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Mixed methods approach for research on youth inclusion in labour markets in Niger

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Abstract
This article briefly explores how to combine two qualitative methodologies to inspect the topic of youth inclusion in Niger via a mixed methods analysis. It presents the ethnographic approach developed by LASDEL's social anthropological qualitative methodology and the CPAN's critical realist mixed methods approach to research and analysis of poverty dynamics. In assessing their joint functioning, it also inspects some limitations of the experimented exercise for Niger.

Résumé
Cet article decrit succintement le procés de combinaison de deux méthodologies qualitatives pour interroger le thème de l'inclusion de la jeunesse dans le marché du travail au Niger, via une analyse à méthodes mixtes. Il présente l'approche ethnographique développée par la méthodologie qualitative d'anthropologie sociale du LASDEL et l'approche critique des méthodes mixtes réalistes du CPAN pour la recherche et l'analyse de la dynamique de la pauvreté. En évaluant leur fonctionnement conjoint, il inspecte également certaines limites de l'exercice expérimenté pour le Niger.

Introduction

In this article we merge two distinct institutional qualitative methodologies in order to understand the pathways young people follow into and out of labour markets and the enablers of the quality of inclusion, based on a research article on youth inclusion in labour markets in Niger (da Corta et al., 2021). The two methodologies are the Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherches sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Devéloppement Local (LASDEL) social anthropological qualitative methodological approaches and Chronic poverty Advisory Network (CPAN) critical realist qualitative approach to field research and analysis designed for research into poverty dynamics. The latter is iterated with CPAN's national-level panel data analysis for further insights.

We first briefly trace the evolution of conceptual and methodological thinking leading to the LASDEL methods and the specific application in the preparation of the study on youth inclusion. This included: (1) an ECRIS[1] workshop in Niamey prior to the fieldwork that involved the initial collection of qualitative data (ECRIS); (2) the prior training of researchers from LASDEL in the qualitative methodology and the analysis of the interview material used in this study; and (3) an ethnographic strategy drawing on the CPAN and LASDEL methods applied in the field. We describe this in detail in Section 2.

In Section 3, we trace the evolution of conceptual and methodological thinking leading to CPAN's mixed methods approach to understanding the nature and causes of poverty dynamics. This involves a critical realist approach to intensive qualitative field research using diachronic, multi-layered and relational-based methods designed specifically to widen our understanding of the causes of pathways into and out of poverty and livelihood transformation (da Corta, 2020b, forthcoming; da Corta, 2017). This approach is modified for the study of youth inclusion in labour markets in this article. The CPAN approach also includes a quantitative analysis of national-level panel data to sample and support the qualitative analysis in a mixed methods approach. Here, the analysis of the statistics involves relaxing positivist assumptions regarding closed systems and constant conjuncture and instead follows a more 'critical' modest and careful artisanal iteration with a wider body of evidence from intensive qualitative field research, enabling interpretation of the direction of, and rationale underlying, the statistical associations (Olsen and Morgan, 2005; Shaffer, 2013).

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[1] Enquête collective rapide d'identification des conflits et des groupes stratégiques.

In Section 4, we present the application of the CPAN and LASDEL methods to the study of youth inclusion in Niger. We follow this with a discussion of the limitations of each approach and show how the two approaches complement each other to enable a deeper and richer methodological approach to field research and data analysis on the subject of youth inclusion in labour markets in Niger.

1.   The LASDEL methodology

LASDEL (*Laboratoire d'Etudes et de Recherche sur les Dynamiques Sociales et le Développement Local* - Study and Research Laboratory on Social Dynamics and Social Development) is an African research laboratory for social sciences located in Benin and Niger since 2001. It is an original experience aiming to promote science centres of excellence in Africa.

LASDEL has been developing or participating in many North-South and South-South research programmes for 20 years. It has established partnerships with research teams in ten countries and regularly collaborates with research institutions in nine European and American countries on an equal footing. The eight sessions of its summer University, each organised for two weeks, gathered a total of over 300 African PhD students. In addition, LASDEL has also welcomed dozens of researchers and PhD students from North and South for fixed-period exchange, writing, documentation, and investigation programmes. LASDEL researchers teach in Universities in Benin, Niger, Togo, and Europe, and LASDEL directs two masters at the Abdou Moumouni University of Niamey.

Six important characteristics define its special features.

1.   LASDEL's research programmes mainly revolve around delivering public goods and services in Niger and in West Africa, in different areas (health, education, justice, migration, humanitarian aid, security, fighting poverty, methods of governance, etc.) and by different institutions (the state, international institutions, development agencies, NGOs, etc.)

2.   LASDEL prioritises empirical research relying on mostly qualitative data produced using a rigorous socio-anthropological methodology: prolonged insertion in the environment being investigated and in-depth knowledge of this environment, observations, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, case studies, life histories, triangulation, and approaches by strategic groups. This approach is eclectic (combining several types of data instead of limiting itself to just one), flexible (involving dialogue with the subjects of the investigation, and not a pre-established framework), evolving (each interview and observation can open new avenues of investigation), and contextualised (the social stakeholders are always approached in the context of their daily activities).

3.   This methodology allows us to highlight the unexpected effects of public policies and development projects when they are implemented in local contexts where social and practical norms prevail, which are often far removed from the protocols and rules demanded by these policies and projects. Quantitative indicators do not help us understand unexpected effects.

4. The data analyses carried out by LASDEL researchers are always grounded in the field (grounded theory). LASDEL does not separate the production of data from its interpretation, it does not lock itself into any pre-existing theoretical system, and it favours comparative analyses of neighbouring environments which enable progressive increases in generality, while always remaining sensitive to contexts.

5. LASDEL is a collective organisation where researchers are used to working in teams, particularly on multi-site and multi-researcher comparative research programmes. It is with this in mind that LASDEL regularly uses the ECRIS framework (Rapid Collective Inquiry for the Identification of Conflicts and Strategic Groups) as the initial collective investigation phase before individual research on each site, which remains indispensable.

6. LASDEL is a research institute and not a study office: it negotiates the terms of reference for its programmes, uses its own methodological practices, and works out a specific problem for each subject. But it also aims to ground its research in issues of society and development, and wishes for its results to contribute to improving the quality of services delivered and the policies framing them. It thus engages in ongoing dialogue with the public institutions in Niger and Benin, as well as with development partners. Notably, LASDEL develops research and action programmes focused on identifying internal innovations to African public services.

As part of the collaboration with CPAN, LASDEL has, on the one hand, organised and supervised the ECRIS collective investigation in Niamey, followed by investigations on Zinder and Tahoua. On the other hand, it has led further investigations in order to contextualise some of the comments gathered during focus groups and life histories directed by CPAN, to open new avenues not mentioned in these comments.

1.1. The ECRIS workshop

The ECRIS methodology (Rapid Collective Inquiry for the Identification of Conflicts and Strategic Groups) is a kind of exploratory collective investigation presented as a framework with different steps. This collaborative work enables, on the one hand, the development, application, and refinement of a research practice, and on the other hand, to put forward the first analyses from material gathered and to identify new avenues of research. As defined, ECRIS can resemble a "scoping workshop" in some ways, a kind of meeting often organised by consortia of researchers to mark the launch of a research project involving several countries and investigation sites. It has several differences with these meetings insofar as the collective work is not limited to improving the data collection tools, but consists first and foremost of leading field investigations together and of analysing the results together. ECRIS provides a framework where the research problem, never closed, is

sustained by discussions on the first sets of data gathered. It thus leads to the collective development of methodological tools enabling comparative analyses to be carried out using common qualitative indicators, and taking into account the specific contextual features of the investigation sites. The relevance of the qualitative indicators and their ability to give an account of the reality being studied are regularly at the centre of researchers' discussions. In practical terms, carrying out ECRIS involves three components. These are the preparatory, theoretical, and practical components.

- The preparatory component is performed by 1 or 2 researchers with some research assistants who are tasked with going to the pre-targeted investigation sites, obtaining research authorisations from the relevant institutions, and identifying a handful of strategic groups and local issues related to the research topic.

- The theoretical component will allow us to explain the ECRIS framework. The problem, as well as a preliminary methodology note, are presented and subject to a discussion between all participants. The classic tools for producing qualitative data are revisited in light of the research problem. This second component also includes a joint exercise to determine the strategic groups and identify the provisional qualitative indicators that will help guide the investigations.

- The practical component involves performing the investigations on the sites targeted during the preparatory phase. These investigations are led by all participants, organised into groups of investigators. Each group of investigators is tasked with investigating with one or two strategic groups. These investigations can be planned for two or three days. In practical terms, mornings are set aside for field investigations and afternoons for synthesising the material collected by each group. The last day of ECRIS is given to writing a general summary outlining the first analyses from the material produced. It will be completed after more extensive investigations and will suggest new avenues to follow.

The ECRIS workshop for the current research project took place in Niamey with 16 researchers (8 senior and 8 junior) on a variety of investigation sites targeting five strategic groups:

1. Stakeholders from NGOs, associations, and unions
2. Trainers from the public, private, and voluntary sectors
3. Community members: family, local administrative and customary authorities, young people

4. Young employees and their employers, major national operators, and multinational firms
5. Institutional frameworks and TFPs (technical and financial partners)

The researchers also identified the qualitative indicators. Four categories of indicators shaped the progression of the investigations: (1) the local definitions of terms used by the stakeholders, and their perceptions; (2) the strategies for accessing employment; (3) the institutional and family environment; (4) training and qualifications.

2. Evolution of CPAN'S mixed methods approach to poverty dynamics

2.1. Qualitative methods informed by critical realism

The Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC), later the Chronic Poverty Advisory Service (CPAN), has been conducting research on chronic poverty and poverty dynamics for 15 years. CPAN is a network of researchers, policy makers and practitioners across 17 developing countries focused on tackling chronic poverty and getting to zero extreme poverty and deprivation. CPAN is a programme hosted at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in London. CPAN works to draw attention to the needs and interests of chronically poor people, and what can be done by and for them, reflecting the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principle of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Our projects are aimed at creating high-quality evidence-based research, at providing policy advice, carrying out policy monitoring, and driving policy-focused dissemination and engagement at the national and international levels.

In this study, our focus on the full range of poverty dynamics experienced by young adults, including chronic poverty, impoverishment, sustained escapes and never poor as defined in Box 1.

Box 1. Poverty trajectories referenced in the study

- **Chronic poverty** is long-term poverty that persists over many years, or even a lifetime, and which is often transmitted inter-generationally. In the quantitative data, this referred to household's poor in both survey years; in the qualitative data, individuals in poverty for most of their lifetime and inter-generational poverty.
- **Impoverishment** refers to the process whereby a poor person or household becomes poorer, or where somebody who is non-poor slips into poverty. In the quantitative data, this refers to households who were non-poor in the 2011 survey, and poor in 2014. In the qualitative data, we can examine impoverishment as well as transitory poverty escapes. The latter refer to individuals or households that used to live in poverty, succeeded in escaping poverty temporarily and then subsequently fell back into poverty, i.e., they became re-impoverished. In the qualitative data, we also look at the distance moved into poverty (see Annex A for wellbeing groups).

- **Poverty escapes**: Households that escape poverty over time. In the panel data, this refers to households who were poor in 2011, and non-poor in 2014. In the qualitative data, we are also able to explore sustained poverty escapes (i.e., escapes sustained for five years). In the qualitative data, we also look at the distance moved out of poverty, as we have 3 wellbeing levels constituting the 'poor' category, and 3 constituting the 'non-poor' category.
- **Never poor**: Households who never fell into poverty over their lifetimes. In the panel analysis, his was measured by households being non-poor in both survey years

Source: da Corta et al. (2021), based on Shepherd et al. (2014).

Evolution of CPAN's mixed methods approach

Early attempts at using mixed methods for deeper research into the causes of chronic poverty often began with national panel data analysis investigating the duration of poverty and surveyed factors associated with chronic poverty (e.g. asset holdings, age, migration, female-headed households) together with life history-based field research, the latter being particularly effective at explaining the detailed reasons for movements into and out of poverty throughout the life course as explained by the actors perspectives 'voices', rather than using the limited set of surveyed variables. These early attempts to trace poverty dynamics using life histories identified pathways at the individual level. However, without the methods and theoretical scope needed to enable deeper explanations of change, these early methodologically individualist approaches to life histories could both de-socialise and de-politicise poverty studies (summarised in da Corta 2010), leading to thin explanations of people's movements into and out of different livelihoods. Without systematic links to social relations, policy and political economy, the findings may be partial, less explanatory and can even remove politics from poverty studies (da Corta, 2010; Shaffer, 2013).

This experience inspired the adoption of a critical realist approach to qualitative methods and analysis in research into poverty dynamics. A key aim of qualitative research is not merely to uncover what happened (i.e., careful description) but why and how; the focus is on deepening explanation. Ethnographic enquiry can be strengthened through consideration of the ontological assumptions of critical realism (Rees and Gatenby, 2014: 3) regarding the unobservable aspects of reality.

Critical realism (CR) is a methodological framework for research, but it is not associated with any particular set of methods. Instead, it is an approach designed to widen and deepen the causal lens in empirical research. 'One of the key tenets of CR is that ontology (i.e., what is real, the nature of reality) is not reducible to epistemology (i.e., our knowledge of reality). Human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality' (Fletcher, 2017: 2), limited to what is visible, surveyed or observed at the empirical level mediated through human knowledge. Yet events experienced at 'the empirical level' can be caused

by less visible events occurring at 'the actual' level and by causal mechanisms within structures occurring at 'the real level' (ibid.).

The three points set out below uses an example from the article on youth inclusion in Niger which applies a CR ontology (see Fletcher, 2017) on different levels:

- **Empirical level**. This is observed or experienced at the human level. For instance, in a life history, a young person may refer to the problem of deteriorating educational standards and the rising difficulty of meeting the high costs of educational fees and the various additional user costs imposed, but they may not know why this is the case because the decisions are made by others. This is particularly applicable to the young, extreme poor and vulnerable.

- **Actual level**. This is the level not directly observed by the youth respondent. However, research with actors at the state and local institutional level reveals that decision made at the national level regarding the contracting out of junior teachers affects not only youth teacher incomes (who now work on shorter-term contracts with periods of unemployment), but they also further have implications for the primary school children of young parents and young people still in education facing deteriorating educational standards as a result.

- **Real level**. Similarly, causal mechanisms which may be invisible to youth respondent, may be partly revealed in part by interviewing long term resident group interview when enquiring about changes in policies affecting young people's livelihoods across time through three main administrative periods. This points to the generative or causal mechanisms including structural adjustment and intensified neoliberalism which can put pressure on the state to reduce costs while at the same time raising coverage in education by contracting out junior teachers and therefore to the generative or causal mechanism behind this process.

CR and relational, multi-layered and diachronic interview approach

Ethnographic enquiry can further strengthen explanatory power through a CR informed multi-layered and diachronic (process tracing) interview approaches. In adopting this lens, the aim was to bring the following back into ethnographic approaches to life histories and associated interviews:
1. Multi-layered social relational interviews through space (micro to macro);
2. Diachronic analysis: process tracing and historical context (Changing social, economic, climactic, political structural context and the norms underlying this change) – underlines the importance of dating in interviews;

3. Knowledge of poverty theories and prior research on this subject which encouraged open interviews with flexible grounded theory to inform questioning (see da Corta, 2021, forthcoming);
4. Well-being categories comparisons between subjective (local) and universal meanings of levels of poverty (abstract definitions locally defined) - underlines the quality and magnitude of assets, food quality, and quality economic and social inclusion or exclusion.

A CR approach encourages a contextual, relational, and multilayered approach to field research interviews. In the CPAN approach we adapted our methods for youth inclusion by first gathering important context on trends and well-being affecting young adults which helped inform our analysis of youth life histories (table 1) and secondly to move from youth life histories through to key family and relational key informants (employer, teacher, trainer), through to state and civil society actors at the meso (district) and national level (figure 2). Table 1 illustrates the key steps involved in these data gathering processes on context to inform life histories.

Table 1. CPAN data collection process

KP FGDs (long term residents)	• Changes in policy over each administrative period, and political economic trends • Economic growth, decline, crises • Climate change and weather/pest crisis events and long-term trends • Demographic trends • Identification of decisive conjunctures, i.e., those historical moments when previous separate forces converge to impact a group (youth)
Male and Female FGDs	• Gendered and youth perspectives on causes of youth poverty dynamic • Changes in gender and generational norms including changes in norms shaping domestic abuse • Well-being differentiation across six well-being groups (covering eight dimensions of wellbeing/class, see Box 2 and Annex A)
LHIs	Youth life history and relational or thematic key informant interviews within and outside the household. This includes: • LH or short LH of parent, relative or sibling who lived /or still lives with youth, different perspective into parental /family informal training (e.g., skills, financial literacy), financing , education, or reason for drop out from school, inheritance of productive asset • LH of, or short interview with, spouse to obtain perspective on youth's account since marriage, including contribution to family costs (who pays for food, schooling, clothes) and share in unpaid domestic labour

Figure 2 illustrates the second process, moving forward from the youth life history to obtain insights into key issues raised by youth in their life histories and by moving up relationally to key family relationship, key local relationships and to those state or civil society actor higher levels of decision making at the meso (district level) and national level whose decisions and perspectives enable or challenge youth mobility. For instance, if the key issue raised in a youth's life history account involves the formative influence of his/her vocational training, with further perspectives on this theme by a family member, then the key relational informant may be his/her local trainer. This theme is then followed up with meso level interviews with state actors and civil society members involved in youth training, and national level policy on youth training and its implementation. The key objective of this approach was to identify aspects of the situation that constrained and/or enabled the agency of youth in their attempts to move out of poverty.

Figure 2. Moving out from youth life history to key relationships at the local, district and national levels
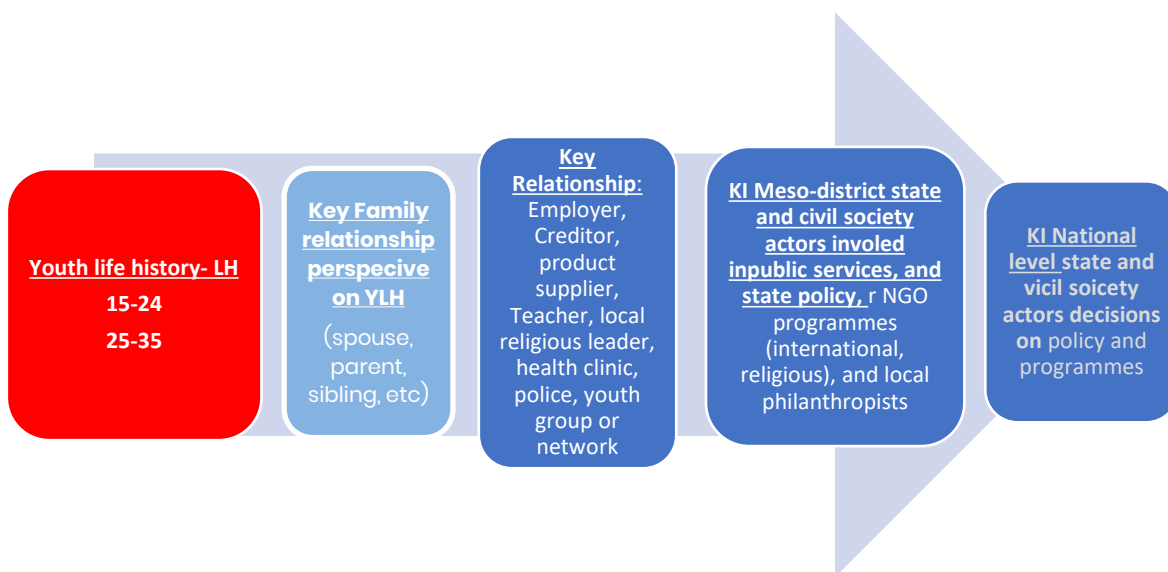
This multi-layered approach to interviewing has some basis in Bhaskar's 'seven-scalar' system (Bhaskar et al., 2018 as cited in Agbedahin and Lotz-Sisitka, 2019 :4).

Figure 3. Multi-level contextualised analysis of wellbeing

National- and international- level insitutional informants

Meso district-level institutional informants: government, NGO, civil society (education, training,

Local-level: key relation - employer, supplier or creditor (if trader), trainer, teacher, etc.

Youth LH relational interview for interactions with and perspective of parent,

Youth life history: childhood, adolescence, adulthood

Internal psych-social capacities: identity, hope, self-esteem, aspiration

Together with the contextual and relational layering of social phenomena – the actions of young people in social settings and the social, economic and political structures within which those actions occur – critical realists also discuss the importance of diachronic explanation, which is concerned with the way in which something has developed and evolved through time. This is the idea that each event requires a consideration of the conditions that enabled it (Archer, 1995; Archer et al., 1998), the decision or strategy, thereby injecting an historical perspective into the explanation.

Life and community histories enable an understanding of events and causes over time. They allow us to look back at prior causes (enablers or challenges in childhood or adolescence) and also how people overcome challenges and transform their lives.

Figure 3. Youth life history stages and relation to prior experiences enabling or challenging livelihoods in young adulthood
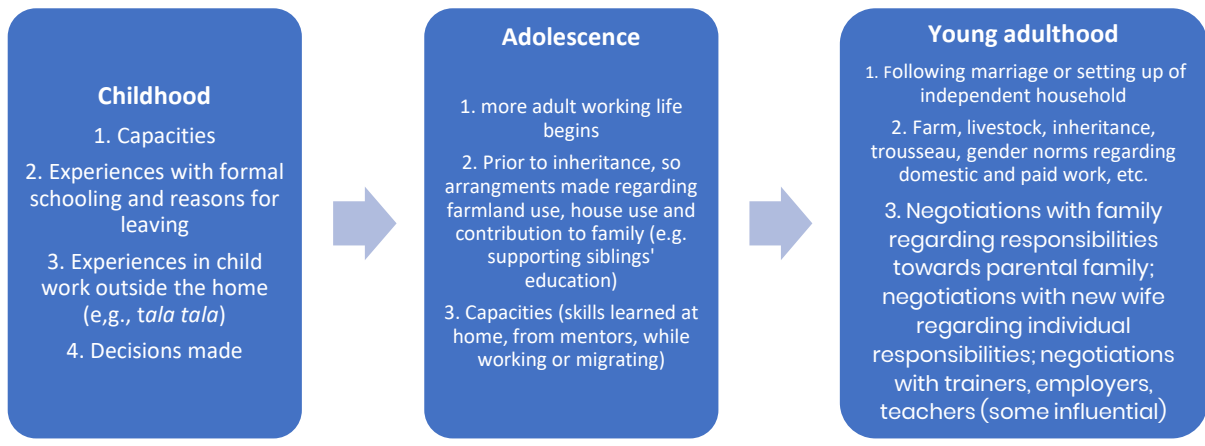
Thus, historical interviews (life histories and community histories) enable us to trace a series of causes/conditions for each event/decision through time. Process tracing approaches are applied to data analysis (described under the application in Section 4).

Multidimensional well-being categories

In earlier studies, addressing poverty levels (well-being indicators) subjectively through individual or local community perspectives, or 'social mapping' alone can be very revealing in terms of the kinds of local characterisations each respondent provides but using them in any work comparing poverty between rural and peri-urban and urban areas was very difficult (see Higgins and da Corta, 2010 for instance). Quite often, moving through poverty levels when understood only thinly led to very subjective assessments.

More recently, we designed a working compromise to address wellbeing. In our notes to researchers, we start with how these groups are defined in other countries (i.e., abstract academic well-being categories and definitions) and explain that we would value their perspectives on whether these are relevant to their community and if not, how should they be redefined in terms of their locality. We start with poorest of the three groups of poor, and then move on to the other groups.

For each category, we ask: Do you have people like this in your village or town and if so, how would you define them more accurately; if not, how would you define them differently, what would you add or take away? What are the defining characteristics of this category? Note that as we move up from wellbeing level 1 to level 6, we find that groups 1 to 3 struggle with

basic reproduction (food, adequate shelter, keeping kids in school which limits and savings needed to invest in assets, training, or petty business capital. They thus own levels of endowments (labour capacity, assets, savings) and work as labour or rent borrow assets. They also often have negative endowments and liabilities (debt, ill health, heavy caring responsibilities) as well as experiencing exclusion or adverse inclusion in institutional relationships (in families, markets and social and political institutions). We probe for participants' perspectives of each wellbeing category (see Annex A).

2.2.   Quantitative methods informed by critical realism

CPAN studies typically begin with a quantitative investigation into drivers of different poverty trajectories, relying on panel data (see Box 1 above). This panel data is constructed by repeatedly surveying the same households over time, and thus allows poverty trajectories to be identified. National panel data analysis enables us to identify changes in poverty status for the same household over the panel periods and examines the surveyed factors associations with this change. It is thus a diachronic change based statistical analysis.

While panel studies had a powerful impact on our understanding of trends in poverty dynamics, the quality of the causal analysis can be insufficient revealing factors statistically significant associations with poverty dynamics (e.g., land ownership, off farm income, education) but without further information one can only guess at the reasons why it associated and how unsurveyed variables might be involved in the explanation of such dynamics (Scott and Marrioti, 2014). This encouraged a mixed methods approach which involved diachronic qualitative field research and analysis.

A second challenge was that in practice in earlier studies, the combination of national data given legitimacy by international institutions with the strict positivism of these quantitative studies could lead to statistically significant associations represented as causal 'facts' and enable politicised readings of panel data gaps vacuums to a-political causation (e.g. a drought or large families) rather than to the insufficiency of effectively resourced and implemented policies (da Corta et al., 2018).

The reaction to these challenges was to both link panel data analysis to intensive change oriented qualitative field research and analysis (and iterate between the two). Then as Olsen and Morgan (2005) have argued, positivist epistemological assumptions regarding closed systems and constant conjuncture can be relaxed sufficiently and iterated carefully with findings from interpretive epistemologies and realist appraisals. CPAN panel quantitative analysis is also generally exploratory and cautious rather than determinative, aiming to avoid the pretention of absolute truth through statistical associations and instead used as a way to explore e statistical trends and non-intuitive findings that, together with strong

qualitative analysis on multiple levels, can help underpin causal analysis. The data is understood not as facts but as 'ficts' ready to be interpreted in the context of a larger analysis of historical and relational qualitative data (Olsen and Morgan, 2005).

3. Combining CPAN and LASDEL methods in field and data analysis in practice

3.1. Qualitative data gathering

The ECRIS introduced the CPAN researcher to LASDEL methods. After this, the CPAN workshop introduced LASDEL trained field researchers to the CPAN poverty dynamics methodology. The latter focussed on field methods to address youth poverty dynamics and included youth life histories and a suite of associated focus group and key informant interviews. The workshop was carried out in 2nd to 5th January 2020 and involved the team piloting and refining the approach in Niamey.

The life histories of the youth were prefaced by focus group discussions designed to expand researcher's knowledge base regarding local historical trends and impact on youth employment prospects and welfare, changing livelihoods of young women and men in the locality and to gather their perspectives on multi-dimensional well-being indicators (aspects of poverty). This knowledge enabled researchers to understand the context of key issues raised during the individual life histories, more cognisant of youth challenges and enablers of upward mobility.

For each interview, the key approach was to begin with open, general questions (tell us about your childhood?, tell us about how life was for youth employment and welfare under the first political regime) based on flexible grounded theory to inform probing for further information at the end of each life cycle stage or end of interview - after the respondent finished his account. The list of possible questions for the life histories was designed for those who are less familiar with livelihoods and poverty dynamics research and addressed some of the theoretical issues involved in poverty analysis. They were not used as checklists in the interviews, which were instead more fluid.

In each of the four sites, the field research was sequenced following CPAN sequencing in other countries as follows:

1. **Group discussions with knowledgeable long-term residents** were designed to capture structural change. The focus was not merely on shocks and key events but also on systemic changes in policy, economic trends (including monetisation and inflation), climate change and soil depletion, and demographic trends in asset inheritance and job availability. The respondents were encouraged to elaborate on how new livelihood strategies were designed to cope with the decline in 'farming as a foundation', including

the rise of new forms of trade and services, precarious labour, and migration. The respondents tended to focus discussions on comparing and contrasting opportunities for youth between two regimes covering two decades – 2001 to 2010 and 2011 to 2020 (see Section 4) – and on the resulting differences for poor young people's employment prospects as well as challenges faced regarding access to, and costs associated with school, health, and agricultural support. They also commented on the role of religious education and INGO training in their localities.

2. **Focus group discussions of men and women (separately), with equal numbers of young adults and older adults.** This comprised 16 group discussions of approximately 250 participants overall. The FGDs were separated into female and male group discussions and were designed to gather local perspectives on:

   a. wellbeing according to multi-dimensional wellbeing indicators (six groups, from rich to poor);
   b. gender and generational social relations (gender and generational relationships), focusing on types of employment and mobility and access to productive assets and on how such norms constrained or enabled movements out of poverty;
   c. domestic abuse (forms, how men and women thought it was legitimate and how disputes and divorce were adjudicated).

3. **Youth life histories** were taken from the male and female FGDs, with respondents asked to identify youth on different trajectories: those trapped in chronic poverty, those who escaped but fell back into poverty and those who had escaped (see Box 1). Overall, 41 life histories were conducted. The life histories of young men and women started with their earliest accounts of childhood, including early investments made in education and health, child labour work before and after school hours, the circumstances surrounding dropping out of school, religious training or vocational skills training, marriage(s), productive asset inheritance, training (if any) and early working life (moving into and out of different forms of employment), steps taken to access training and capital, networks needed to move forward. This included details on negotiating with spouses or parents (in order to be free to join trainings, migrate, etc.). The researchers were encouraged to identify pathways and processes underlying movements into and out of employment over a period of time.

4. **Key informants were identified to address questions we had following the life histories and group discussion**:

    a. relational key informants were people who were influential in the life of the youth, such as spouses, parents, trainers, mentors, employers, creditors (who may have denied or supplied loans), those who lent/sold goods/crops, and so on;
    b. district-level key informants;
    c. national key informants from ECRIS and ongoing for the policy brief requirement to comment on policies and programmes designed to enhance youth inclusion or relevant to youth welfare (education and training, agriculture, etc.).

Figure 3. Summary of tools and sample sizes for qualitative data collection

Stage	Details
KPFGD	• Focus on changing wellbeing; one at each site (4)
Male and female FGD	• One at each site (8)
Life history	• + 50 LHIs • + 50 short separate interviews with parent, spouse, sibling
Life history complement at community level (village, township)	• + 50 LH relational key informants (employer, teacher, trainer, cooperative, chief, NGO) • Before leaving the village/township, may have feedback group discussion or discussion with key informants on remaining questions from findings
District-level insitutional KI	• 10-12 district-level institutional interviews (e.g. educational office, health, social welfare, NGO) in Zinder and Tahoua (24 in total)
Key informants with capital-level institutions	• 10-12 national key informants (government, NGO, civil society, religious institution); the choice should relate to the findings

3.2.   Mixed methods data analysis

Initial panel data analysis

The first step was a re-examination of a recent analysis on poverty dynamics (McCullough and Diwakar, 2018) to understand, for the population at large, what factors are associated with changes in wellbeing over time. This study analyses the Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS) – *L'Enquête nationale sur les conditions de vie des ménages et de l'agriculture* (ECVM/A), a nationally representative longitudinal survey of 3,436 households interviewed in 2011 and 2014 in rural and urban areas of Niger. Household-level poverty trajectories were constructed from the panel data (Box 1). Throughout the analysis, we eliminated households whose per capita expenditure was within 5% above or below the poverty line to limit measurement error (Baulch, 2016). Alongside the wider literature on poverty and livelihoods in Niger and a series of poverty dynamics studies in sub-Saharan Africa (for a synthesis see Diwakar and Shepherd, 2018), this provided an initial understanding of factors associated with descents into and escapes from poverty as well as correlates of chronic poverty.

The next step was an initial analysis of the ECVM/A, prior to the fieldwork. This was undertaken with two aims in mind: (1) to guide site selection sub-nationally, given the zone-level poverty trajectories uncovered by the panel data; and (2) to present descriptive and initial regression analysis findings to raise specific issues that could be nuanced or interrogated through the subsequent qualitative fieldwork. Using the ECVM/A, we descriptively explored key variables around wellbeing, livelihoods, training and migration, with a focus on exploring changes over time and differences between young adults and other adult populations. In addition to this descriptive assessment, we undertook regression-based analysis comprising multinomial logistic regressions at the household level to investigate drivers of different poverty trajectories across all households, and also restricted to the subset of youth-headed households. The model relied on baseline values of household (characteristics of the head, assets, livelihoods) and area/regional regressors, and shocks from the latest survey wave. In all regressions, average marginal effects are computed.

Analysis of qualitative multi-level data

The write up of the notes or findings from interviews is not a synthesis of findings but rather a full account, close to a transcription. In the summary and conclusion, the researcher involved in the interview reports on observations, analyses contradictions, incomplete accounts (e.g., if they had hidden assets or didn't find out how they obtained capita to start a business which is difficult for the chronically poor, or issues of magnitude, e.g days unemployed or size of herds). When iterated with key family interviews, the interviewer might

identify contradictions with spousal/sibling or parental accounts). The interviewer would then write a summary and conclusions from the notes which is the first stage of data analysis (and hence privileging the researchers in our acknowledgments).
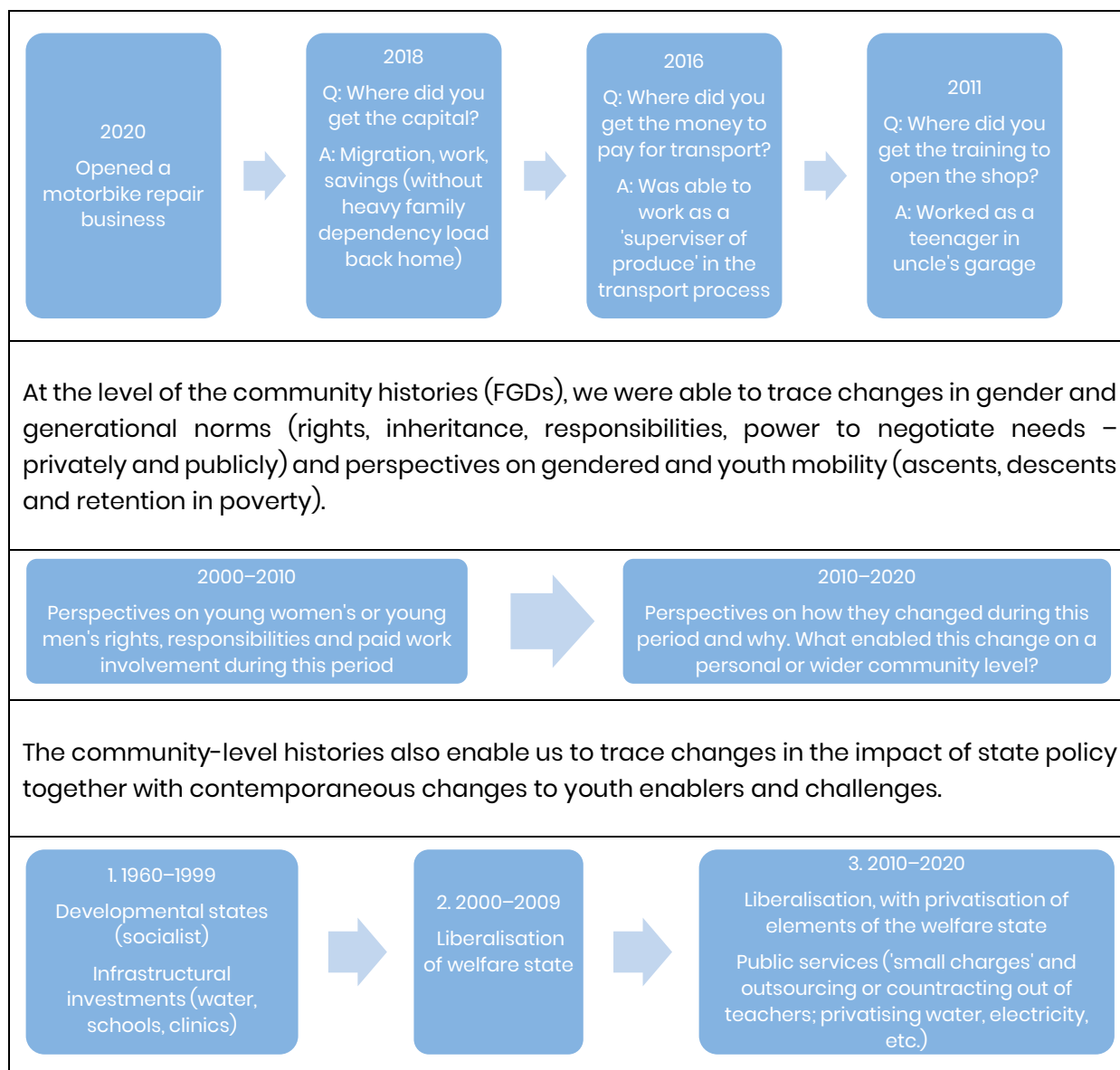
The next stage involved coding and data analysis by broad themes including capacities (e.g., education, training), economic activities (various livelihoods), relationships (economic social), resources, strategies. Each of these had a number of sub themes (see da Corta, 2021, forthcoming)..While the sample was too small to make generalisations regarding significance of key themes and gave an indication of quantity and more importantly significant excerpts from the interviews by each subtheme which was very useful in data analysis. It began the grounding process (by key poverty and social themes) and began the process of identification of key findings.

It is notable that there are not many references to coding and data processing in the CR literature because of the positivism, deterministic regularity and closed prediction assumptions, and in the application in some coded qualitative data analyses, which do not sufficiently account for the reality that social systems are open and involve change and transformation. Yet such positivistic assumptions and use can be softened and made more flexible and exploratory, similar to the argument made by Olsen and Morgan (2005) with respect to statistical analysis. As such, CR sees qualitative data coding as more exploratory partial regularities that CR labels as demi-regularities. Such demi-regularities are interpreted as tendencies not laws and can be identified effectively through qualitative data coding and analysis (see Fletcher, 2017).

Qualitative coding analysis was then combined with another form of data analysis routed in context and process identification. This involved understanding the full life and community histories as a process and identifying processes through time (e.g., how event or experience A led to B which then led to C). This process then iterates this with the trends in changing contexts and changing norms identified in the FGDs. Moreover, careful re-readings enabled deeper details on key issues and identification of less observable drivers of change – changing norms, meanings, ideas and decisions – that can still have causal impacts on youth inclusion.

At the level of the life histories, we can trace conditions that enabled an event by working backwards to those life-cycle states that led to the adoption or challenges faced in terms of educational and training endowments, work experience and asset or marriage inheritance (figure 4 below). Referring back often gives the analyst a chance to ask counterintuitive questions (e.g., if you dropped out of school at age xx, how then were you able to train in this training scheme?)

Figure 4. Pathways at different levels

At the level of the community histories (FGDs), we were able to trace changes in gender and generational norms (rights, inheritance, responsibilities, power to negotiate needs – privately and publicly) and perspectives on gendered and youth mobility (ascents, descents and retention in poverty).

The community-level histories also enable us to trace changes in the impact of state policy together with contemporaneous changes to youth enablers and challenges.

These community-level investigations enabled us to address two key causal mechanisms: the role of gender and generational norms, and the pattern and nature of state intervention on behalf of poor youth together with challenges posed by economic, demographic and climatic features. A key finding is that it was not a 'norm' or 'a pattern of state intervention' that was fundamental but rather the key defining feature was the change or transformation in the norm or pattern. Thus, a defining feature of the CPAN approach harks back to studies of agrarian change – rather than describing the status quo (e.g., in terms of norms) or assuming that the status quo is fundamental, the key casual factors to consider are the evolution causing the outcome and changes in norms, events, actions and livelihoods that transform or sustain youth poverty.

Iteration and integration of mixed methods analysis

After the qualitative fieldwork was completed, the panel data was revisited to focus on specific issues raised in the fieldwork. For example, the qualitative data analysis raised the issue of short employment contracts even for salaried workers, and the precarity associated with various forms of work. As such, the quantitative analysis further disaggregated salaried employment into executive agents and qualified workers on the one hand, and non-qualified workers or labourers as a separate group to help nuance the research results. Similarly, the varied pathways out of poverty for young women compared to young men generated additional descriptive, gender-disaggregated analysis on specific issues as permitted by the panel data.

For this iterative analysis, we also undertook standard logistic regressions at the individual level to understand how these same factors may be associated in turn with salaried employment of individuals overall, and with a focus on the subset of youth. In the survey, salaried employment is defined using the following professional categories: superior executive, middle executive or master agent, qualified worker or employee, non-qualified worker or employee, or labourer. In our analysis, we disaggregate this into executive agents and qualified workers in one group, and non-qualified workers or labourers as a separate group. Executives and qualified salaried are chosen for analytic ease as a proxy for resilient youth inclusion in labour markets, given wider literature pointing to the importance of salaried, stable employment in pathways out of poverty (Diwakar and Shepherd, 2018). However, while certain forms of salaried work are better paid than day work, private salaried work by month is not necessarily stable and depends on factors such as formal or non-formal piecework or contracts. It can involve short-term contracts or frequent movement from job to job. Indeed, individuals who have built up wealth through a variety of businesses and other jobs can be equally if not more stable, but data limitations preclude us from developing these measures. The present analysis explores training, migration and household wellbeing through plotted interactions to visualise how these might influence the probability of salaried employment.

Both the quantitative and qualitative data are ultimately triangulated and build on the wider literature on poverty dynamics and livelihoods to contextualise study findings. Qualitative data pays particular attention to the panel data years, while exploring in more detail the processes and trajectories of poverty over the respondent's life time and, in the knowledgeable person focus group discussions (KPFGDS), over the last 20 years. As the qualitative data extends beyond the period covered by the survey, an escape from poverty in the quantitative data could turn into a sustained or only a transitory escape from poverty in the qualitative data. The analysis was also sequenced, with preliminary analysis of the panel data offering insights to be unpacked in more detail through the qualitative

investigations, after which a more thorough quantitative analysis of the panel dataset was conducted that sought to build on the findings from the qualitative data.

3.3. Analysing complementarities between the CPAN and LASDEL methods

The CPAN tools were informed by a critical realist and process tracing approaches to field research on youth poverty trajectories and subsequent analysis (Sayer, 2000; Archer, 1995; 2010; Bhaskar, 2014; Fletcher, 2017). Building on Sayer (2000), CPAN adopted a combined approach that avoided both ultra-realist and ultra- constructivist caricatures to find a middle path through more open versions of realist and post structural approaches, thus enabling CPAN to widen the explanatory lens on youth poverty dynamics. This combination involved:

- **'Critical' approach:** a focus on social relations, norms, meanings and discourse in both society and (especially gender and generational norms) and institutions (e.g., shaping access to public services education, health and justice) and to markets (labour, finance, goods, services). As these norms evolve and change, they drive quality of youth inclusion. Here local country partner researchers with long term familiarity with local contexts, and with local languages, and experienced in ethnographic methods adapted the methods and questions to their country context and led the field research approach by gathering interview material through open ended questioning privileging the actor's voice (even if contradictory with the perspective of other actors), and combined this with a realist investigation.

- **'Realist 'approach:** embedding the study of youth inclusion, through a life history methodology, in a much wider and evolving macro and local context, including identifying trends **–** political, economic, demographic and climatic – and their interactions that shape youth employment. It further includes understanding of the labour arrangements underlying various livelihoods youth engage in, such as remuneration, capital, nature of access (ownership, rent, borrow) to productive assets, time unemployed, and ability to meet the costs of living for themselves and dependents. This includes the impact of livelihoods on the multidimensional wellbeing/poverty status of youth and their own young children, with a special focus on their ability to earn enough to feed and keep young children in school.

- **Process tracing:** identifying causal sequences of youth capability (education, health, skills), asset/capital and employment acquisition over the life courses. These causes include the events, livelihood strategies taken and 'invisible' structural enablers and negotiations with powerful people and organisations to overcome barriers to employment. These shape the pathways young people follow over their life course into and out of different forms of youth employment.

Both LASDEL and CPAN are eclectic in their approaches. However, each also have their own methodological emphasis. Research culture as developed by LASDEL is based on the flexibility of data-producing instruments and is open to any approach. It has thus helped to integrate the different phases of the CPAN methodology, which starts by collecting general information and goes via group discussions before focusing on life trajectories, through life histories and relational, district and national key informant interviews. By following the dynamics in the field, LASDEL's empirical research has also helped to identify relevant avenues of research, dealing with the problem of violence, for example, or endogenously emerging professions such as that of jogol (a second-hand furniture trade practised by women in Zinder).
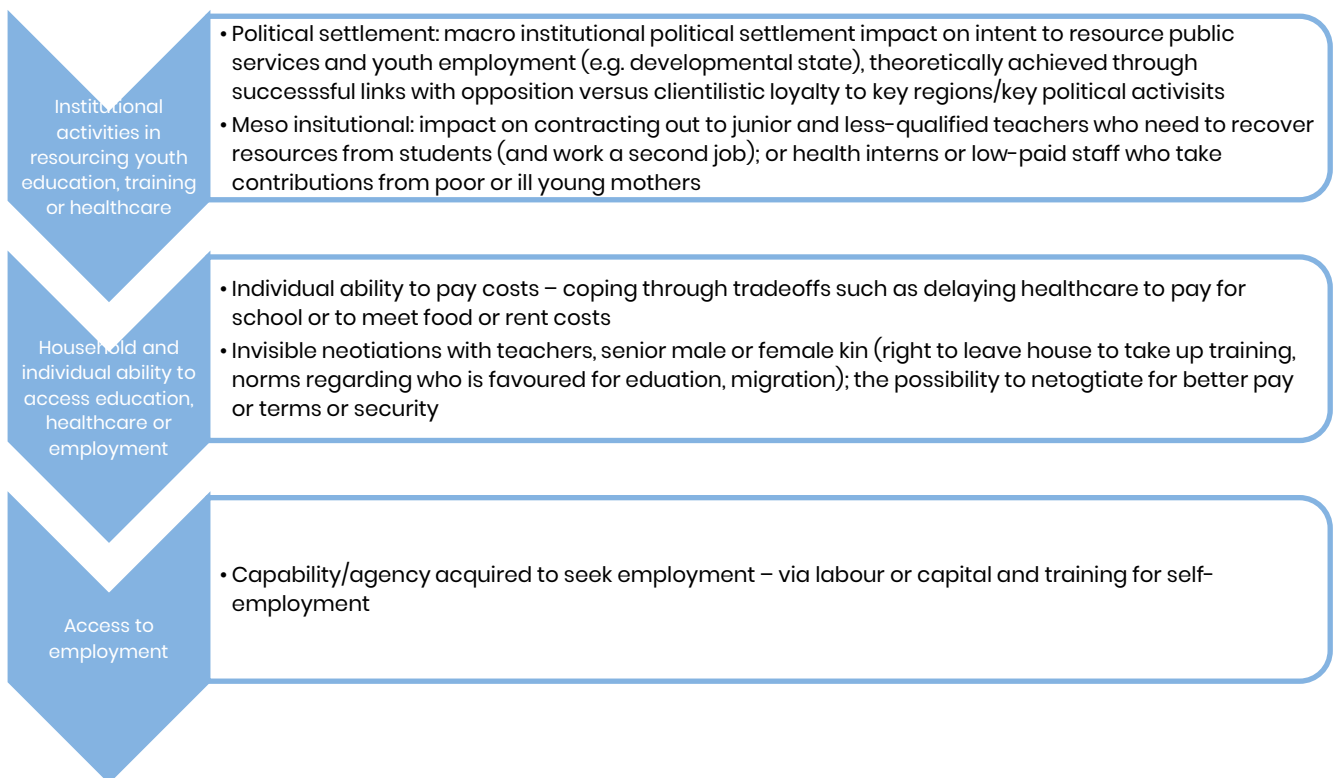
CPAN places a critical realist emphasis on materialist and evolving structural foundations of youth inclusion through interviews at multiple levels and identification of processes through time- -in order to deepen and explanations of youth poverty dynamics. LASDEL's methodology is relatively more ethnographic in its approach to empirical research, and is driven by stakeholders' perceptions, their interactions, and daily routines. It insists in particular on familiarity with local contexts, inserting researchers into these contexts, and proficiency in local languages and cultures. While CPAN methods also address these local contexts, coping strategies, and other dimensions, it does not as regularly devote time to the full suite of intensive ethnographic methods such as daily routines (time management), intense observation and transect walks and relies on the knowledge of local country partner researchers for long-term familiarity with survey contexts and mastery of local languages.

Another point of integration of the two methods was the key 'axis' of the ECRIS approach – the focus on conflicts between groups as a 'window' or gateway to understanding youth inclusion. Conflicts reveal the (power) structure of societies and the norms and codes which govern how a local society works; they also indicate social change (Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan, 1997). The analysis of social relations, conflict and negotiation between individuals and groups – particularly power in gender, class, and generational relations – was also a key dimension of the critical realist CPAN methods. Indeed, what the two approaches have in common is the use of ethnographic methods and the critique of community consensus approaches that see the community as a cohesive unit separate to the state or capitalism. Thus these methodologies overlap in implicitly challenging purely participatory approaches that focus largely on 'community consensus' rather than on conflicting perspectives on key issues among what are, in reality, highly differentiated social groups within communities (structured by generation, class, gender or ethnicity). In this complementary and overlapping focus, the integration allows us to:

- widen the causal lens across key areas (political, demographic, economic, social), layers (macro international, district, local) and local relationships (class, gender, labour).

- look at precursors (multiple and previous causes) that might be 'invisible', unobservable or unmentioned in discussions in order to deepen an explanation.

- investigate gender norms that reflect the historically unequal power relations between men and women in the public and private spheres – all individuals live within a set of norms and, in turn, reinforce the underlying social structures that make those norms seem timeless and natural (or essential).

Figure 5. Widening the multi-level causal lens through integration

Institutional activities in resourcing youth education, training or healthcare	• Political settlement: macro institutional political settlement impact on intent to resource public services and youth employment (e.g. developmental state), theoretically achieved through successsful links with opposition versus clientilistic loyalty to key regions/key political activisits • Meso insitutional: impact on contracting out to junior and less-qualified teachers who need to recover resources from students (and work a second job); or health interns or low-paid staff who take contributions from poor or ill young mothers
Household and individual ability to access education, healthcare or employment	• Individual ability to pay costs – coping through tradeoffs such as delaying healthcare to pay for school or to meet food or rent costs • Invisible neotiations with teachers, senior male or female kin (right to leave house to take up training, norms regarding who is favoured for eduation, migration); the possibility to netogtiate for better pay or terms or security
Access to employment	• Capability/agency acquired to seek employment – via labour or capital and training for self-employment

Even so, the focus on the conflict/strategic groups differ:

- CPAN focuses on gender relations, generational relations, class relations and ethnic relations; in class/labour arrangements it focuses on the details of payment, exploitation based on gender, child labour, race and so on. A second area of focus is on changes over time.

- LASDEL focuses mainly on local stakeholders, their interactions with the norms of government and international institutional bodies, the strategies they deploy to build resilience mechanisms against poverty, and the social and economic restrictions that this involves.

Perhaps the most crucial difference is that, although the CPAN focuses on the evolution of policy and political approaches, introducing the analysis of the political settlement as an intention to adequately resource developmental state, LASDEL looks relatively more at local level and institutional norms. These norms are multifaceted and include the social norms of populations, on the one hand, which are varied and sometimes contradictory, and the practical norms of state agents, on the other hand, who regulate their deviations from official norms. There is a wide spectrum going from norms of clientelism to mitigating norms, from norms of corruption to compassionate norms.

3.4. Limitations and way forward

The quantitative analysis of poverty has clear advantages, not least on account of its generalisability and ability to compare material needs across space and time. However, there are limitations to the statistical approach to poverty analysis. For example, questionnaire surveys suffer from many biases, public statistics may sometimes be unreliable or suffer from measurement errors and certain aspects such as informal activities, which are key in our analysis, are regularly underestimated. We attempted to address some of these issues, for example through adopting a 5% band as noted above to limit measurement error. In other cases, complementing the quantitative data with qualitative data collection and analysis offers another means of data triangulation.

In practice, the qualitative data collection and analysis also faced certain challenges:

1. Wellbeing categories: local/subjective versus universal categories based on years of poverty research. After the write up, we had to read between the lines to see if the respondent was poor or non-poor and at what level of well-being.

2. A bias towards less poor and escapers (TE, SE, NN) who have moved out of poverty or reclassified as never poor. These respondents presented themselves as poor relative to their own group. As an example, in a life history as a child a respondent might be working on the family farm, selling items (tala tala) or herding for pay – which appears to be 'poor'. However, in reality, some respondents may have a rich (but absent) father, uncle or aunt who supported them in higher education, an

opportunity not available to the broader mass of chronically poor. As a result, many respondents were reclassified.

3. Different experiences of researchers in studying rural and peri-urban livelihoods, assets, credit or the kinds of relationships between farm workers or construction workers and employers. This meant that attention to the detail of livelihoods was not always visible unless specifically asked or triangulated with a key person in each person's life such as an employer, creditor or kin. For example, the sources of capital for trade, how relationships with a trader to resell goods were forged or power in relationships (trader and re-seller) were not interrogated regularly. These can remain 'invisible' yet are critical to understanding what drives or prevents moving up. Time was a constraint, but while state actors in institutions were questioned, key informant interviews with local traders, employers, large farmers who employ labour herders, and so on would have been useful.

4. There was some difficulty with the foundational assumptions and ideology brought to the ECRIS and field research, including normative statements regarding gender and generational livelihoods, conflicts and norms (e.g., is it child labour or is the child carrying out his/her responsibility?).

5. The choice of young people included in the corpus of life histories and the choice of focus groups and limitations in sites studied created certain biases as it was applied: though in the workshop we discussed the need to balance focus groups with older and younger respondents from varied well-being groups, in practice the need to go through community leaders did not allow us to diversify the networks within the communities studied; nothing was dealt with regarding youth delinquent practices, for example; similarly, the influence of fundamentalist ideologies on young people was ignored. These are nevertheless important topics in Niger, in the countryside as well as the towns, which other LASDEL investigations have highlighted.

6. Though there was some discussion of the six well-being categories and how they relate to local definitions in the CPAN workshops, the "emic" definitions of poverty, in local languages, were not sufficiently taken into account. They are in fact far removed from statistical as well as scholarly definitions.

4. Conclusions

This article has presented the LASDEL and CPAN methods and their attempted integration and application to a study of youth inclusion in Niger. These comprise the LASDEL social anthropological qualitative methodological approaches and the CPAN critical realist qualitative approach to field research and analysis designed for research into poverty dynamics. The latter is iterated with CPAN's national-level panel data analysis for further insights.

CPAN's critical realist perspective can contribute towards the understanding and achievement of transformation towards sustainable movements out of youth poverty and into quality employment, which in turn contributes to ensuring that both the current generation and future generations (through investment in children's education) flourish. Its iterative approach to mixed methods research is well suited to presenting a more integrated understanding of poverty dynamics. At the same time, LASDEL's methods place emphasis on local and institutional norms: the varied and sometimes contradictory norms of populations, and the norms and practices of state agents who mediate their deviations from official standards through a spectrum of norms that range from clientelistic norms to palliative standards, from corrupting norms to compassionate standards. The integration of these methods offers useful directions for further refinement and applications to researching issues of inclusion and poverty dynamics.

ANNEX A.   The participatory wealth ranking table and its use

This ranking is necessary for the local analysis of differentiation and to help the life historians recognise movements from one group to the next in local terms. The wellbeing scheme has three categories of poor and three categories of non-poor (see Table A1). In this FGD, we start by explaining the 'universal/conceptual based wellbeing scheme' to the FGD participants, which was used to compare wellbeing across countries in earlier research. The scheme also has six wellbeing classifications, ranging from 'destitute' (1) to 'rich' (6). After their answer, we probed for more details alongside 8 well-being dimensions – diet, assets, labour capacity, education and training, livelihoods – and economic, social, political relationships.

Table A1. Conceptual Definitions taken from research in other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa

Level label	Conceptual/universal definitions
Wellbeing (WB)1	WB1 are people who cannot work due to being partially or fully disabled and so depend on others for basic needs (food, housing), and who don't have external support. • Food consumption is very low – perhaps one meal a day or nothing. • They may be physically impaired (e.g., very old, physically, cognitively impaired, severely depressed) or unemployed by circumstance (e.g., in remote rural areas after drought). • They tend to be socially, economically and politically excluded from government support. • In urban areas, this may include street children, the homeless, or those living in extremely poor dwellings (e.g., holes in roof); drug addiction is a feature.
WB2	WB2 are extremely poor but capable of working. They are physically able to work but have no or few productive assets or capital for trade. • Income is erratic and some days they don't eat; they eat when they work. • They must accept whatever wage is offered, and are often desperate for work and so are forced to negotiate adverse labour relationships (e.g., piecework) • Shocks will push them into destitution. • They live in very poor and more temporary accommodation; they move often (for example, because they can't afford the rent, the housing is flimsy, or they have very poor access to water and sanitation). • They may engage in petty trading that involves spoiled/fallen fruit/vegetables/grain and/or extremely small margins (door-to-door traders). • They may glean in other people's fields after harvest in order to eat. • They have difficulty in supporting children in primary school and so some children may drop out and work/trade. • They have little or no negotiating power with employers and so tend to be adversely included in labour markets and other institutions (family, community, polity) and accept whatever wage/crop price is given. • They are sometimes dependent on remittances from relatives elsewhere (especially in towns).

WB3	WB3 are moderately poor.

- They have the capacity to work as labourer (not infirmed).
- They may also have some productive assets or small trade with capital, but in rural areas and not enough to escape labouring for wages in order to meet basic needs.
- This group also tend to have adverse credit and labour relationships.
- They may have land, cattle or a small business but cannot save enough in good years to withstand shocks (health, drought).
- They are vulnerable to downward mobility to the 'very poor' category.
- Often they must sell assets to cope in a crisis and go hungry.
- They have very limited ability to support education beyond primary.
- They may engage in formal employment close to or under the minimum wage (e.g., as a guard or domestic worker)
- They are sometimes dependent on remittances from relatives elsewhere (especially in towns).

WB4: 'Vulnerable but not poor'

- They have relatively more productive assets (plough, ox cart, oxen, bikes, taxi), as well as assets made more productive through inputs, which can provide the income necessary to feed the family through the year.
- During good times, they can save and tend to diversify assets and livelihoods.
- During bad times, they will reduce family consumption in order to meet other regular expenditures (e.g., education, rent, other financial obligations).
- They are vulnerable to downward mobility with a significant shock (often worse in urban areas).
- During bad times, they will reduce family consumption, but not as regularly as above (WB-3 or lower).
- They are able to meet regular rent and/or own a house
- They are able to pay for some private education for children.
- Formal employment beyond the minimum wage but not high earning
- They have access to informal (*kaloba*) and formal credit linked to assets and employment, which they sometimes struggle to pay back.

WB5: 'Resilient'

- They have the (substantial) assets (house, car, land), social networks and sometimes political connections necessary to prevent significant downward mobility relative to overall productive wealth.
- The may employ small amounts of labour on-farm or be involved in small-scale trade.
- They may have formal employment in higher wage-earning sectors that is more secure, including in the civil service.
- They may be informally employed (e.g., trading in business), which is sometimes clandestine or cross-border
- They have access to formal credit and are more reliably able to pay this back.

WB6: 'Rich'

- They have significant assets and local power.
- They may be involved in large-scale trade or employment of labour.
- They may own large-scale non-farm assets.
- They may lend money usuriously (at extremely high interest rates).
- They may participate in the formal banking system.

ANNEX B. The ECRIS analysis results for the youth inclusion study

In accordance with planning the study, the launch workshop was organised around the ECRIS framework[2]. It took place over 5 days, from 30 September to 4 October 2019, at LASDEL. This report is an account of the workshop and the investigations' results. It is structured in three parts: (1) a brief presentation on the ECRIS framework methodology; (2) the main results of the investigations; (3) avenues for more in-depth investigations.

1. ECRIS framework methodology

1.1. ECRIS theoretical framework

The goal of the ECRIS theoretical framework was to bring participants to take ownership of the research problem and of the methodology developed to implement it. More specifically, it enabled the research to be presented in its entirety (Aïssa Diarra, LASDEL) and the multidimensional contours of youth employment to be retraced from previous field experiences (Lucia da Corta, ODI).

The discussions following these presentations highlighted several points allowing us to clarify certain concepts as well as expand the perspectives around the problem of youth employment and youth social inclusion: 1) the definition of concepts, notably that of "young person"; 2) updating statistical data and the applicable regulations in the sectors related to youth employment; 3) taking into account the variety of young people's situations (urban vs rural environments, unsafe area, etc.); 4) new forms of self-employment; the influence of the environment on access to employment, etc.

1.2. ECRIS practical framework

Two activities were carried out before the investigations themselves: preparing the ECRIS framework, and identifying the qualitative indicators and strategic groups.

Preparing the investigations involved two senior researchers (A. Diarra and T. Ali Bako) assisted by two junior researchers (L. Coulibaly and S. Oumarou). Several meetings were held to pre-target sites, based on population on the one hand, among public and private organisations on the other, as well as formal and informal workspaces. This pre-targeting of sites resulted in a provisional list of key stakeholders.

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[2] Rapid Collective Inquiry for the Identification of Conflicts and Strategic Groups

During the workshop, 16 researchers (8 senior and 8 junior) drew up a final list of investigation sites and strategic groups.

The researchers also identified the indicators.

The investigations took place over two days. Five groups of investigators were formed, with a researcher with extensive experience in the ECRIS methodology in charge. Each group of investigators was assigned 1 strategic stakeholder group.

2. Main results of the investigations performed during ECRIS

The variety of key stakeholders and the main organisations revolving around the issue of youth access to employment and their social inclusion highlights several factors influencing youth access to employment.

2.1. Factors related to policy and institutional frameworks

In response to pressure from the international community aiming to make entrepreneurship a development tool for young people, the state of Niger has formulated policies shared between several ministries. It should be noted that this policy turmoil and the sheer number of stakeholders creates problems with coordinating and synergising actions. The creation of the Ministry for Entrepreneurship in 2016, one of whose objectives was to centralise resources and actions undertaken, was unable to resolve these problems. These policies receive little financial support from the state, their crucial resources coming from foreign aid. Furthermore, the assessment of the National Employment Programme (2008-2012) did not lead to an updated roadmap being drawn up.

2.2. Factors related to young people

At least three elements act as determining personal factors in young people's access to employment: confidence, personal commitment, and training and apprenticeship.

Confidence, which should be an asset, is seen to be lacking in young people, which is reflected in their attitude. It is both a lack of confidence in themselves and in the state's policies and institutions. These two absences colour attitudes, leading young people to be closed to any opportunity coming from institutions.

Personal commitment, which doesn't necessarily exclude the lack of confidence, was revealed to be a determining factor for the process of accessing employment.

Professional training and apprenticeship can be actively sought by young people in the formal sector as well as the informal sector. The objective targeted by training centres for various professions is to give them professional skills and improve their employability. If good results are sometimes recorded, there are nevertheless high dropout rates because of i) marriage, which often puts an end to young girls' training, and ii) the cost of training, which can be as much as 15,000 Central African CFA francs, and weekly contributions for purchasing small equipment. These expenses are sometimes beyond the means of certain families.

Apprenticeship is more so part of the informal sector where we distinguish two pathways: one is related to apprenticeship spaces for professions such as mechanics, carpenters, and hairdressers; the other is related to an apprenticeship context just like the Kataka market, an "open-air university" for many young people who go there to seize apprenticeship and job opportunities.

2.3. Social factors

Very often, apprenticeship pathways are only accessible to young people when they are part of social networks where the pathways to access employment are largely shaped by the stakeholders' positions, the dynamic of the interactions between them, and the strategies they use for opportunities and the constraints of power, influence, and mutual aid games. However, if social networks promote access to employment, they can conversely have a negative impact for young people who are excluded from them. Targeting young people who could benefit from enhanced abilities thanks to specific programmes is often limited to the scope of closed networks. Consequently, some young people benefit from several instances of support in a row. This situation highlights the strategies employed to capture the income of entrepreneurship promotion programmes.

Young people's family affiliation is also a determining factor in strategies for accessing employment. The richer the family is in social and economic capital, the more chances the young person has of getting employment opportunities, and vice versa. But the link between the "family factor" and youth access to employment involves a wide variety of sometimes complex situations.

3. Avenues for more in-depth investigations

3.1. A series of typologies to complete, stabilise, and document

➢ The definition of the "young person" category does not allow us to arrive at a homogeneous and stable approach because of its multidimensional nature. There are several young people profiles that must be highlighted to grasp the full range of situations, strategies, and issues related to them.

➢ The same goes for the "profession", "job", and "employer" categories.

3.2. Examining youth access to employment and the notion of social justice.

3.3. Does the Katako type of apprenticeship exist in both regions?

3.4. Migration: a source of deviation or professionnalisation?

3.5. Examining the notion of shame in young people's pathways

3.6. Documenting how young people perceive entrepreneurship and institutional programmes (state and NGO)

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