steady progression to attaining the social markers of a successful life. These are often grounded in moral and philosophical considerations and are understood to be based on an ascendance to the next level of attainment. This progression may or may not include material achievement—as is the case of the material goals which I describe later—but are grounded in

what may be becoming a responsible (i.e., independent and stable), honest, and upwardly mobile member of society. In certain societies in Nigeria, a person may possess material wealth but may not be considered to have become somebody if they do not meet the social and ethical markers. A person may attain financial wealth but may still not be considered to have become somebody if they do not have a university degree or if they attain wealth through corruption. The goals here embody the students' desire to have social and economic mobility and attain transition to social adulthood. The specific goals identified in the analysis for this category include: having higher educational qualifications, gaining financial independence, and obtaining postgraduate education.

Central to this category of goals is educational attainment, which is seen to be instrumental, offering a means to other ends, such as becoming a respectable person in the society through gaining the prestige that the possession of a degree offers or by becoming a professional in a defined area. As one 21-year-old male interviewee expressed, the inability to transition from education to this desired professional outcome could be a source of considerable stress:

It gets frustrating when you spend your years in school, and you come out not having anything to do, anywhere to work even with your good grade or less grade you still don't have anything to do, it's frustrating and makes people want to do something stupid. ... I wouldn't want to waste the whole resources in school and come out walking in the streets.

Despite their status as university graduates, students also recognize the nuances of the need to attain a "respectable" degree, achieved through high grade point averages "to come out with a 2.1, 2.2" (upper- and lower second-class degrees, respectively), as indicated by a 25-year-old female interviewee. Furthermore, students also discussed the importance of completing their degrees at "the right time" and studying "the right courses"—that is, courses perceived as offering opportunities in the labor market (e.g., medicine and engineering). Regarding the latter, students who were studying courses that were not among their original preferences said they were exploring avenues to change to their preferred courses. However, at the time of the study, none of the students who indicated this desire in the interviews had successfully changed to their preferred course.

The data also show that concern about opportunities in the labor market motivates students' desire to pursue graduate degrees. The perceived

link between graduate education and labor market opportunities is illustrated by a 23-year-old male participant who observed that, for students who do not have social networks to rely upon, acquiring these additional credentials is a strategy to advance their chances of securing employment opportunities:

Why I think it's important for me to take my educational level to masters before getting a job due to the fact of unemployment in this country, without masters or a PhD ..., you can hardly get a job as a BSc holder. ... Nowadays, ... if you don't have anyone even there's no how you can get [a job]. But once you are academically sound, you've gotten to certain level, they can easily consider you for employment in the country.

Contrary to conventional wisdom as reflected by expectations that international migration leads to a better life (Mains, 2013), in the interviews and focus groups conducted as part of this study, international migration for economic purposes was not a major factor. However, the quest for good *quality* higher education is a major influence on students' desire for international migration. The primary reason participants gave for intending to travel abroad was to receive a better-quality education owing, according to a 28-year-old male interviewee, to the “lack [of] those good facilities to study,” which affect the “ability to acquire those things we are learning ... Sometimes lecture venues are not conducive. The school system and everything is bad.” Although not specifically explored in this study, the absence of economically motivated migration goals among members of the study cohort of university students is an area worthy of further in-depth analysis.

Material Goals (Making It in Life)

As the title suggests, the category of material goals encompasses the desire for ownership of material and consumer goods. During the field data collection, it was common to hear the expression that a person has “made it.” This phrase expresses the notion that the individual has attained specific markers of a successful life. These markers are varied and include having a highly or well-paid job, becoming a political official, purchasing consumer goods such as a car, and being able to build a house. It is typically based on specific material and status markers that describe a person's achieve-

ments relative to society's perception of what a person requires to be successful.

Making it in life relates to having tangible achievements that affirm a person's social and economic position. Some of the specific defining features of this category found in the analysis include being wealthy, having a powerful position in the society, and being famous. The goal of becoming wealthy is distinguished from that of being financially stable based on the degree of influence commanded by being wealthy, while being financially stable refers to simply being able to afford a basic life. One of the avenues that participants perceived as a path to the ownership of such wealth and affluence is becoming a politician. Many of the interview participants indicated an interest in becoming politicians. However, this did not seem to have general appeal among the majority of participants in the focus groups and survey. The item associated with this goal "to go into politics" was only endorsed by 41.9% of the participants as very or extremely important, with a much lower median and mode of 3 and 1, respectively, compared to all the other items which had medians and modes of between 4 and 5 (see Table 5.2).

Different reasons were given by the students for their interest in politics. Some of them were already involved in student union politics and indicated an intention to run for elected office upon graduating university. Two clear motivations for the students' interest in politics emerged from the analysis: the desire to become wealthy and powerful and the intention to contribute to social change through innovation—"abstract thinking and ideas"—in policy making (as indicated by a 28-year-old male interviewee). Being a politician is perceived to be one of the ways through which individuals make it in life, as the students believe that they will be afforded the opportunity to become wealthy. As illustrated by a 25-year-old male participant, becoming a politician is perceived as an avenue for personal enrichment because "politics is the highest payer in this country."

Another aspect of political life that was mentioned by only a few participants, but which stood out in the interviews and focus groups, is the desire to represent Nigeria to other countries in an ambassadorial or other capacity. The choice of this goal can be largely understood from the same prism of prestige, power, and wealth that other types of political offices are perceived to offer. Relatedly, some participants expressed the desire to be "well-known in the society" and to be respected because of the work that they have done or their contribution to society.

Table 5.2 Descriptive statistics of goal importance items (in order of importance)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Goal importance rating frequencies % (n)</i>						Md
	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Very</i>	<i>Extremely</i>	<i>Missing</i>	
God	1.9 (5)	1.5 (4)	7.5 (20)	18.4 (49)	70.4 (188)	0.4 (1)	5
Career	0	3 (8)	7.1 (19)	24.7 (66)	64.8 (173)	0.4 (1)	5
Degree	0.4 (1)	1.1 (3)	9.7 (26)	22.8 (61)	65.2 (174)	0.7 (2)	5
Health	0.7 (2)	3 (8)	10.1 (27)	20.6 (55)	64.4 (172)	1.1 (3)	5
House	1.9 (5)	1.9 (5)	9 (24)	27.7 (74)	59.6 (159)	0	5
Support family	1.1 (3)	3 (8)	8.2 (22)	28.1 (75)	59.2 (158)	0.4 (1)	5
Live	1.5 (4)	1.9 (5)	8.2 (22)	29.2 (78)	58.4 (156)	0.7 (2)	5
Married	1.5 (4)	3.0 (8)	12.4 (33)	21.7 (58)	61.4 (164)	0	5
Knowledge	0.4 (1)	3.4 (9)	8.6 (23)	28.8 (77)	58.1 (155)	0.7 (2)	5
Peace	0.4 (1)	2.2 (6)	12.4 (33)	27 (72)	57.3 (153)	0.7 (2)	5
Job	1.5 (4)	2.2 (6)	7.9 (21)	18.4 (49)	66.7 (178)	3.4 (9)	5
Comfortable	0.4 (1)	3 (8)	7.5 (20)	29.2 (78)	57.7 (154)	2.2 (6)	5
Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)	1.1 (3)	1.5 (4)	11.6 (31)	18.4 (49)	64 (171)	3.4 (9)	5
Needs	1.9 (5)	2.2 (6)	10.1 (27)	28.1 (75)	56.6 (151)	1.1 (3)	5
Financially stable	1.1 (3)	2.2 (6)	11.2 (30)	27.3 (73)	56.6 (151)	1.5 (4)	5
Social change	0.7 (2)	4.1 (11)	11.6 (31)	30 (80)	53.6 (143)	0	5
Masters	0.4 (1)	3.4 (9)	9 (24)	72 (27)	57.7 (154)	2.6 (7)	5
Happy home	1.9 (5)	3 (8)	9.4 (25)	18 (48)	64.4 (172)	3.4 (9)	5
Wealthy	0.7 (2)	3 (8)	14.2 (38)	30 (80)	51.7 (138)	0.4 (1)	5
Children	1.5 (4)	1.5 (4)	13.9 (37)	25.8 (69)	55.1 (147)	2.2 (6)	5
Role model	1.9 (5)	3.7 (10)	14.2 (38)	26.2 (70)	53.6 (143)	0.4 (1)	5
Prefer	1.1 (3)	4.9 (13)	13.1 (35)	29.6 (79)	50.6 (135)	0.7 (2)	5
Respect	0.7 (2)	2.6 (7)	13.9 (37)	36.7 (98)	45.3 (121)	0.7 (2)	4
Independent	4.1 (11)	2.2 (6)	11.2 (30)	33 (88)	48.3 (129)	1.1 (3)	4
Family support	3 (8)	2.2 (6)	15.7 (42)	25.1 (67)	52.1 (139)	1.9 (5)	5
Learning	0.7 (2)	3.4 (9)	12 (32)	30.7 (82)	49.8 (133)	3.4 (9)	5
PhD	1.1 (3)	4.1 (11)	17.6 (47)	27.7 (74)	47.6 (127)	1.9 (5)	4
Friends	1.5 (4)	4.5 (12)	13.5 (36)	39.3 (105)	40.1 (107)	1.1 (3)	4
Car	1.1 (3)	4.9 (13)	13.9 (37)	32.2 (86)	45.3 (121)	2.6 (7)	4
Vocational	3 (8)	4.1 (11)	17.2 (46)	32.2 (86)	42.7 (114)	0.7 (2)	4
Confide	3.4 (9)	5.6 (15)	13.1 (35)	31.8 (85)	44.6 (119)	1.5 (4)	4
Visit	1.9 (5)	4.9 (13)	14.2 (38)	31.8 (85)	44.2 (118)	3 (8)	4

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

<i>Item</i>	<i>Goal importance rating frequencies % (n)</i>						Md
	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>A little</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Very</i>	<i>Extremely</i>	<i>Missing</i>	
Travel	0.4 (1)	3.7 (10)	17.2 (46)	34.1 (91)	41.2 (110)	3.4 (9)	4
Influential	1.9 (5)	5.2 (14)	13.5 (36)	40.8 (109)	37.1 (99)	1.5 (4)	4
Famous	3 (8)	4.5 (12)	14.6 (39)	33.7 (90)	41.6 (111)	2.6 (7)	4
Ambassador	4.1 (11)	4.1 (11)	16.5 (44)	28.5 (76)	44.2 (118)	2.6 (7)	4
Look	4.9 (13)	6 (16)	16.1 (43)	31.8 (85)	38.2 (102)	3 (8)	4
Study abroad	5.6 (15)	7.1 (19)	19.5 (52)	29.6 (79)	37.1 (99)	1.1 (3)	4
Business	4.5 (12)	6.4 (17)	18 (48)	36 (96)	31.5 (84)	3.7 (10)	4
Politics	22.8 (61)	11.2 (30)	20.2 (54)	21.7 (58)	20.2 (54)	3.7 (10)	3

Source: Author's analysis of fieldwork data

$n = 257$ to 267 . NB: n varies across items due to missing responses. Responses were provided on a Likert-type scale (from 1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = average, 4 = very, 5 = extremely)

Central to participants' conception of the good life, or making it in life, was the marker of wealth and money, as is illustrated by Brooke:

Good life generally, like in Nigeria you hardly survive without money. Money is almost everything, so money should play a major role in a good life. It plays a major role. There are other things but money plays a major role. You need money for mobility, because if you have money you can actually move to somewhere. If you have money, you can look presentable. ... Money is good; it's good in so many aspects.

Generativity Goals (Becoming a Voice)

Because they are closely related to helping others, and in some respects advancing social justice, the third category, generativity goals, are described as becoming a voice, rather than having a voice. These goals are understood in two ways. The first, on which there is a greater emphasis, relates to giving—supporting people in need both financially and materially, contributing to social change, and being a voice for the voiceless, those who are constrained or incapable of defending themselves. The second relates to giving back to family members, particularly parents and those who contributed to the students' education in some ways.

The desire or interest in addressing social issues was found to be influenced by the experiences of others whom participants witnessed and by

participants’ own experiences. In relation to witnessed experiences of others, this appears to drive the desire to help and to seek justice on behalf of those affected. This is illustrated by a 23-year-old male interviewee who highlighted the oppression he witnessed in his neighborhood as the main reason for his interest in helping others, citing police injustice as a specific example:

I have seen social injustice from people towards people, that is from citizens towards fellow citizens, from government to citizens, from the rich to the poor, from the high-handed ones to the less privileged, and every time I see these things I just think “ah Osky, if you were here you would have done this, you know. You should have told that police man to leave.”

The reference to state institutions, the police in the above example, also shows that students’ desire to help others is, at least in part, driven by the perceived inadequacies of state institutions and responses to the problems that exist in the wider society. In the wake of youth protests in parts of North Africa such as Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and elsewhere in the region, researchers have highlighted the factor of youth lack of trust in state institutions as a leading contributor to youth protests in Africa (Honwana, 2012). In addition, there is a long tradition of self-help established in parts of Nigeria, which has led to the development of community schools and other types of infrastructure such as community access roads. Negative experiences of young people also drive their desire to help others. For example, a 19-year-old female participant pointed out that the challenges that others in her environment face are like hers and this informs her desire to help:

I don’t like seeing people suffer. I’m not really from a very rich home so I know where I’m coming from and I know what my people are suffering. ... So, if I have the position to help them, I would help them. ... I came from the part of the country that you see so many things happening [as] you walk on the street, you see things what you are not supposed to be seeing...? You go around you meet people, you hear people cry, you hear people tell their stories and you are not really comfortable, you feel if you actually have something you know to help these people you can be able to help these people. ... People are suffering, and I think with my position if I have something to help them I should be able to help them.

Broadly, the desire to help others appears to reflect students’ interest in contributing to wider social change. Several participants indicated that

they were already engaged in activities to help others through the provision of free tutorials to their peers and through local nongovernmental organizations addressing important social issues. Students who stated this goal frequently cited the examples of establishing outreach groups to communities and schools and celebrating birthdays with children in orphanages. At least two interviewees discussed their involvement in community outreach/social work with youth in Port Harcourt, through the establishment of a community-based organization. These community groups typically engage in activities such as sex education, tutorials for secondary school students, and career advice.

Relationship Goals (Having Valuable Relationships)

The fourth category, relationship goals, refers to the desire to have meaningful connections with others. This includes close associations with those within one's family, having reliable and trustworthy friends, and being religious. Participants indicated that personal and communal relationships constituted an important aspect of how they envisioned their future lives. The goals discussed under this category include: the desire to have respectful and beneficial friendships; having a person with whom to discuss their personal problems, confide in, and seek guidance; being married; having children; being able to support their families; and "to have God."

The specific goals outlined in this category have both personal and cultural motivations and relevance. For example, as will be discussed in greater detail in a later section on gender differentiation, the data shows that young males and females' transition plans to marriage is defined in part by cultural expectations and norms. This potentially explains why the majority of the male students project their transition from university mainly as being able to secure employment or pursue graduate degrees, while some female respondents see their transitions as being directly to marriage. This could be partly attributed to the patriarchal nature of most societies in Nigeria, in which males are expected to be the primary financial providers in their families. Linked to the above is also the view that when a female marries, her financial or other needs become the responsibility of her future husband. This is illustrated by a 19-year-old female respondent who indicated that she would like to marry as soon as possible "because some load will be reduced from my father." In part, these kinds of relationships have been analyzed in the literature as adaptive and survival strategies (Utas, 2005). However, the anticipated benefits do not

often materialize and many young women get stuck in relationships that offer limited benefits.

On the other hand, relationships perceived to be between people of the same religion are aligned with their need for affiliation. In most parts of Nigeria, Islam, Christianity, traditional religions, and sometimes Eastern religions, are practiced—although often the media and literature cast Nigeria as being a religious binary between Islam and Christianity (Sampson, 2014). Students in this study perceived religion as not only being important but also as a cardinal aspect of their lives. In a few interviews, students expressed “regret” or “remorse” for not being as actively religious as they would have liked, and thus expressed the desire to be “closer to God” or “return to God.” As shown in the quantitative data in Table 5.2, “God” was categorized as one of the top items for importance among the goals listed, with more than 70% of participants rating it as extremely important.

References to God are often linked to the participants’ spirituality, as illustrated by a 23-year-old female interviewee:

My spiritual life is not the way I want it to be. I should have my time with God. To have your own time, it gives you insights. Everybody has his own guiding angel. To have your own time with God.

As they were described by the participants in the study, relationship goals are important for both the instrumental and terminal value that they offer. Some of these goals are viewed as ends in themselves, for example having children, whereas others are viewed as being instrumental to other ends, such as being married and having reliable friends.

HOW IMPORTANT ARE THESE GOALS?

As described earlier, individual goals developed from the foregoing qualitative analysis were converted into items for the collection of additional quantitative data. The questionnaire developed through the qualitative analysis process was administered in a pilot study. A total of 267 students completed the instrument (see Table 5.1 for demographic characteristics). When the data from the 40 items using the question “how important is it to you?” were analyzed, they showed high-level endorsement of the goals by the participants. The results also showed that, consistent with the small sample of participants in the interviews and focus groups, these goals are

highly valued by the students in the universities where data was collected. Table 5.2 shows the item-level responses and medians for each of the data points, which illustrates that most of them were endorsed at the highest level.

GENDER DIFFERENTIATION

The goals found in the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data did not show significant differences between male and female students. Tests of statistical significance (Mann Whitney) did not find any statistically significant differences between male and female students (at 0.05 level) across the goal categories. However, one area where there was a difference in the qualitative data, in the sequencing of goals, is with respect to the goal to be married.³ While marriage was identified as a next step for many female participants after completing their undergraduate studies, this was not the case for most of their male counterparts. The male participants cited the need for financial stability as the main reason for not prioritizing marriage immediately following their degrees.

As mentioned earlier, male students' prioritization of work or post-graduate education perhaps may stem from cultural norms that require them to be the primary income earners of their families (Olawoye et al., 2004). There appears to be an extension of the model of relationships in which females are expected to be entirely dependent on their male partners, or mainly take on the role of being house wives (Ntoimo, 2013). Some female participants (for instance, Chidinma, cited earlier in the section on relationship goals) pointed out that they preferred to be married while still studying or soon thereafter, citing the belief that marriage would improve their financial situation.

Research shows that the reasons young women marry in Nigeria include pressure to avoid the stigma associated with being single beyond a certain age and to acquire the social status associated with the perceived achievement of being married, and a desire for companionship and to have children. In some societies in Nigeria, being married accords a woman

³Marriage is used here to refer to heterosexual relationships between males and females. Although this differentiation was not explicitly asked, the researcher assumes the majority of the students referred to these types of relationships. This does not however discount the possibility that some students might have implied other types of marital relationships that do not fit the gender binary that is dominant in Nigeria.

certain social status and “respect,” and having children elevates this even further, given the premium placed on childbearing (Uchendu, 2006). However, many young women, particularly urban and educated women, are choosing to remain single for various reasons, including the desire to first secure their financial independence, challenge the patriarchy, adhere to religious beliefs, and wait for the right partner (Ntoimo & Isuigo-Abanihe, 2011).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study finds that youth goals are culturally grounded, diverse, and multidimensional. The four categories of goals that emerged from the analysis presented in this chapter—achievement, material, generativity, and relationship—define the range of values that the students in the study wanted to achieve in their lives. For certain categories of youth who are similar in terms of their age or life stage, their goals can be similar irrespective of their gender or other markers of difference.

In analyzing the goals of the students, some additional questions emerged: Why are some obvious goals such as international migration, personal safety, and environment not prioritized by the students? What role do religion and culture play in the formation of the students’ goals? These questions are discussed briefly in this section.

The first question reintroduces the instrumental and terminal functions of goals. In this regard, some goals, such as international migration, may be seen as means to other ends and therefore not considered specific goals in themselves. Consequently, despite the opportunities that may be perceived to be available via migration, the students did not indicate it as a goal. This is illustrated by the fact that when international travel was discussed in focus groups and interviews, it was mainly described in relation to vacations and overseas studies. The specific example of international migration is given as an example of “expected” goals not mentioned because it contradicts the high numbers who attempt to cross the Mediterranean into Europe (International Organisation for Migration, 2018).

Furthermore, it is interesting to find that despite their level of education, being university students, and perceived privilege, gender normative expectations still influence the goals of the students. This is seen in the replication of existing gender norms and stereotypes in the results where some female students prioritize marriage over further education. However,

the above is said keeping in view that the essential composition of the participants' goals were similar across gender, and no statistically significant differences were found in their goal content.

The goals reported in this chapter are grounded in and defined by students' experiences, society, religion, and culture. This, however, fails to explain why some goals that should be locally relevant under the broad rubric of collective goals are missing, such as the preservation of the environment. Does this suggest that the students are increasingly individualistic, unaware of the impact of oil activities on the environment in the Niger Delta or unconcerned about the safety and security concerns daily expressed in the region? This question is further expressed given that students voiced a specific interest in participating in social change activities in the region. Why did these obvious questions of interest in the region not feature as prominently as those included in the four categories? These questions, and others such as the strategies the students are adopting in the pursuit of their goals, are not discussed in this chapter, but could be areas for further exploration.

This chapter sought to contribute to the body of work on youth aspirations by analyzing and describing the goal content of university students in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Based on the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data, the study found and operationalized 40 goal items and validated these using descriptive results. The results offer an opportunity for policy makers and researchers to draw on the content of students' goals for program design and policy making. There is a wide array of issues that an analysis of goals generates, which can be translated into youth development policies (te Lintelo, 2012). Understanding the goals of youth could therefore enable the design of policies and specific programs that are more targeted in addressing students' instrumental goals and serve to tailor them in ways that help students achieve their terminal goals. For example, education programs may be strengthened to prepare youth better for employment opportunities. Furthermore, an understanding of the goals of young people could be taken as a dynamic process. This implies an ongoing process of research and analyses on how their goals may inform policy analysis and review on an ongoing basis rather than as a one-off exercise.

The similarities of young people's goals across gender also suggest that policies for youth can be broadly similar in their areas of focus. However, in areas where there are differences, policies should be appropriately tailored to meet youths' needs based on gender differences (Sommers,

2012). Approaching policy in this way will ensure that policies are dynamic, are continuously sensitive to the evolving priorities and needs of youth, and enable governments to channel resources to the aspects of young people’s lives where they can make the most difference.

Finally, these results offer an opportunity for researchers to explore the goal content of young people, analyze the factors that affect, influence, and enhance the formation and pursuit of their goals, and explore further the extent to which goals influence youths’ decision-making and the effects of specific types of goals on the ways in which young people live their lives. Researchers could also explore further the effects of culture and religion versus the role of globalization in shaping youths’ goals.

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