

Intergenerational Mobility in Five African Countries

Thomas Bossuroy, Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit, University of Cape Town

Denis Cogneau, Paris School of Economics

Abstract

We set down the first comparative measurement of the social mobility of men in five countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, based on ten different nationally representative household surveys. Intergenerational mobility between the farm and non-farm sectors is examined, and is linked to migration patterns on the one hand, educational development and mobility on the other hand. The two former British colonies of our sample, Ghana and Uganda, stand out with the highest level of social fluidity. Two former French Western colonies, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, come next. Last, Madagascar exhibits particularly large and sustained inequalities of opportunities. These results appear to be driven by the differences in the spatial distribution of farm and non-farm activities in rural and urban places. A greater diversification of activities (peri-urban agriculture and rural nonfarm jobs) yields higher levels of intergenerational sectoral mobility and reduces the gap between the farm and non-farm sector. These results suggest that the settlement policies implemented differently by the French and British colonizers have persisting effects over time.