

Between Hope and a Hard Place:

Boys and Young Men Negotiating Gender,
Poverty and Social Worth in Ethiopia

Gina Crivello and Nikki van der Gaag



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About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, following the lives of 12,000 children in 4 countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam) over 15 years. www.younglives.org.uk

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Summary

The second decade of life is increasingly recognised as a crucial phase and a 'window of opportunity' for policy intervention. It is a period of social transition as young people navigate complex life choices around schooling, work, and intimate and family relationships. In recent years, adolescence has risen high on the global agenda, but boys are often marginalised by an overwhelming focus on girls and on female adolescence, which also means that a gendered perspective is missing. Although boys and young men hold more powerful positions in society than girls and young women, their needs may be disadvantaged by sexual stereotypes, social norms and economic adversity.

In this paper, we use longitudinal qualitative and survey data from Young Lives, an ongoing study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, to trace the diverging trajectories of a group of adolescent boys across their second decade of life (aged 12 to 20), from a relational gender approach that also looks at girls' experiences. The paper is particularly interested in the way poverty and gender interact in boys' and girls' lives to shape their pathways to adulthood, including their aspirations, agency, actions, and changing roles and responsibilities in their intimate, family and community contexts. We describe the obstacles boys and young men face as they grow into adults, the diverse strategies they employ to overcome them, and how these differ from girls' and young women's experiences. We examine multiple factors affecting boys' trajectories of hope across time, and find that, as they grow older, the failure to find work is particularly crushing of hope, and undermines their efforts to progress in life. The metaphor of being stuck 'between hope and a hard place' draws attention to the real-life struggles of boys and young men to remain hopeful, connected and productive with very few resources to draw upon.

The paper concludes by drawing out the policy implications. It calls for stronger gendered evidence on the relationship between gender inequality and childhood poverty, and an approach to gender justice that include boys and young men, as well as girls and young women.

Introduction: a gender perspective on boys' trajectories

You start feeling the challenges when you get older. There's nothing good about staying here without anything ... It is very difficult to find a job. (Bereket, Male, Age 20, urban Bertukan)

I do think that my life is improving ... I am expecting that there are good things ahead of me and that my life will be improved. (Hassen, Male, Age 19, rural Leki)

Learning. Land. Love. Labour. These, according to a cohort of boys and young men growing up in poverty in Ethiopia, are what are required for them to become men and to garner social worth. In reality, education, land ownership, marriage and livelihoods are not achieved without a struggle for many, all too often leaving them between hope and a hard place. This paper uses longitudinal data from Young Lives in Ethiopia to examine the impact of social inequality and poverty on boys' trajectories to adulthood. It covers the second decade of life, with a particular interest in their trajectories through school and work and their changing relationships from around age 12 to 20. We draw directly on boys' and young men's narratives to illustrate interlocking transitions as both personal and political, and above all, as relational. We also look more briefly at girls' and young women's experiences and trajectories. Indeed, the starting point of this paper is a relational analysis that highlights the fundamental influences of gender in explaining boys' diverging life trajectories. Further to this relational approach, boys and girls represent heterogeneous social groups whose experiences are cross-cut by other axes of socio-demographic difference, based on, for example, their sibling birth order, household wealth, ethnicity, and where they are born and grow up (Ayele 2008; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; Hopkins and Noble 2009; O'Neill Gutierrez and Hopkins 2014).

We focus in particular on adolescence and early adulthood since young people in their second decade of life face a multitude of potentially life-shifting experiences and changes, including whether to remain in, return to, or leave school, to seek out paid work, to experience sexual debut, to marry, to have a child or to migrate. Their agency and roles in the decisions affecting their life pathways are often highly constrained, not least by their material and family conditions and by powerful gender and age expectations which are nonetheless dynamic.

There is an increasing global focus on adolescence as a key transition point in a young person's life (UNICEF 2011). It is during this period when the foundations for their future as an adult are laid, and the point at which gender norms have the potential to become increasingly entrenched (Crockett et al. 2000; Dornan et al. 2013; Feeny and Crivello 2015; Hardgrove et al. 2014; McCarthy et al. 2016; Sawyer et al. 2012).¹ *Why, then, is the paper's*

1 The authors do not apply strict age criteria when referring to life course categories since these are socially constructed, codified through legal and institutional norms, and therefore vary across time and space (Bourdieu 1993, Ch 12; Utas 2005; Zelizer 1994). For this paper, we use 'adolescence' to refer roughly to the period spanning the second decade of life and to the lower threshold of 'youth', acknowledging that in many contexts, chronological age is less relevant than social age. The United Nations defines an adolescent as between the ages of 10 and 19, with younger adolescents being between 10 and 14 (UNICEF 2012). Using this definition, there are 1.2 billion adolescents in the world today, and in many developing countries, they make up as much as 47 per cent of the population (UNICEF 2012).

main focus on adolescent boys and young men? It is, of course, intentional. There is a strong tendency in international development to separate out adolescent girls as a policy priority. This has led to programmes focused on adolescent girls in many countries, with a particular focus on education, sexual and reproductive health, and child marriage and female genital mutilation and cutting (FGM/C), rather than a wider contextual and structural analysis of power, privilege or patriarchy (van der Gaag et al. 2014; Levine et al. 2013).² Discussions of 'adolescents' have come to mean discussions of girls in many contexts. At the same time, 'youth' refers to young men. Including in the (new) sociology of childhood, attention to gender and age together is rare (Bartholomaeus and Souza Senkevics 2015).

The Lancet (2015) acknowledges that 'adolescent boys are an important, and neglected, part of the equation.' The assumption that boys do not need the same attention as girls because they benefit from the status quo is being challenged in some quarters (Kato-Wallace et al. 2016; Silberschmidt 2001; WHO 2000). The primary rationale for engaging with adolescent boys is often an instrumentalist one – that it will have a positive impact on girls and young women and on gender equality (Barci 2013; UNFPA 2013; Unterhalter et al. 2014). The improvement in the quality of life of the young men themselves is a side effect. However, there is beginning to be recognition not only that boys and young men's attitudes and behaviours have an impact on girls and women and thus on gender equality, but also, more controversially, that boys themselves experience vulnerabilities affecting their life chances (Kato-Wallace et al. 2016) which in turn also affects gender equality.³

This paper contributes to these debates with a case study from Ethiopia drawing on Young Lives multi-sited, survey and qualitative longitudinal study spanning childhood and youth. The analysis emphasises crucial periods, or 'transitions', in adolescent boys' unfolding biographies and in their daily struggles to establish themselves as individuals of social worth. It will show how attitudes around masculinities affect adolescent boys and young men's relationships with others, including behaviours towards girls and women, and their relationships with their peers and communities, as well as having an impact on their own lives. The paper takes a gendered perspective, drawing directly on boys' narratives and also looks, albeit in less detail, at girls' experiences, asking:

What affects adolescent boys' trajectories through school and work, including their aspirations, agency and changing roles and responsibilities within intimate, family and community contexts?

What obstacles do they face as they grow up and seek recognition towards social adulthood? How do they deal with them, and how might they differ from girls' experiences?

The young people in the current study experienced much of their childhood within the lifetime of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000-2015). The new phase that follows with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can examine whether the investment in education is paying off for young women and young men in terms of livelihoods

2 See also the UN's Coalition for Adolescent Girls, the World Bank's Adolescent Girls Initiative, and the Nike Foundation's Girl Hub (Grosser and van der Gaag 2013; Koffman and Gill 2013).

3 For example, while a gender gap in favour of boys remains in many countries at primary school level, at secondary level, it is increasingly boys who are dropping out of school. The 2012 World Development Report, finds that boys are also more likely to repeat a primary grade than girls in 90 of 113 countries where data are available.

and labour market outcomes, and what is needed in order to ensure that, as the SDGs promise, 'no one is left behind'.

Key concepts

To answer the above questions, the analysis draws on three strands of literature, summarised here with the aim of being indicative rather than exhaustive. First, we build on recent studies that conceptualise transitions in terms of '*vital conjunctures*'; these are defined as a 'socially structured zone of possibility that emerges around specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives' (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 870; see also Jeffrey 2010b, Langevang 2008; Locke and Te Lintelo 2012). Agency and structure intersect in vital conjunctures, as agents navigate their social environments in pursuit of their desired imagined futures (Langevang 2008; Vigh 2006). This view departs from a normative transitions model that depicts individuals moving (passively) from one fixed stage of the life course to the next in a linear and predictable sequence, such as from education to employment to marriage to parenthood. At the forefront are the diverse strategies that young people develop in response to 'critical moments' triggering instability and/or hope and possibility in their lives (cf Ansell et al. 2011; Thomson et al. 2002). Globally, the timing and order of 'transitions' are highly variable, and social statuses that tend to be thought of as permanent (such as leaving school) have been shown to be reversible (see Johnson-Hanks 2002; Morrow 2013). In this perspective, childhood, youth and adulthood are relative and relational categories, and the meanings of and boundaries between childhood and adulthood are fluid, dynamic and context-specific. The movement from childhood to adulthood is therefore not just the movement between developmental positions or through time but between positions of power and social positioning (Christiansen et al. 2006:12). Our study, then, did not work with fixed age thresholds; rather, we took into consideration what boys and young men themselves considered the important markers of coming of age in their communities. Paramount to the notion of vital conjunctures is the way in which structures coalesce in individual lives to shape actions and trajectories. We can therefore ask, *what are the vital conjunctures marking boys' lives in their trajectories to becoming men?*

Second, our analysis resonates with a growing scholarship on 'waithood' highlighting the consequences of economic crises in low- and middle-income countries for young men's life trajectories and the challenges they face in achieving socially recognised adulthood. Honwana (2012: 9) defines waithood as 'a prolonged and uncertain stage between childhood and adulthood' that is characterised by the 'inability to enter the labour market and attain the social markers of adulthood.' One area of focus is on the so-called 'educated unemployed' (Jeffrey et al. 2008) who have gone through the schooling system and obtained diplomas, yet face extended periods of unemployment and a lack of government jobs. Studies invoke a variety of local discourses, expressed through spatial and temporal metaphors of 'waiting', such as 'timepass', 'boredom', feeling 'stuck', 'im/mobility', 'sitting' and 'sipping tea', to describe the frustrations brought about by the involuntary nature of waithood (e.g., Honwana 2014; Jeffrey 2010a; Locke and Te Lintelo 2012; Singerman 2013; Sommers 2012). It is notably a very male-focused scholarship since young women's experiences of 'waithood' in low- and middle-income countries have so far been understudied and under-theorised, and we therefore know very little about how their experiences compare. What we do know is that, in many contexts (including Ethiopia), for young women who, like young men, juggle both

schooling and work, employment is not the only or even the ideal route towards social adulthood; female adulthood can be achieved through marriage and parenthood, and these are not open to young men until they have achieved at least a modicum of economic independence (cf Tafere and Chuta 2016).

Third, we draw on scholars of gender and masculinities in particular, acknowledging that what boys and young men feel able to do and to become is closely intertwined with what they consider constitutes *masculinity* (Phoenix and Frosh 2001: 27), and that definitions of masculinity vary historically, and across different contexts. In *Masculinities*, Connell (1995) challenged the prevailing sex role theory that was based on static binaries of male/female sex roles and promoted a relational view of gender, and the notion of 'hegemonic masculinities'. Later work with Messerschmidt further developed this thinking, emphasising: (a) the plurality and diversity of masculinity; (b) masculinity and femininity as relational concepts within interlinked hierarchies of power; (c) masculinity as performance (rather than as a set of dominant character traits); (d) the mutual reinforcement (intersectionality) of gender with other social factors such as age, class, ethnicity/race and location, and (e) the role of the body as both subject and object of practice (Messerschmidt 2012; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005; see also Cornwall et al. 2011). Knowledge production about masculinities has tended to neglect boys in favour of looking at men and has been anglocentric in its geographic focus (for critiques, see Berg and Longhurst 2003; Connell 2014).

The Ethiopian context

An active agenda of social research involving children and young people is generating a rich picture of contemporary Ethiopian childhood, including focused work from a gender lens, such as Poluha's (2007) *The World of Girls and Boys in Rural and Urban Ethiopia*. While most studies do not take an explicitly gendered approach, poverty is a major theme in the study of Ethiopian childhood, providing a shared context for exploring a range of topics with gendered implications. Among others, these topics include: time-use (e.g., Abebe 2011, Heissler and Porter 2013, Morrow et al. 2014, Poluha 2007; Tafere and Pankhurst 2015); experiences of risk and wellbeing (Boyden 2009; Camfield 2012; Chuta 2014; Ogando Portela and Pells 2014; Tekola 2009); and specific child protection issues, including parental death (Abebe and Aase 2007; Crivello and Chuta 2012); street-based living (Heinonen 2011); child circulation (Kassa and Abebe 2016); violence (Pankhurst et al. 2016); and traditional rites of passage (Boyden 2012). In comparison, research with youth in the country tends to focus either on young men or on young women depending on the topic under investigation. Thus, studies of youth unemployment and entrepreneurship concentrate on the experiences of young men (Camfield 2011; DiNunzio 2015; Mains 2007; Serneels 2007). Heinonen's (2011) research on young masculinities in the context of gang life on the streets of Addis Ababa was likewise carried out with boys and young men. Getnet (2006) studied young men's experiences, and van Blerk (2007) young women's experiences, of negotiating risks associated with HIV/AIDS in different Ethiopian towns. Some studies have been larger in scope and scale, such as the multi-sited, long-term investigation (1994-2010) of changing pathways to adulthood involving male and female youth in a sample of rural communities (Bevan et al. 2010).

The social and policy context

Ethiopia's young people aged between 15 and 29 make up over half of the country's population.⁴ Like other young people in many parts of the world coming of age in the first decades of the twenty-first century, their lives are affected by global social and economic changes. Echoing the concerns expressed in the discourses of 'waithood', Jeffrey (2010b: 496) states that 'the decline of state welfare systems since the 1980s has undermined young people's efforts to obtain social goods associated with "adulthood", such as a stable job, valuable skills, and secure housing.' This is the case too for young Ethiopians living in one of the world's poorest countries with a per capita income of US\$550; notwithstanding, the country has experienced strong and broad-based economic growth – poverty levels in the country fell from 44 per cent in 2000 to 30 per cent in 2011 (World Bank 2015), making Ethiopia one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa. Indeed, the Government of Ethiopia aims to transform the country into a middle-income economy by 2025.

Economic growth is bringing expansion of infrastructure and improving access to services such as health and education.⁵ The number of primary schools across the country increased from 25,000 in 2008/9 to 30,500 in 2012/13, accompanied by an increase in net enrolment rates from 83 per cent to 86 per cent for the full cycle of primary education (Grades 1 to 8) (Ministry of Education, cited in Woldehanna and Pankhurst 2014b). The proportion of women reporting no education has declined significantly, from 98 per cent among those age 65 and over, to just 17 per cent among girls age 10 to 14 (CSA 2012: 26). Similar declines are reported among men; 89 per cent aged 65 and older had no education, compared with 13-19 per cent of those aged 10-24 (CSA 2012: 27). Numbers of boys and girls attending primary school are now roughly equal, although by secondary school, only 14 per cent of young people (age 15-18) were attending school (14 per cent of young men and 13 per cent of young women).⁶ Attendance ratios were much higher in urban areas and among children from wealthier households – for both sexes – compared to children in rural areas and from poorer households, respectively (CSA 2012: 27).

The Government has committed through numerous policies to improving opportunities for young people. In 2005 a National Youth Policy was passed, followed by a number of adolescent and youth strategies that have had some effect in mainstreaming youth issues within other development programmes, at the same time promoting youth participation in government and development processes.

Children, youth and gender are closely linked as 'cross cutting sectors' in the Ethiopian Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) 2010/11–2014/15. This has clear objectives and targets for each; for example, in relation to gender, the main objectives 'are to ensure women's active participation in the country's economic and social development as well as political processes and equal benefits to women from the resultant outcomes (p. 10).' Youth are included as part of Youth and Sport Development, with the aim to 'increase the participation of youth in democratic governance and economic development processes and

4 Ethiopia is the second-most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa, with a population of 96.5 million in 2014.

5 The country is considered 'low' on human development indicators and in 2015 ranked 174 out of 186 countries on the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) of the UNDP Human Development Report. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>

6 The net attendance ratio (NAR) for primary school is calculated as the total number of students of primary school age (age 7-14) expressed as the percentage of the population of primary school age. The NAR for secondary school is the percentage of the population of secondary school age (age 15-18) that attends secondary school.

build capacity in the sports sector to produce top class athletes for regional and international competitions' (p. 111).

Generally, unemployment is a key policy concern for young people. Male employment is higher than female employment in the formal sector, and young people are less likely to find paid work than older adults (Broussard et al. 2014), although young people may be preferred in some sectors (e.g. for certain agricultural tasks) (World Bank 2016). In rural areas, youth livelihoods are further challenged by insufficient rural job creation in the face of land shortages, potentially leading to rural-to-urban migration and, in some cases intergenerational conflict (Bevan et al. 2011: 13; World Bank 2007).⁷ Despite laws allowing women to own land, the majority of women do not, as control of land customarily falls on men (Tura 2014).

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: the next section introduces Young Lives and the study communities where the data were generated. The main findings follow (in four sections), moving loosely chronologically from boys' experiences in early adolescence through to early adulthood, before concluding with implications for policy.

About Young Lives

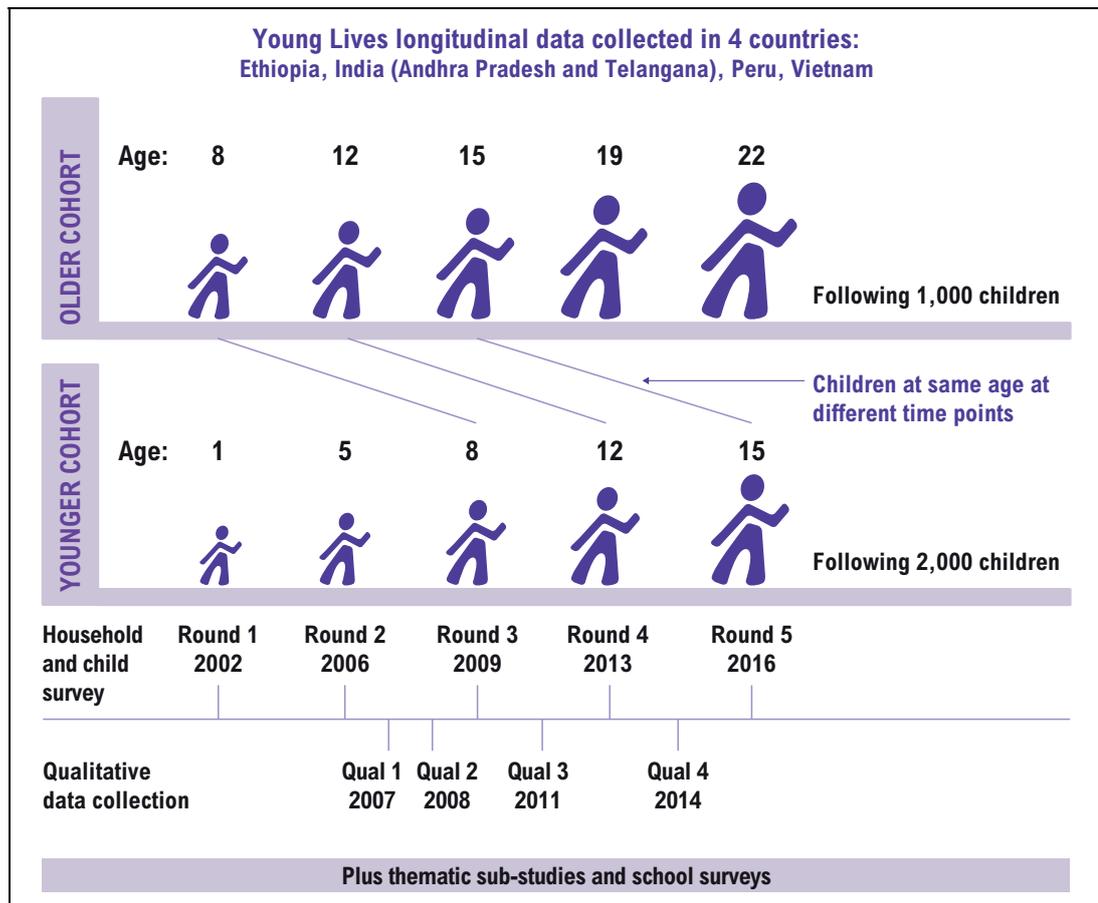
Young Lives is a longitudinal study of childhood poverty that has operated in Ethiopia since 2002, tracking 3,000 children in two age cohorts, their households and communities, over a fifteen-year period, in five major regions (Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, SNNP and Tigray).⁸ Children from poor households and in food-insecure areas are over-represented in the sample although, overall, a diversity of circumstances is captured. Most of the data for this paper come from the sample's Older Cohort (in 2014, n=908) of boys and girls (recruited in more or less equal numbers) born in 1994. A Younger Cohort (in 2014, n=1872) also participate in the study (see Figure 1). The study has two research components: a panel survey (four rounds so far) with the full sample, and qualitative longitudinal research with a nested sub-sample of 60 children/young people plus around 20 'reserve' cases.⁹

7 The current land tenure system is such that the Government owns land and grants households usufruct rights.

8 For further information see www.younglives.org.uk.

9 'Reserve' cases replace case study children in the event of attrition. Basic information is collected about them and their families in each round of data collection, and they are invited to participate in group-based research activities.

Figure 1: *Young Lives research design*



The bulk of data used for this paper come from the qualitative longitudinal stream of research which means the same group of children participated in four rounds of data collection between 2007 and 2014, between the ages of 12/13 and 19/20, along with caregivers, peers and community members.¹⁰ The qualitative longitudinal research sought answers to the following questions: (1) How do choices, decisions and actions influence children’s trajectories?; (2) What are the environmental and social factors that influence children’s trajectories?; and (3) What are the factors that prevent or support children in pursuing the lives and futures that they value?

Data generation and analysis

A team of Ethiopian social scientists generated data with participants using an integrated suite of qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews, creative tools (e.g., life maps, community mapping, and photography), group discussions and observation

¹⁰ Individuals in the Older Cohort were recruited into the study on the basis that they were born in 1994; however, there were inconsistencies in reports of children’s (and caregivers’) ages in different rounds. Age is not hugely relevant in this context. In this paper, we tended to use the age as reported in the first round as a reference point, but also had to exercise flexibility.

(Crivello et al. 2013).¹¹ They spent around two weeks in each site and fieldwork was scheduled to take place in between rounds of the main survey.

The general design of Young Lives reflects a socio-ecological life course approach suited to investigate – with children and youth at the centre – ‘changing persons in changing contexts’.¹² Thus, our analysis of longitudinal narratives aimed to understand socio-biographical complexity over time and to identify themes both ‘between cases’ and ‘within cases’, contextualised within the wider trends indicated by the panel survey. Our analytic approach was layered and cascading, first beginning with thematic analysis of the full set of boys’ individual interviews (age 19/20), then, of girls’ and adult caregivers’ accounts. Based on emerging themes, we identified a selection of boys across the sites for longitudinal biographical analysis, going back to their earlier interviews.

Community contexts

The qualitative sample includes five Young Lives communities (two urban, three rural) which were selected to capture contrasts (Table 1).

Table 1. *Qualitative research sites*¹³

Bertukan	A densely populated ethnically and religiously diverse poor suburb in Addis Ababa, located next to the city’s fruit and vegetable market; recent urban development, private investment and government-sponsored housing schemes are having a range of impacts on the area.
Leki	A comparatively small ethnically homogenous rural community in Oromia region, located close to an expanding town offering some opportunities for work, and where there has been recent expansion of private irrigated vegetable and flower commercial farms.
Leku	A poor urban neighbourhood of informal market activities in Hawassa, the regional capital of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region. Many residents are in-migrants with important networks to the agricultural hinterlands.
Tach-Meret	A rural community located in Amhara region and situated on the outskirts of a town that exerts considerable influence on those living on the town’s edge. Locals mainly engage in farming, and children can access all levels of schooling due to proximity to the town.
Zeytuni	A relatively remote, poor, ethnically homogenous rural community in Tigray region, affected by protracted drought and food shortages; has a primary school but children are attracted by paid work in private stone-crushing plants in the community.

All five of the research communities where the children and young people live have reported changes since the qualitative study began in 2007 (Pankhurst 2012). These localities represent differing ‘spaces of possibilities’ – to borrow a phrase from Hage (1997) in the sense that communities are an important space in which hope is generated, constrained and negotiated. Many changes have been positive: all communities now have primary schools and some have pre-schools. Health facilities too have improved, as has infrastructure, with

11 The field team is led by Ethiopian senior researcher Yisak Tafere. Individual interviews were carried out in local languages and audio-recorded, then transcribed and translated into English. In some cases, such as migration, interviews were carried out over the phone. Researchers produced reports on group discussions, and the following reports were included in analysis for this paper: *Wellbeing/Il/being* (what it means to live well or badly); *Transitions* (identifying key milestones and social expectations for boys and girls); *Understandings of Poverty* (eliciting children’s views on the indicators, causes and consequences of poverty); and *Who is a child?* (seeking local definitions of childhood and indicators of change from childhood to early adulthood). The latter was part of a sub-study on children’s work with considerable overlap in the sample.

12 We borrow the phrase ‘changing persons in changing contexts’ from Crockett et al. (2000: 68) who developed an ecological and life course framework for the study of rural youth. See also Bronfenbrenner (1979).

13 We use pseudonyms in place of actual names of communities and children throughout the paper.

new roads, electricity and mobile phone coverage, meaning that transport connections and connectivity are now possible for those who can afford it. Young people, even in rural areas, are no longer as isolated as their parents were (Pankhurst 2012). Private companies have meant that there is paid work, although this has not been unproblematic – for example, in Leki (rural), there is a large Dutch flower farm, but local people are worried that chemical waste is polluting the lake, affecting fishing, washing and drinking water for cattle. In Zeytuni (rural) a nearby quarry provides employment, although large construction vehicles have damaged the main road. Children and young people in the area find paid work at the quarry; girls are hired to crush stones (for construction materials) and boys are assigned to shape the stones into cobbles. In Tach-Meret (rural) a fieldworker who was involved since the first research visit in 2007 also remarked on changes within this community:

There is big progress in many aspects in the area. During my first visit, there wasn't electricity and good hotels. There wasn't internet or computer access ... The road was difficult ... [I]n the final round [2014 visit] there are a lot of improvements in electricity up to the rural part of the city. The road is constructed very well so people move from place to place easily. (Fieldworker notes, 17 April 2014)

In the paper, we look at how boys' and young men's perceptions of their localities affect their expectations and plans for their imagined futures. Indeed, with respect to rural youth, in particular, there is global policy interest in what their aspirations say about the future of farming. In his valedictory lecture on this theme, White (2011: 20) cited IFAD's 2010 Rural Poverty Report to highlight the specific challenges facing rural youth, both young men and young women:

It is ... tomorrow's rural generations who most need to see rural areas as places where they can fulfil their aspirations. Already today, more and more youth are unwilling farmers or livestock producers and reluctant residents in rural areas. ... [Robust action] needs to turn rural areas from backwaters into places where people have access to quality services and profitable opportunities, and where innovation takes place, whether in agricultural production and marketing, in non-farm enterprises or in energy generation.

White expressed concern that rural youth are at risk of experiencing 'transitions to nowhere', a term signalling uncertain transitions to adulthood (2011: 3). In this paper, we ask: *where, then, are the places where young people can cultivate hope and fulfil their aspirations?* Does growing up in the city guarantee transitions to 'somewhere'? Such spatial metaphors are not coincidental and are meant to underscore the centrality of place in shaping life chances, identities and inequality. This includes the varied contexts and meanings of gender, poverty and childhood as these shape expectations for boys' and girls' trajectories to adulthood.

Constructions of gender in Ethiopia

The constructions of gender when growing up are mediated through the lens of poverty for many children, but they are also extremely varied and contextual. Girls and boys living in poor households are affected differently by poverty, depending on the socio-cultural context, location, the dynamics within their family and communities, institutional structures and economic pressures. In the Young Lives study, they experience fragile household economies

and high levels of shocks such as parental death and absence, family illness, and the failure of the livelihoods that their families depend on (Chuta 2014; Ogando Portela and Pells 2014). Ethiopian children and youth are part of interdependent family relations and the contributions they make to their households are often crucial; subsistence farming requires a lot of labour, and children and youth are expected to participate. Their specific roles are also influenced by poverty, culture and location but also by sibling birth order and composition, which often have as great a part to play in children's lives than whether they are born female or male (cf Boyden et al. 2016; Heissler and Porter 2013; on Bolivia, see Punch 2001).

Social norms and expectations: how are they different for girls and boys?

In Ethiopia, there are a number of broadly understood constructions around what it means to be a man or a woman that help to put the findings about what it means to be a girl or a boy growing up into context. Masculinity and femininity are powerful social-control mechanisms, where masculine identity is seen as superior to feminine identity (Heinonen 2011: 30), although there are exceptions due to age, class, location and personal status (Poluha 2004: 122). The norm is for households to be organised along patriarchal principles with hierarchies based on gender and age. According to Bevan and Pankhurst (2007: 21) this means: 'The male head manages the household and can take all major decisions or agree to share some of the decision-making with his wife. Sisters are expected to serve their brothers, while within genders authority is dispersed through age hierarchies.' In this scenario, 'senior women have power over younger females and over young boys, and both gender and age hierarchies operate among children' (Bevan and Pankhurst 2007: v).

However, this pattern of subordination and super-ordination is not always what occurs in real life and in everyday practice which is constantly changing (Poluha 2004). An 'ideal' woman therefore is characterised as: 'virginal, chaste, modest, submissive, respectful, domesticated, serene and beautiful' while the 'ideal' man is seen as: 'sombre, quiet, reflective, rational, brave, fearless, handsome, respectful and submissive to his family and to none other' (Heinonen 2011: 38-39; see also Abebe 2008a). Likewise, a long-term study across several rural communities found that: 'Parents still train their children into gendered habituses emphasising the need for males to learn aggression and females submission' (Bevan and Pankhurst 2007: 57). However, 'there is increasing acceptance of education for girls and the severity of the violence involved in disciplining children has diminished' (ibid).

One of the strongest cultural mores is that of *yilugnta*, defined as the intense concern for public opinion and involving the repression of doing what one might like or prefer to do for fear of social opprobrium. *Yilugnta* is inculcated from a young age, irrespective of social class or ethnic background, and emphasises 'community mindedness' (Abebe 2008b: 20) and the relationship of the individual to his or her wider moral community. Heinonen (2011: 32) describes *yilugnta* in terms of shame, honour and family pride, and therefore implying a positively valued attribute.

To a boy growing up, it implies a notion of masculine dignity and responsibility, involving status, and protecting and honouring the family, including providing for it financially. The constraining side of *yilugnta* involves being too self-effacing, and of being overly dictated by 'what people would say.' As one of the boys (Miki) in this study explained: '*yilugnta* is to do things for the sake of others but you do not believe in it'. Boys from poor households who are, like many of the Young Lives boys, unable to earn a living to provide for their families, are also unable to live up to the ideal of *yilugnta*.

Above all perhaps, for boys, *yilugnta* is about being seen as male, and importantly, not being seen as female, and thus losing face in public.¹⁴ Such was the case of 12-year-old Seife, in this study: with no sisters at home, many of Seife's chores, such as cleaning the house and preparing *wot* (stew), made him feel ashamed because these tasks are normally done by girls (Boyden 2009). He was keen to contribute to his family, but did not want to transgress gender and age norms of children's work:

Fieldworker: *So you don't like to work around the stove? Why?*

Seife: *Because it's a woman's work. I hate it.*

Fieldworker: *But do you have to do it because there are no women at your house?*

Seife: *Yes.*

The boys, aged 12, in (urban) Bertukan, attributed changes in themselves and in their capacity to confront risk to their social maturation, such as being better equipped to face their problems independently, developing a better 'understanding' and 'relating well to others'. Indeed, by age seven, a boy is expected to 'know his soul', meaning, being aware of right and wrong (Heinonen 2011). For example, Bereket considered himself to be a 'good boy' (*tiru li*) evidenced by his 'love of work', 'respect for others', 'good use of time', 'getting along well with others' and 'improving' (Chuta and Crivello 2013: 20). Aged 12, he said, 'I make decisions on my own, starting from a long time ago', and he no longer does things 'just to please others'; he does things because he knows they are 'the right thing to do'. He and his brothers were taken in by their grandmother when their parents died and she cultivated a strong work ethic in them. He earned money from a young age which may have contributed to his sense of autonomy, whereas children in better-off families may face greater control by their parents.

Yilugnta is about social conformity, including conformity to gender ideals; something that affects girls even more than boys. For girls and women, the emphasis is on respectability which is the responsibility of the mother, and a daughter's sexuality and reputation must be protected at any cost. Girls who do not conform in this way are said to bring shame on the whole family. Girls who do not conform in this way are said to bring shame on the whole family. In practice, harmony and consensus are not easily achieved, and sometimes young people's actions expose community tensions. For instance, Boyden (2012: 1117) described a study in Oromia region in which government efforts to eliminate female circumcision were met with resistance by young people, who seemed to favour the practice more than adults who feared criminal prosecution if discovered. The pressures on girls to conform to gender ideals meant they sometimes arranged their own secret circumcisions to avoid vilification and bullying by their peers for being out of line with norms of girlhood.

Poluha (2004: 137-138) outlines the main characteristics of a 'good girl' and a 'good boy', such that a 'good girl' always obeys her parents, helps in the house, respects her elders, stays at home, works and studies, and does not go out in the street or spend time with boys. A 'good boy' is obedient to his parents, respects his elders, runs errands, does not do girls' work and studies hard. These cultural values are learned at a young age and reinforced as children grow into adolescence and early adulthood (Poluha 2004). *Yilugnta* then, according

14 Tellingly, the phrase *yeset lij* [son-of-a-woman] is used as an insult for boys (Heinonen 2011: 34).

to Heinonen (2011: 8), 'promotes hegemonic masculinity within the wider Ethiopian culture' and accounts for the gendered nature of how Ethiopian children are socialised.

In the current study, by age 12, there were gender differences in boys' and girls' increasing concerns with their social reputation and development. For girls, a combination of responsibility, respect, hard work, the acquisition of new and useful skills (especially domestic competences, such as knitting, embroidery, and coffee and food processing and preparation) and modesty were valued attributes (Chuta and Crivello 2013). For example, Fatuma, in Bertukan, managed her social reputation in her teen years by choosing to stay indoors more, as an expression of modesty, and maintained, 'It's not the same for a girl that spends her time in the house as for a girl that is often seen outside.' When Ayu was 12, her mother said: 'We do not allow the girls to play with the boys. If they play with the boys, the people in the community will call them unnecessary names and their brothers will be angry. So she plays with her female friends' (van der Gaag et al. 2009). At age 19 Ayu is married with a daughter. She says that a married woman's life is even more restricted (cited in van der Gaag and Knowles 2016):

It is not possible for her to meet people like she used to. Because she has a husband and she is in a marriage, she is not free to meet anyone at any time. I never wander around like I used to when I was young and single. I just stay at home and wait for him [her husband].

What is clear is that being a boy or a girl is not a passive process whereby an individual acquires gendered attributes through an automatic process of socialisation from parent to child. On the contrary, being a boy or a girl entails active and constant navigation by children of such powerful social mores as yilugnta and other gendered social expectations as well as of their material environments.

Education: the route out of poverty?

Education is regarded by many Ethiopian parents and children as a route out of poverty and an important way of seeing that the next generation live better lives than their parents. One of the most remarkable recent societal changes relates to the expansion of formal schooling and the way school education has come to define modern childhood in the country, as elsewhere. DHS data from 2005 found that 68 per cent of women born between 1976 and 1980 had no education compared with 41 per cent of those born 20 years later.

Ninety-nine per cent of Young Lives children aged 12 surveyed in 2006 (n=980) said that formal schooling was essential for their future life. Being educated is associated with social worth, while being uneducated can be a source of shame. This is just as true for girls and young women as it is for boys and young men. When Adugna was 15, he said, 'a person that is not educated is insulted by other people as illiterate. But a person that is educated is not insulted, but is respected.' Adugna's mother reflected back on her childhood and said:

We did not know that education was very important as we do now ... Adugna's life is better than mine. For one thing, he is learning with freedom; he has time to go to school. We did not have time and girls were not attending school in our area. When I compare my life with that of Adugna, the difference is like the sky and the earth.

Other parents reiterated these points:

We understand the value of educating our children. In today's world, an educated person is better than an uneducated one. (Tufa's father)

If you study well, you can improve. I want [my children] to reach a better place through their education. If they [do] they can support me. Uneducated people are not valued. Educated people have opportunities everywhere. (Louam's mother)

Parents aspire for their children to be educated as a route out of poverty and as a way of being supported in their old age. As this mother of a 15-year old girl said: 'If I help my daughter to finish university, she will support me financially.' While Kasseye, a rural, boy, aged 15, said: 'My family depends on agriculture. The harvest is sometimes good; at other times, poor ... My father works day and night because he is a farmer. He loses a lot of energy and may die soon ... But I want to finish my education and sit in an office with a monthly salary ... I will live longer than my father ...' (Tafere 2014: 7). Where social protection is lacking, reliance on family support is a practical necessity.

Many Young Lives children, both boys and girls, are better educated than their parents, particularly their mothers, even if they only have a few years of schooling. Nowadays, the vast majority of children eventually enroll in school, although many do so late.¹⁵ In 2013, 95 per cent of all 12-year-olds were enrolled in school – with girls slightly more likely to be in school (96 per cent) than boys (93 per cent) (Woldehanna and Pankhurst 2014b). From age 8 to 12 the enrolment rate for rural children increased from 55 per cent to 92 per cent, whereas in urban areas it rose from 82 per cent to 97 per cent (Tafere 2014).

Increases in enrolment, however, have not meant an equal improvement in education quality. Young Lives data from 2006 indicate that 34 per cent of 12-year-olds were unable to read even a simple sentence. Analysis of learning outcomes (in maths and receptive vocabulary) from age 5 to 19 years found no evidence of a systematic gender bias at primary school ages, but gender gaps disadvantaging girls became prominent after the age of 12 (Singh and Krutikova forthcoming). Generally, school progression is slow, grade repetition is common, especially for boys, and it is not unusual for children to temporarily leave school when their families hit hard times, such as in periods of acute parental illness (Chuta 2014) and then find it hard to return. And yet, despite poor quality schooling, education aspirations tend to remain high.

A study by Tafere (2014: 6) found that at the age of 12, around 70 per cent of children desired a university education, and aspirations remained high for both boys and girls at the age of 15. There were no large gender differences, but there were differences on the basis of location, such that by the age of 15, 88 per cent of urban children aspired to university compared to 64 per cent of children in rural areas (ibid). Overall, only a small proportion identified 'farmer' as their desired future occupation, and by age 19, only 11 per cent of rural young men (n=265) and 5 per cent of rural young women (n=211) wanted to be farmers. When they had to choose one occupation, they chose professions like doctor, engineer and civil servant. Yet, many of their families are dependent on rural livelihoods. Qualitative research exploring children's definitions of good and bad lives found that rural children gave more emphasis to having material resources such as land and livestock, whereas urban children focused more on schooling (Woldehanna et al. 2011: 12-13).

15 Primary school has an official entry age of seven and a duration of eight grades. School enrolment increased for the Older Cohort between the ages of 8 (66 per cent) and 12 (94 per cent) (Woldehanna and Pankhurst 2014b).

Combining work and school

In practice, it has not been possible for many of the children who are now young people to remain in school; for most children, education is regarded as an activity to be fitted around other important things in life, especially work, whether in the household or for pay (Bevan et al. 2011).

More generally in Africa, for the majority of children, work is simply part of growing up responsibly (Spittler and Bourdillon 2012; Pankhurst et al. 2015; Poluha 2007; Abebe 2007). Children learn skills through working and it is one way to earn respect from others; however, work is also carried out as a response to immediate needs, whereas formal schooling is seen as an investment in the future:

[T]he stone crushing work we are doing is going to be finished at some point, but those who complete their education will be able to drive cars whereas those who didn't complete their education will go to farming. (Maregey, 12-year-old boy, Zeytuni)

Normally, starting from around the age of 6, children are expected to start working for the household. In 2009, more than 90 per cent of the Younger Cohort (then aged 8–9) undertook some kind of paid or unpaid work. Household chores (such as fetching water, collecting firewood, and preparing food) took up the biggest proportion of children's time, followed by childcare activities and unpaid work for the family, mostly farming and herding cattle. Children's work is assigned according to gender-age roles (Abebe 2011; Bevan and Pankhurst 2011; Epple 2014; Morrow et al. 2014). Herding is mostly a job for boys, although in some communities girls also herd; ownership of livestock is negatively associated with enrolment in school since tending to animals cannot always be worked around class schedules (Chuta and Morrow 2015: 8). In some households, particularly those with elderly parents/caregivers or with only one parent, adults are heavily reliant on children's work contributions. This is illustrated through an interview with the elderly father of Defar (at age 13, from Tach-Meret), which revealed how much the household relied on the boys' contributions:

Interviewer: *You did not want him to go to school.*

Defar's father: *What can I do? At a village meeting they told me to do so. But who can keep the cattle for me, who can bring water? And [who can] split wood for his mother?*

Interviewer: *What kinds of work does he do?*

Father: *Everything.*

Interviewer: *Everything?*

Father: *He can work as a cattle keeper, wood splitter, and water carrier and he can work doing anything.*

At the age of 12, almost all children (98 per cent) were doing some type of work, and although there was little difference in the amount of time boys and girls spent working, their time was allocated differently; girls worked longer on domestic chores than boys, and boys worked more hours on the family farm or business, or in paid work (Orkin 2011: 8; Orkin 2012: 12; Tafere and Pankhurst 2015: 11; Woldehanna 2009). By this age, many girls have learned the skills they will need to manage a household:

Girls can do everything including preparing sauce, baking bread and injera [sourdough pancake] and managing the house at age 12 and 13 if their mothers are very smart to train them. (Fathers group, Addis Ababa)

Birth order as well as gender affected children's time-use. Orkin (2011: 8) found that the eldest girl worked significantly longer than her younger sisters (by almost an hour per day), but the oldest boy did not work longer than his brothers. Eldest girls also worked longer hours than eldest (and other) boys (again by almost an hour) (Seid and Gurmu 2015).

Many children struggle to balance the demands of schooling with their family and work responsibilities, and schools are not always flexible to their needs (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015). Their education is often interrupted because of economic shocks and adverse events such as drought, family illness or death, or because they are needed to care for siblings or other family members (Chuta 2014; Ogando Portela and Pells 2014). There is a notable problem with school re-enrolment even only after several days of absence (e.g., due to work demands or to family illness). Rural boys, in particular, have erratic schooling trajectories which can include several episodes of drop-out and return, and girls also leave school for various lengths of time. Boys, however, tend to be older than they should be for the class that they are attending; 60 per cent of boys compared to 12 per cent of girls were overage for their grade in school at age 12.

Some of the reasons why boys interrupt their schooling are illustrated through the following three cases: Gemechu enrolled very late in school at the age of 12. A year later, still in Grade 1, he left school to earn money by herding in a different community. He later returned home, re-joined school and attended up to Grade Two; then he stopped for the second time. He recalled this incident with some resentment.

My parents prevented me from joining school and forced me to herd cattle; they give [higher] priority to their cattle than to my education. Sometimes I am forced to go to the field with cattle early in the morning and had to stay there up to dusk. (Gemechu, age 13, Leki)

Tufa's school trajectory reflected wider family dynamics and his responsibility to find solutions to household troubles. His father had been in prison, and Tufa dropped out of school on several occasions, when there was no one to plough and guard the farm. He struggled to balance the demands of work with his desire to continue in school. Age 16, he was still in Grade 2, while other boys his age were in Grades 5 to 8. Tufa helped his family by fishing, undertaking household chores and doing waged work. In relation to this, his father described Tufa's stamina:

He has been working hard day and night on the farms. His effort is even greater than mine and he never gets tired. He spends most of his time on the farming, taking his younger sisters with him. When you see him, his physical height may seem short. But, in his mind, he is very mature. For example, he goes with the other children to glean vegetables and sell them. But he does not spend the money immediately like the other children, but saves it to give to his parents and to buy clothes for himself. Sometimes he even buys a chicken. (Tufa's father, interviewed in 2011, Leki)

Unlike Gemechu and Tufa, Hadush, from rural Zeytuni, had, unusually, only ever spent two days in school.

I went to school when I was very young, but soon quit because my parents ordered me to herd the cattle. I did not insist on asking them to send me to school because if they were willing they would have sent me ... Being illiterate may have a negative impact on my future because I cannot write or read. (Hadush, age 19)

When he was 15, the teachers asked his father to send Hadush to school and he tried it for a few days but then he left, feeling embarrassed that he did not know how to read or write:

They [my parents] sent me to school because they were afraid of the officials' warnings. My father didn't want to send me to school because he is illiterate.

Hadush's father, however, told a different story.

I told him to go but he refused. When the teachers came to ask me, I told them to talk to him not to me, because he didn't want to learn. Now he asks me why I didn't send him to school. But it wasn't me; it was Hadush who refused to go.

In Hadush's case, being pulled out of school was at least partly attributable to the sibling composition within his household, and to birth order alongside gender and location (cf Punch 2001). Hadush is the last of eight siblings and was the only child living at home at the time. As the youngest, it was his job to care for the family's livestock, and explained: 'There wasn't any open area where we could just send the livestock to graze on grass, so there must be someone to look after them.'

Beyond childhood

The benefit of longitudinal research is being able to trace the biographies of young people like Hadush, Tufa and Gemechu through their experiences of childhood into adolescence and beyond. In this section, we begin with young people's definitions of what it means and what it takes for boys to 'become men' to provide a context for understanding what it is that they are striving for at the end of their second decade of life. We then describe in some detail the cases of Miki, Tufa and Afework, showcased here because aspects of their individual trajectories were shared by other boys in the study, and because their cases shed light on the central themes of gender, poverty and striving for social worth underpinning the analysis.

Indicators of young adulthood

For the current generation of youth in Ethiopia, the expansion of formal schooling and the shrinking of the public sector have resulted in a prolonged period of time between childhood and adulthood (Mains 2007: 664).¹⁶ In fact, according to young people's accounts, the age at which 'childhood' ends does not necessarily correlate with the age at which 'adulthood' begins, and boys, in particular, referred to an in-between phase of *wottat*, an Amharic word describing 'youth'.

Some of the boys self-identified as youth, even though they fell well below the age range they assigned for youth (25 – 35 years old), most likely in an effort to distance themselves from childhood, since they no longer saw themselves as children and wanted to be seen as mature. Nineteen-year-old Hambtamu (Tach-Meret) considers himself a 'youth': 'because I started working independently'. Meanwhile, Afework (Addis Ababa), still in school, considers himself a youth on the basis that:

¹⁶ In 2010, group discussions ('Who is a child?') with young people aged 17 and with adults/caregivers in three Young Lives communities elicited local definitions of childhood, and views on the timing and indicators associated with male and female adulthood.

Now nobody tells me to cut my nails. And nobody punishes me for simple reasons ... [I] am a youth. I am not a child and I am not an adult ... [I] can understand things better than a child, so I am a youth.

Afework's insistence that he is 'not a child' comes from his sense of social maturation rather than a reflection of his (chronological) age. Indeed, although there is considerable variation in young people's *age-based* definitions, in contrast, there is strong consensus on what they understand to be the *social indicators* marking the move from childhood to adulthood.

For girls, as for boys, social maturation is a gradual process, cultivated through their changing care and work roles within their families, often leading to paid work, and to increasing competencies and self-reliance. Puberty (age 12-15) stands out as a key turning point for girls, associated with physical changes, sexual awareness and increased responsibilities. Marriage, often swiftly followed by parenthood, marks the transition to adulthood, and occurs earlier for girls than for boys, and earlier in rural areas compared to urban ones. Haymanot in Zeytuni married at age 15, and four years later, with a child, she resents that she looks 'older' than her actual age. She says: 'I see myself as a youth (menesay), but people think that I am an adult woman (abay sebeyti).' Sessen, in the same community, is also married: 'Those who are married and have babies are adults Yes, I am adult because I am married.' She sees herself as different from her unmarried friends, saying: 'They are still dependent on their parents; but I live independently.' Comparing herself to them, she believes: 'Living an independent life is good; dependency is not good.'

Ayu's mother (rural Leki) thinks that having a child has made Ayu more mature:¹⁷

She has changed. She is now a mother and she has matured. She takes care of me too. She says she now realises how much I suffered to raise them [Ayu and her siblings]. She has become a responsible mother. She loves her child more than anything else... She said she couldn't bear to be away from her, even for a single night. She takes care of her child better than I did my children.

Physical changes (e.g., voice, dress, strength) and social maturation (e.g., 'knowing right from wrong') are also indications for boys that they are growing up; 'those who are childish do not know about *yilugnta*,' explain the boys in Bertukan. There is also a strong social norm governing expectations that boys, in particular, should only marry after they have finished schooling and achieved some degree of financial security and, in addition, for rural boys, land. Although there is considerable congruence amongst boys and girls regarding what is required for boys to become men and for girls to become women, their actual pathways, as we will see further, are far from uniform or straight.

A snapshot of school and work outcomes at age 19

Neither young men's nor young women's experiences at the age of 19 are in any way homogenous. Of the 908 study participants, more than one third of the boys were working (36 per cent) and one third were studying and working (32 per cent), while 39 per cent of girls reported 'only studying' and 23 per cent 'studying and working' (Tafere and Chuta 2016).

Almost half of the sample were working in the agriculture sector (two-thirds in rural areas), and 14 per cent reported wage employment. Despite a strong discourse of the male

17 In van der Gaag et al. 2009 and van der Gaag and Knowles 2016, the case of 'Ayu' appears under the name 'Seble' (both pseudonyms of the same girl).

breadwinner, girls also want independent livelihoods, and girls and boys alike consider a school-based education instrumental in securing their 'bright futures' (Chuta and Crivello 2013; Chuta and Morrow 2015). However, by age 19, there is a growing ambivalence regarding education, particularly for young men, and what is relevant for 'real life' becomes an increasingly important question. 'Real life' for young men means increased pressures to earn money and to secure a living. Most of them had already left school, and even when they were still enrolled, their aspirations were increasingly oriented towards the world of work.

Now I want to work in irrigation. I have already quit my education and now it is hardly possible to achieve my childhood ambitions [to be a doctor]. (Tufa, 19 years old, Leki)

Hadush says he wants to:

work hard and live like a better-off person ... expanding my farm and hiring more labourers ... I would like to be a rich man.

Mihretu's uncle tells him:

[I]t is better to seek a source of income instead of simply wasting time in school.

Being enrolled in school at the age of 19 might be an indication of perseverance, rather than good progress or good quality schooling. In fact, the Young Lives Round 4 survey found that the 19-year-olds who were still enrolled in school were spread across an enormous range of grades, from *second grade* of primary school on one end, to early years of *university* on the other end (Table 2). Although the numbers for both are low, in our sample, girls and young women are more likely than boys and young men to continue beyond secondary school at this age. One explanation is that teenage boys are under more family pressure to seek out paid work since they can find paid work more easily than girls and girls are needed for work in the household. The opportunity costs of staying in school diminish over time for boys, particularly when work and school schedules are incompatible (Favara 2016).

Table 2. *Grade level of young people aged 19 attending school*

Education level enrolled to	male		female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
None	212	43.53	156	37.14	368	40.57
Primary level	79	16.22	59	14.05	138	15.21
Secondary level (9-10)	98	20.12	89	21.19	187	20.62
Pre-university grades (11-12)	38	7.80	50	11.90	88	9.70
Vocational/diploma	36	7.39	42	10.00	78	8.60
University	24	4.93	24	5.71	48	5.29
Total	487	100	420	100	907	100

(Source: Tafere and Chuta 2016)

Often, schooling decisions reflect considerations that go beyond the life of the individual boy or girl, and rather reflect families' strategies towards securing collective wellbeing, so that individual child wellbeing is defined and managed in relational terms. This was clearly the case for Desta (Younger Cohort) and his four siblings in Zeytuni, as they were caught between the demands of schooling and their family's livelihood needs. At one point, Desta's parents tried to spread the responsibility of caring for the livestock among the sons equally. To do this, they alternated on an annual basis who would leave school to herd, and who would attend school. Eventually, Desta's elder siblings refused to interrupt their schooling,

which placed greater pressure on the younger siblings. The parents decided three years ago that Desta would study in the church school, since it was too difficult to balance formal schooling with herding.¹⁸

By the same token, leaving school early can be a source of shame for some. Defar, in rural Tach-Meret, left school in Grade 4 but his friends progressed to Grade 7. Aged 19, he is sensitive to their differences, and is ashamed because, 'If someone educated asks me about something, I cannot answer.' When he was younger he imagined that by age 19 he would be a merchant, but says, 'No, I did not accomplish it ... I am not successful.' Similarly, Tufa, aged 15, said that he felt 'left behind' by his friends who continued to progress in schooling after he left school. More generally, boys' educational aspirations start off higher than girls (age 12 and 15). Parents too at these ages have higher aspirations for their sons than for their daughters. But after age 15, boys' educational aspirations decline in comparison, and the gender gap in terms of aspirations is the highest among the poorest households (Favara 2016).

Marriage: a route into adulthood

Marriage remains one of the most important markers of social adulthood and the young men in the study are just a few years shy of reaching the national median age for first marriage – 23.1 years old (Central Statistical Agency 2012).¹⁹ Yet they note that marriage is impossible for them until they have adequately paid work. *What then are the consequences for those young men who are unable to marry, or leave the family home? Can they consider themselves to be adults?*

Mains' (2011: 79) study of unemployed youth in Jimma city found that 'older men who were not married were often the objects of disdain even if they were otherwise successful'. Marriage was important because it was a step towards having children, it meant participation in the local *iddir* (informal burial society offering insurance to its members), and afforded recognition as a social adulthood (ibid). In some parts, a man must be married in order to be recognised as a household head and to request land from the Peasant Association (Emirie 2005).²⁰ The same may apply to girls and young women who access certain benefits unavailable to their unmarried peers. For example, Haymanot, in Zeytuni, said she was given land from the government, and since marrying she is also able to participate in the local *Senbet* ('Sunday'), a monthly gathering restricted to married women in the area who alternate hosting a kind of 'potluck' social.

In this light, our use of the word 'love' as shorthand for marriage is misleading, since 'marriage' in this context entails varying degrees of 'love', choice, coercion and custom, as well as social integration. By law, marriage should be entered into with 'the full consent of the intending spouses' but in practice marriage is also an alliance between families formalised through ritual and customary economic transactions (e.g., dowry, brideprice, etc.) (Boyden et

18 Chuta and Morrow (2015: 8) explain: 'The church school system has preserved traditional learning in Ethiopia. It is one of the oldest in Christendom, having originated in the Aksumite Empire with the introduction of Christianity ... [R]eligious education is usually given in Ge'ez language which is only typical to church schools ... [T]his education is normally given in churches at any time and day of the week, and in some cases even at night. The main objective of attending religious education is to become a priest.'

19 The median age at first marriage among men aged 25-59 was 23.1 (compared to 17.1 for women aged 20-49) (Central Statistical Agency 2012).

20 Cited in Pankhurt, Tiumelissan and Chuta (2016).

al. 2013). Previously, it was parents who decided when and who children would marry, but, in many parts, this is changing. In some communities, it was boys from better-off families who married earlier because poorer boys struggled to accumulate the *gabara* (bridewealth) required to marry; the option of voluntary marriage (rather than customary, family-arranged) means that the differences between wealthier and poorer boys are no longer so great.

Gemetchu, aged 19, has plans to marry his girlfriend, but only once he is 'mature' enough.

That means we will get married when I possess my own property and when she [girlfriend] finishes her education ... I will start saving, building a house, and owning my own property from now onwards.

Gemetchu has a plan, but resourcing his quest for 'maturity' remains a challenge for him since he needs to rely on his ability to earn money and save; where social protection and more formal sources of support are lacking, being able to draw on personal networks of friends and family is essential.

Afework (aged 19) says he would like to have a girlfriend one day but, he says, first:

You have to have your own income. When you finish your education, you get a job; when you decide to have a girlfriend you think about having children. You need to have your own life, your own house and a car before you start a relationship.

For young women, marriage is much more of an immediate possibility. In the wider survey of 19-year-olds, 13 per cent of young women had married compared to less than 1 per cent of young men (n= 908). Young women see marriage as a way of being recognised as mature, and in some cases, it is also a way out of the family home and into a more secure livelihood, especially if the husband is older and educated (Boyden et al. 2013). But marrying young is most common for girls in rural areas and from poor households; 21 per cent of girls surveyed in rural areas had been married compared to 3 per cent in urban areas. One in ten of the young women have a child of their own by the age of 19, compared to two per cent of young men (Woldehanna and Pankhurst 2014a).

Ayu, for example, from rural Leki, had always said she didn't want to marry young because she had seen the negative effects on her mother who married very young. Her mother agreed. Ayu's mother too had always been clear that education is important for girls. She said:

If she had continued with her education she would have benefited. Her husband went to school up to Grade 9. I believe that educating a girl is preferable [to educating a boy] because girls or women can find jobs. For instance, my eldest son's wife works in a local business because she is educated. Ayu could have done the same thing. But because she is not educated she can't do that. Education has lots of advantages.

Ayu herself would not advise other girls to marry so young, but because she has an understanding husband she says she wants to go back to school or else to find employment: 'I want to create my own job, for example, my husband promised me that I could open a shop. I don't want to stay at home and rely entirely on him.' Young women in Ethiopia do not necessarily expect to be entirely supported financially by their husbands, but given that unemployment is higher for women than for men, this also has to be a possibility, putting the emphasis once more on a man's need to provide, even if both sexes are equally educated.

In the qualitative study, none of the young men had married by age 19 but a third of them reported having a girlfriend (n=15). Bearing in mind the small sample size, it is notable that

none of the boys still enrolled in school have a girlfriend. They were waiting until the appropriate time, which meant: waiting to finish school (Afework); getting a job first (Yitbarek); and when the couple was able to support themselves (Mesih). Seifu felt strongly that it was shameful to have a girlfriend at his age and that it went against local custom. Indeed, young men often kept secret from their families their intimate relationships, and they preferred to confide in their male peers. Only once they were ready to marry and to have children would they inform their families, who they anticipated would be pivotal sources of advice and support during these critical moments.

However, forming intimate relationships was more than an instrumental tool in achieving one's marriage aspirations and in the transition to adulthood. Having a girlfriend contributed to young men's current sense of wellbeing; girlfriends provided companionship, a social outlet, comfort in times of crisis and more, as in the case of Miki (described later) for whom his girlfriend has supported him through the most difficult period of his life.²¹

In some cases, young men's relationships were strongly influenced by traditional gender norms, as with Hassen, whose ardent sense of masculine role explained why he always paid for meals with his girlfriend:

She never pays. For example, if boys love girls, it is the boys who have to settle the bills for food and drinks. How you dare to allow the girl to pay for the bills! Even if she has [the money] ... you tell her that it is you who has to settle the bills.

Yet there is also evidence that the expectations around marriage and family life are becoming less rigid and influenced by modern notions of development, and that these ideas are being learned at a young age. Teje, a 13-year-old girl from (urban) Leku, has a clear vision of her future:

I believe that in the future I will no longer be poor. I will use family planning and have fewer children [than my parents]. My parents have five children, which may be a reason why we are poor. I want to continue my education to university.

Aged 19, Mihretu (who didn't have a girlfriend), in (rural) Zeytuni, also imagines a different kind of family and future: 'I want to marry when I am 28 years old, I will have children at 30. I want to have only 2 children.' He recognises that his desire for a small family goes against traditional custom and that new ideas about what constitutes a good life are emerging:

[T]here are sayings in the community that if people have few children, they are considered to be infertile. They were saying that 'having one child is like having none, having two children is like having one child'. Now, there is no such thought and it is best to limit the family size because having many children becomes a source of poverty. For instance, if there are only two children, it becomes easy to send them to school and raise them properly.

While ideas around the nature of marriage and parenthood may be changing, these nonetheless remain among the most important markers of the transition to social adulthood. Less certain for this generation, however, are how young men are meant to mobilise the resources necessary for them to marry and to raise a family, in a context where land and housing are scarce, and where the promises of education are not translating into secure

21 The authors acknowledge the heteronormative bias underpinning the framing of relationships in terms of boyfriend-girlfriend and husband-wife; however, other constellations of intimate relationships were not captured in the data. This also reflects prevailing social and cultural norms surrounding sexuality and partnerships within the sample communities.

livelihoods. A group of fathers (Leki) summed up the challenges in these terms: land shortages, large family size, increased family poverty, inflation and lack of rain. These are shared dilemmas, rather than the problems of individual young men.

As many youth are failing their education and becoming jobless, it is becoming a headache for parents. (Mother's group discussion, Bertukan)

Jeffrey (2010b: 496) refers to the 'eroding of life maps' to describe such scenarios of life course insecurity for youth more globally. It means that young people are often left to improvise and strategise in ways that their parents were perhaps not required to. Camfield and Tafere (2011: 259) note, 'Although life courses are increasingly destandardised and young people and their families faced with a bewildering range of options, this may not represent an increase in the choices available, given that the alternatives are not equally valued or equally accessible.'

Place and the changing contexts of hope

Place affects boys' and girls' life chances and their sense of hope. Places are important for boys becoming men and for girls becoming women because they 'play a large part in constructing and constraining dreams and practices' (Aitken 2001: 20), and because aspirations are constituted in and through particular spaces (Holloway and Valentine 2000: 770). Young men's sense of personal progress that was central to their masculine identity was strongly defined by locality, evidenced by notable differences between and within urban and rural spaces. By age 19, the role of locality in shaping young men's expectations and orientations becomes increasingly evident. They are more aware of the limitations and possibilities of what their localities can offer them. They weigh up how their localities compare to others and whether migration is a necessary and viable option to get ahead in life.²² On many accounts, boys and girls growing up in rural areas experience poorer life chances compared to their urban counterparts. They are more likely to suffer nutritional deficiencies as children and they leave school earlier; their households are economically worse-off, they access fewer basic services and are more prone to adverse events ('shocks') (Chuta 2014; Dornan and Georgiadis 2015; Woldehanna et al. 2011; Woldehanna and Pankhurst 2014b). But the role of locality in shaping hopes and orientations cannot be understood in simplistic binary terms that would equate rural childhood with deprivation and urban childhood with privileged upbringing. Community-level influences are more relative and contextual.

For example, there was much variation between communities, including between the two urban sites (Leku and Bertukan). In Leku, the neighbourhood in Hawassa city, boys' aspirations have changed over time, but they are generally optimistic about their futures. Boys here, like in Bertukan, reported good progression through schooling, unlike boys in the rural areas who tended to leave school. In Leku, even when they failed the Grade 10 national exam, they perceived alternative options so had positive outlooks. For Yitbarek, failing his

²² Historical and contemporary patterns of Ethiopian migration and displacement have been well-documented (see Comenetz and Caviedes 2002; Gibson and Gurma 2012; Pankhurst and Piguet (eds) 2009).

national exam meant settling on technical school (to be an auto mechanic) instead of university, a choice which nonetheless afforded him a sense of progress:

I feel good because a person who works becomes happy when he sees changes in life. Hence, I am also happy about transferring from high school to college.

Denbel, who also failed his exam, is keeping his options open, and at the moment is combining schooling with work, selling cassette tapes. He hopes to get recruited onto a football club which would mean moving to Addis Ababa, but if that doesn't work out he is confident that through his personal efforts he will find a job:

I think and expect that better things will come. [W]e are working to improve ourselves not just continue as it is. When you strive to change yourselves, hopefully, you will become better.

In Bertukan, urbanisation is rapidly taking hold and there are many signs of development – construction of international hotels and modern shopping malls, an over-ground train line, the grand African Union building towers in the distance. However, this image of rapid social change is in jarring contrast with young men's sense of personal stagnation and an increasing sense of feeling 'stuck', largely because so much of their sense of wellbeing and of their futures is closely tied to their capacities to find paid work. Work is both a response to poverty and a vital source of respectability and self-worth. The changes observed around them did not include job opportunities. For young people growing up in Bertukan, such 'developments' can generate uncertainty, especially when these changes appear to displace their personal concerns and interests. For example, Bereket and his friends have for years been earning money washing cars, but the construction of a new Chinese-financed road near their workplace meant they had to suspend their work for five months, and it was difficult to re-start. When they returned to work they encountered increased regulation of informal work in their area, and they were forbidden from washing cars.

The rural areas remain far less 'developed' on many counts, but several community-level changes are affecting young people's sense of possibilities. In particular, the construction of irrigation systems in Leki and the opening of a private quarry in Zeytuni have led to livelihood opportunities for young people. In Leki, the new irrigation system meant that boys' aspirations were increasingly oriented *within* the community (rather than to migration), and that the goal of becoming a successful farmer using modern irrigation techniques was gaining acceptance. Success was no longer reserved for those working in white-collar jobs. For instance, unlike many children his age, 12-year-old Kebenga does not want to be a teacher or doctor:

I want to become a rich educated farmer. I want to engage in producing vegetables and cereals on the irrigated land. I want to produce crops more than once a year on the same land. As to my education, I want to complete grade ten and to start my farm business ... [I] want to become rich by fully engaging in farming activities. I want to use improved inputs such as fertiliser to increase the farm production.

Kebenga's vision for himself is hopeful and in many ways concrete, reflecting his existing familiarity with the world of agriculture since he, like other children in the community, has been farming from a young age. Irrigation represents a space of possibility. Hadush, aged 19, is also placing his hope in irrigation. His main job is working on his family's farm and selling their produce. He said his life changed when his family acquired irrigated land: 'I was just sitting, doing no job. Now I can sell something to Mekele [regional capital] ... and buy necessities.'

In Zeytuni, however, the opening of a stone-crushing plant (for construction) and the rise in livelihood opportunities (such as scrubbing stones for sale) has had a major impact on boys' early drop-out of school. Boys are encouraged (and in some cases compelled) by their parents to engage in paid labour. Importantly, time spent crushing stones is often regarded as a better investment compared to time spent in school, or even livestock keeping which also takes priority over schooling in most cases. As a result, many of the younger boys have left school since it was too difficult to balance both school and work, while, in contrast, most of the younger girls were still in school and progressing through the grades (see Boyden et al. 2016).

A study by Tafere (2014: 7) further indicated how perceived changes in resource environments influence changes in individual aspirations. Tafere reports that on average rural households had seven household members living with holdings of just 1.4 hectares of farmland (Round 3 survey). In many communities, the Government scheme to give land to young people has finished, so they are reliant on their parents transferring land to them and parents are often resistant to giving up land.

This young man interpreted his father's transfer of land to him as an expression of care: 'I feel like he loves me a lot because he has given me a plot of land which he didn't do to my older brother.' Another young man was not so fortunate: 'I pray to God to help me to get land. I blame my father for not getting land at a time when land was so cheap.'

Clearly, the struggle to be socially recognised as an adult is a struggle of individuals; but these everyday struggles for material and social security play out in the context of young people's relationships and in their changing environments. Further, as the cases presented here show, boys' perceptions of their relationship to development varies; on one end, they see themselves at the heart of development processes, and on the other end, completely marginalised from them. Indeed, the boys and girls in this study represent a variety of trajectories of hope, such that some of them consider themselves to be on the road to 'becoming somebody' in life; whereas others reach the end of their second decade of life less optimistic. In the next section, we begin to examine in greater detail boys' individual trajectories of hope, the possible reasons for their differences and the strategies they develop to recapture a sense of hope and certainty in their current and future lives – starting with the cases of Miki, Tufa and Afework.

Differing trajectories of hope

Miki: 'working hard but not changing your life'

Miki is 20 years old, from Bertukan, a poor neighbourhood in Addis Ababa. He was raised mostly by his grandmother as his mother left his father when Miki was eight. His father has been unwell since he was involved in a car accident when Miki was 12. As a boy, Miki enjoyed doing the housework and he wanted to be an engineer. Compared to other boys and girls in the study, Miki had progressed well through schooling, reaching Grade 11. When he was 16, Miki felt he was growing into a responsible individual, 'I have become a mature and disciplined person. I reconcile individuals when they quarrel.' When he was in Grade 11 his father became ill again and Miki had to stay home, missing three days of schooling. When he returned he had an argument with his teacher about missing classes, and the conflict escalated to the point the police were called, and Miki was expelled. After leaving school, he

earned money selling eggs and chickens, and he applied for a loan from the local *kebele* administration unit to expand his business, but his application was rejected. At the time, he defined poverty as: 'Working hard but not changing your life.'

Having been refused the loan, he migrated to Sudan in search of work, taking months by land to arrive; in an interview by mobile phone he said he suffered a lot of violence and his passport and other belongings were stolen. Desperate, he became involved in smuggling and contraband as a means of survival. Now he sees no way out. He would like to return to school but considers it impossible in the desert. Looking back he reflects, 'When I was in school I was happy. I had a good time. But after I left school, times were very bad.' On top of this, he was diagnosed with diabetes. The only positive thing in his life is his relationship with his girlfriend who he says looks after him. Miki misses his grandmother and wants to return to Addis Ababa but his future is uncertain and he feels stuck in the borderlands of Sudan.

Tufa: working hard and fulfilling everything

Tufa is also 19, and grew up in rural Leki, Oromia region. His parents enrolled him late into schooling because he was needed at home for herding and farming. Then he had to abandon his studies twice on account of his father's imprisonment. Aged 13, he said: 'I feel happy because if I learn and complete my education, I will become a teacher.' He remained in Grade 2 from age 13 to 16, although his younger sister had progressed to Grade 7. Falling behind his friends was a source of embarrassment. Although he does not feel he learned much in school, he believes that had he stayed on it would have been useful for his work in irrigation. 'If you learn mathematics, arithmetic, then you can work. So if one comes to irrigation work after education that is good.' For that reason, aged 19, he wishes to return to school, but it would have to be night classes (unavailable in his village) because he feels too old and would feel ashamed to study with young children in the same classroom.

Currently, Tufa earns money from fishing (through a middleman) and from daily labour. For a long time, he has been the most active contributor to his household's economy, and he hands over most of his earnings to his parents. Both his parents are chronically unwell and are getting old: 'I want to work hard and fulfil everything. I want to watch over my parents too. I will not allow them to work. Rather I will support them like they have been helping me in my childhood.' After migrating for work, Tufa returned to his village where he applied for an ID card (from the local administration), but his application was denied. This meant he couldn't request a loan. He explained that the government gives loans to parents against their land, so he was unable to get a loan himself. Instead, he and his friends borrowed from one another. He tried to join a youth work cooperative (transporting onions) but was told that he was too old.

Despite these setbacks, Tufa is positive about his future and wants to work in irrigation since there have been many new irrigation projects in his village. His uncle is his role model since, as Tufa explained, he went from 'nothing' to becoming a successful irrigation farmer. Tufa wants to marry his girlfriend but he says she first needs to finish school and he needs to have enough money to buy a house. Until then, they will both have to wait.

Afework: "I get all the support I need from my family"

Unlike Miki and Tufa, Afework does not have a sense of 'waiting'. Age 19, he was in Grade 10 at a private high school, having steadily progressed through school without repeating a grade. However, his life has not been without crises: his mother died when he was seven and

his father when he was 10; more recently, a cousin who was living with his family committed suicide. Since the time his mother died, Afework and his brother were brought up by Addisu (another male cousin) and their sister; until recently, the sister worked in the Middle East and she regularly sent money home.

Three aspects of Afework's biography stand out as factors contributing to his ability to bounce back in the face of adversity: Afework had *material security*; he had consistent *family support*; and he is a *leader* among his peers. His cousin describes him as a role model to others. For all but one year of his schooling he received aid from a local NGO which supported him on account of his orphan status and grades, funding his school uniform and school supplies. His sister bought him a laptop and mobile phone; the family had a large TV and they added on a room for a separate kitchen. Over a year ago, the family hired a housemaid which meant Afework no longer had to do chores and could concentrate on his studies. He has never worked for pay. He enjoys good relations with his teachers at the private school. He is active in school clubs, is a member of the local youth league and he is cultural affairs officer in the local *mahber* (a Christian community based association) which imparts moral and religious development, according to Afework. The youth league has a political function and he is paid 50-60 birr for each meeting he attends; through their efforts the league has installed a pool table, foosball, and a place to watch TV and use the internet. The mahber is more about moral and religious development and they learn and perform songs.

Much focus in the family has been on supporting Afework's progression through schooling. His cousin is like a father to him and he has always been close to his sister despite the physical distance separating them. Afework feels they have sacrificed their own lives for him and his brother. 'Both my sister and cousin have no children and are not married yet because of us.'

They are not married yet because of [me and my brother]. They have to live their own lives. They have done their best and helped us from the moment my mother died. I am the fruit of their hard work and will be happy to see them get married.

In Afework's view, the next big milestone in his life is the Grade 10 national exam. He believes that if he passes that, Grades 11 and 12 will not be difficult, then he plans to go to university to become an engineer.

The cases of Miki, Tufa and Afework convey differing trajectories of hope, one declining, one ascending and one steady. Miki, aged 12, was hopeful and doing well in school. Tufa, on the other hand, faced several obstructions to his schooling which can only be understood within the context of economic strains on his household, magnified by his father's protracted absence requiring Tufa to step in to fill his shoes. Afework had consistent financial backing which meant he could focus on school, which he was encouraged to do by his family.

Both Miki and Tufa harbour a desire to return to education, but unlike Miki, Tufa has a role model in his uncle and a local social network in his village that give him reason to believe that if he works hard enough he can change his life: 'Because when he [uncle] started, he didn't have anything. But now, he bought land and he works ... I want to be like that.' The promises of education were not realised for either boy in terms of offering stable jobs at the end of their schooling, and for Afework, still enrolled in school, the job market seems a way off yet. Afework relies on his family. In Sudan, Miki relies on his girlfriend and peer network, they share food, and encourage each other: 'by saying "we have to work hard". It is through working hard that we can get something.' Miki's concerns at the moment are about sheer survival, whereas Tufa feels able to plan for his future.

Although each boy's life narrative is unique, several themes resonate in common with other boys' experiences, among them: the risk of disrupted schooling trajectories; a masculine work ethic positioning boys and young men as providers for their families; a strong sense of individual responsibility for personal progress; interdependent and inter-related transitions; spatial strategies (i.e., migration) for overcoming obstacles to progress; the role of social networks; and, for some, over time, an adjustment of aspirations in the face of diminishing/expanding hope. We have purposefully chosen these contrasting cases to demonstrate the centrality of place and context in boys' pursuit of learning, land, love and labour, without wishing to generalise beyond these specific examples. In the next section we look at young men's struggle for status and paid employment.

Fighting against standing still

For this generation, education has created expectations among boys and girls and their families and the belief that they will lead lives involving progress and an improvement on their parents' lives, as well as being able to support their parents in their old age (cf Mains 2007: 666). This is true for both girls and young women and boys and young men, but young women have less pressure to be the breadwinners in the family, which, together with the expectation that they will marry someone with resources, means that they are under less pressure when it comes to finding paid work.

The risk is that these expectations fail, in what Jeffrey and McDowell (2004: 137) call a 'cruel irony' wherein the Western ideals of youth transition that have been exported outside Euro-America have become increasingly difficult for young people in low- and middle-income countries to emulate. In his study of unemployed urban youth in Ethiopia, Mains (2011: 1) invokes the Amharic phrase *tesfa qoretewal*, which literally means 'hope is cut', to underscore the temporal underpinning of hope 'as a thread linking the present to the future'. He explains, 'When hope is cut, one's relationship to the future changes' (ibid).

As the boys and girls in the study grew older, their hopes changed. Most boys had left school and reoriented themselves from schooling towards the world of work; at the same time their awareness of the failures of the job market increased. As young men, many of them feel that the opportunities that exist in their communities are out of their reach. For example, there are grants available in Ethiopia for small enterprises and initiatives to support the formation of youth cooperatives, and while a few individuals in the study had gained membership, far more had been excluded from them; according to their accounts, they were denied loans on the basis they were either too young or too old for the schemes. Miki, for example, had been involved in selling eggs and chickens and had tried to get a loan to start a small business. It was the failure to get this loan that led him, in desperation, to migrate to Sudan.

Several studies of male unemployment in the cities have focused on well-educated first-time job seekers who aspire to well-paid jobs in the public sector (Serneels 2007: 181); it is argued that they sometimes prefer unemployment rather than taking on lowly jobs for fear of shame (Di Nunzio 2015; Mains 2007), and many of them have never worked before (Serneels 2007). The young men in Mains' study explained that there weren't any jobs in Ethiopia, but what they meant was that they couldn't accept the available jobs because of *yilugnta* (Mains 2007: 660), explaining why, for example, they wouldn't work as porters. Young men without work are at risk of being labelled as social threats and 'idlers' and are a potential source of social anxieties (Mains 2012). The fear is that young men's unemployment leads to hopelessness, resulting in gambling, alcoholism and drug addiction, particularly in urban areas. There is even an Amharic phrase used to refer to youth –

adegenya bozene – which translates literally as ‘dangerous individuals without work’ (Chuta and Morrow 2015: 3).

The majority of boys and young men in the Young Lives study cannot afford to ‘choose’ unemployment, nor can they expect to be fully supported by their parents. Impoverished, they must earn a living both for themselves and as a contribution to their families. This is not to say that young women do not earn a living, but that the pressure on them to do so is not as great as it is for young men. Indeed, those girls and boys who do not work to support their family are seen in a negative light since it is important for children of both gender to fulfil their social responsibilities to the household, whether through paid or unpaid work (Boyden 2009: 19). Generally, the work that young people are doing is not high status and they experience long periods of uncertainty about generating income. Such is the case for 18-year-old Bekele in Addis Ababa, who for the past nine years has been earning money carrying loads in the marketplace.²³ He must cover all his personal expenses, including school-related costs. He recently left his job to become a taxi assistant, explaining that although it was acceptable for him to carry loads as a child:

I hated it once I grew up. I do not want to be known for carrying loads. Actually some people have no respect for those who carry things ... One of the problems is they don't consider us human beings. They call us wezader [labourer] ... you know, it has a bad connotation. It is not a good word.

In part, boys and young men build their masculine identities in the context of their working lives, much as girls and young women build their feminine identities through their daily actions inside and outside the home. By the age of 12, urban boys, in particular, emphasised ‘idleness’ as a strike against one’s moral reputation, whereas an individual’s perseverance and self-propelled progress were considered moral virtues (cf Boyden 2009: 17). Recall Miki’s definition of poverty as ‘working hard but not changing your life.’

Children know the reality of the life which is poverty. Children lose hope for the future due to poverty ... They just live for the sake of the time being. They do not think about the future. This is the result of understanding the reality of the present life of the community. (Religious leader, Addis Ababa)

Awareness of the scarcity of formal sources of support and services meant that young people placed substantial emphasis on personal initiative (Chuta and Crivello 2013) and on informal sources of support (Pankhurst and Tiemelissan 2012). This awareness sharpened with age.

Life here is very bad. Things may work out only for ‘the haves’. But for those who do not have [‘the have nots’], even the law doesn't help. (Miki)

Where transitions are flexible and uncertain, demonstrating for oneself and for others that one is *actively* improving oneself becomes ever important (Locke and Te Lintelo 2012; Mains 2007). Being respected becomes even more important for youth in contexts of extreme economic and political marginalisation (Mann 2010). As young as the age of 12, boys and girls shared a belief that if they worked hard enough, they could overcome poverty. Afeework, aged 12 from Addis Ababa, claimed:

I never felt inferior to anyone. There is a guy who always teaches us to remember that we are equal to one another. He is a mate.

23 Young Lives sub-study on children’s work (2013) in Menderin, Addis Ababa. See Pankhurst et al. 2015.

When asked what his wish was for himself when he was younger, 19 year-old Gemetchu (Leki) said that it was 'to flourish with better progress.' In this context, progress is defined as 'the expectation that the future will not be like one's past and that, instead, it will be qualitatively better,' following Mains (2007: 665). Nonetheless, by the age of 12, the theme of hopelessness was already featuring in the boys' narratives. But at that age, hopelessness was more about what 'could be' in the future, rather than a description of their actual experience. Bereket, aged 12, explained why it was important for boys like him to avoid becoming idle:

If [a boy's] life is not changing from day to day and if he does not do anything to boost morale, he starts to lead a hopeless life. He starts to say 'there will be no change' whether he lives today or tomorrow and that all the gain is toiling.

He explained why he liked working:

It makes me happy having a job rather than staying at home the whole day in the neighbourhood ... [I] take risks to learn new things...

His grandmother confirmed his initiative to work, saying:

He's always thinking about ways through which he can rescue himself from such a miserable life and through which he can stand above his brothers in terms of educational status and living status.

Many of the youth talked about the importance of changing themselves through working, but they want the kind of work that offers more than solely securing one's 'daily food'. They also want to do better than their parents, which, after all was what education promised to deliver. Tufa talked about his parents wanting him to do better than they had:

My parents encouraged me to work hard and to attend to my education properly in order to escape the problems they have encountered.

Family relations in Ethiopia are defined by intergenerational mutuality, and the value of children's present and future contributions cannot be understated – boys and girls work for themselves and for the benefit of others. Louam's mother says:

I want [my children] to reach a better place through their education. If they [do] they can support me. Educated people have opportunities everywhere.

Boys and girls emphasise their initiative and actions in improving their lives. Fatuma, from Bertukan, reflected on how she compared to her better-off friends:

I think we are both the same. It is not just about them being able to pay a lot of money. What matters is individual effort. If I work hard, there is no reason why I should not fulfil my future goals the same way as my friends, and even reach a better position.

Boys and girls alike share a strong work ethic. Young men in particular emphasised a desire for work that provides a sense of self-improvement and respectability and that promises a future – at age 19, this might mean earning enough to save, or selling one's *own* onions rather than selling onions for someone else, or being paid directly rather than parents receiving their earnings.

Similarly, Gemetchu (age 19) describes the past few years as a 'joyful period' which he credits to his working, selling fish.

I came to realise things as I grew older ... Previously, I didn't have work. But now with my work I am supporting myself and my family.

Working played a crucial function in raising his status within the household too.

[T]hey didn't value me in the past but now they started to give value for me after I started to give them money.

In this context, it is clear that being able to demonstrate an active disposition is an important part of young masculinity; however, a strong work ethic needs to be matched by work opportunities, and these are limited. The work that young men are engaged in is often precarious, neither affording them financial independence nor a sense of progress. There are those, like Gemetchu, who are able, in their view, to gain a positive position in life and become socially valued through education or work, but for many young men, it is a struggle.

'Simply counting my age'

Despite their active efforts to improve themselves by resisting idleness, some of the urban boys, in particular, feel 'stuck', as if they're wasting time doing what they're doing and staying where they are due to lack of employment opportunities. This creates a sense of restlessness. Bereket, in Bertukan, described it as 'simply counting my age', in other words, watching the years go by without any apparent change. The pathway to adulthood can therefore entail lull periods where time feels as if it has slowed down, despite desires to be active and advancing. Meanwhile, Bereket judged other children whom he considered 'inactive'.

What prevents it [the neighbourhood] from being all [it could be] is that young people do not complete their education ... They stop at Grade 8. They do not work. They spend their time just sitting. They go here and there with their friends and when they come back home, they are a burden to their family. They say that they haven't birr [money] for that day and thus they ask their family.

Rather than fault the structural barriers that perpetuate poverty and deprive children of opportunity in his neighbourhood, Bereket instead blamed children themselves for not persevering, and for 'just sitting'. The highly valued goals of progressing, improving oneself and living a dynamic life cannot be accomplished by young people 'just sitting'. Instead, improving oneself happens through *working*, especially once schooling is no longer a viable option.

Though I regret (leaving school) it is also good that I change myself earning money.
(Habtamu, age 19, Tach-Meret)

Faced with the decision to either join technical school (having failed his national exam) or to work, Denbal, aged 18, chose work: 'I think it was better for me to work for change. It was why I started working ... [M]y first intention was to change my life.'

On the whole, young women did not display this same sense of temporal unease, although young women in certain circumstances may also feel 'stuck', but in different ways. For example, Ayu is now married with a child, and feels that she has nothing to do apart from waiting for her husband to come back. Much as she loves her child, she wants to be active outside the home as well as inside it, and she has doesn't want to remain financially dependent on her husband forever (Van der Gaag and Knowles 2016).

Girls were generally better able to combine their household responsibilities with their schooling and so were more likely to still be enrolled in school, which contributed to an ongoing sense of progress, however slow, fragile and punctuated (Tafere and Chuta 2016). In the qualitative study, those girls who had married did so after already having left school

due to heavy workloads and poor school quality, so marriage, and later motherhood, were often welcomed changes, at least in the short-term. Upon marrying and giving birth to their children, young women redirected their hopes toward the family unit and to building a household and future together. 19-year-old Sessen in Zeytuni said, 'I am happy in my life. I am healthy, married and I have a baby.' Her main regret is having left school in Grade 2 at the age of 14. She reflected, 'Yes, it was a sad moment, but I can't get it back.' Indeed, there was an underlying sense of acceptance apparent in girls' accounts of their lives. Having a child, in particular, seemed to narrow the 'space of possibility' with respect to girls' hopes of ever returning to school, unless they could secure their husbands' approval.

Meanwhile, young men fought hard to avoid the situation of 'simply counting their age'. Young unemployed men in Mains' (2007: 660) study talked of boredom, contrasted with change or improvement, and the inability to experience progress was a great source of unrest. Other scholars of Ethiopia attribute this sensation to culturally embedded fatalistic attitudes, captured in local expressions like, 'We have neither a dream nor an imagination' or 'We live only for today', and development interventions aim to alter these 'mental models' (Bernard et al. 2014). In our study, we found a potential life course element to this, such that boys in their early teens had both dreams and imagination, but as they grew older these became increasingly narrowed by structural constraints; in other words, and crucially, it wasn't for lack of desiring progress.

At age 12, Bereket was rather hopeful, he wanted to be an engineer or else to work in a garage, depending on his grades, and he believed that this was achievable. But by age 20 he asserts that about half of the boys in his friendship group feel hopeless, and the other half are 'still trying'. He counts himself as one who is still trying, but also 'on the way to being hopeless'. In Bereket's account, time ('simply counting my age') and space ('on my way to being hopeless') are conspiring against him, leading to frustration and diminished hope. But not all boys in this study felt this way, and as we've intimated, some were anticipating positive futures.

Roots and routes

The migration of young people, whether to another area or even abroad, is motivated by a variety of reasons, and often serves both individual and collective interests. Writing about the circulation of children, in particular, Boyden and Howard (2013: 358) explain that 'in many environments of scarcity where familial ties are dispersed spatially, the movement of young people is not only customary but also, very often, constructive.' Indeed, for youth, migration is a strategy for constructing better futures, and a way to overcome social exclusion and material inequality. Of course, it also has the potential to exacerbate existing vulnerability, including in pathways to adulthood.

Migration is influenced by gender and age norms and opportunities, and in this study, girls reported higher rates of migration in their teen years compared to boys. Between the ages of 15 and 19, 38 per cent of girls (n= 421) compared to 34 per cent of boys (n= 487) had moved to a different *kebele* (for at least two months) (Round 4 survey).²⁴ Similar rates were reported across rural and urban areas. But rural boys were more likely than boys living in urban areas to migrate. The majority of young people who migrate already know someone in their destination (68 per cent girls; 78 per cent boys), although, interestingly, girls were more likely

24 The survey asks, 'Have you moved to a different kebele for at least two months since our visit in 2009?'

to migrate without established links. The vast majority who already knew someone in their destination were joining parents, siblings and other relatives, and for girls, their spouses.

Boys and girls moved for similar reasons – schooling being a major motivation, the importance of family ties, and for girls, in particular, for marriage.²⁵

Table 3. *‘What were the reasons why you moved?’ (top reason, three most frequent responses)*

Female		Male	
‘to study’	41 per cent	‘to study’	31 per cent
‘to join or to be close to family/other’	19 per cent	‘to join or to be close to family/other’	26 per cent
‘marriage/cohabiting’	9 per cent	‘to look for work’	14 per cent

(Source: Round 4 youth questionnaire)

With respect to rural to urban migration, the wider literature cites poverty as the main driver for migration, although for girls and young women, early marriage, violence and sexual abuse are additional push factors, and can also be realities of their employment in the cities (Atnafu et al. 2014: 20). For Haymanot, poverty and divorce were certainly factors in her migration to a nearby town where her sister was living. She couldn’t travel too far since her chronically ill mother relies heavily on her daughters for care and comfort, thus rooting the family close to home. Coming from a small village, Haymanot initially felt physically and socially isolated in the town:

Although the place is good, I don’t feel as if I am in my community; I don’t feel confident as I do in my village ... [A]s it is a big town, I just feel fear; I feel loneliness because I didn’t have exposure [go out].

Some migration routes are strongly gendered, such as female migration for paid domestic work both domestically and internationally (particularly the Middle East), the latter especially supplying remittances to families back home (Mains 2007: 672).²⁶ Nineteen-year-old Hafety, in this study, went to work in the Middle East as a domestic worker after failing the national Grade 10 exam, and stayed there for two and half years. She feels she was not paid much in view of her heavy workload, but she managed to regularly send money to her grandmother and to her aunt’s family, and saved 30,000 birr for herself. Having returned to Ethiopia, she is looking for a job and has started the immigration process so that she can return to the Middle East in the future. Afework’s sister also migrated to the Middle East and the money she was able to send back was a major factor in the improvement in Afework’s life and his life chances.

Many of the young men in this study did not have plans to migrate, and in fact, felt rather rooted in their communities. Kebenga, the keen aspirational farmer (see above), was one who felt rooted; when asked where he would be living in a few years’ time, he answered, ‘I have no plan to migrate. I will learn and work here [Zeytuni].’ But many boys did see *mobility* as a potentially useful temporary strategy in securing their livelihoods and futures. So, boys and young men in Leki wishing to pursue further studies by default had to be mobile, even if

25 For each move, the survey asks, ‘What were the reasons why you moved?’ Figures here are for most recent move.

26 In 2013 the Government of Ethiopia officially banned domestic workers from moving abroad for employment due to the highly publicised harms experienced by young women at the hands of their employers.

they intended to return to Leki after they completed their schooling. Once having left, however, their orientations towards the future may change. The influence works both ways: aspirations influence decisions to migrate and, in turn, migration experiences influence aspirations. For example, Mesih, aged 18, in Zeytuni, relocated to the city with his widowed sister so that he could attend secondary school. He says living there made him change his mind about becoming a doctor, 'Now I want to be an entrepreneur like working with machines or becoming a mechanic'.

But it is among the young men from Bertukan (Addis Ababa) who stand out as the most 'uprooted' and with the weakest sense of belonging. Miki is an extreme case of multiple uprooting, first from Bertukan when he was expelled from school (grade 11), then denied a loan, leaving him to feel without direction. He used migration as a strategy to reclaim dignity, only to find his situation worsen as a migrant in the Sudanese borderlands. A series of negative events compounded his vulnerability, which he partially attributes to being hopeless, 'You know, when you are hopeless, you feel bad and make wrong decisions.' In the last research interview (by phone), he said he felt stranded and was just wasting time, 'I am doing nothing. I just sit idle,' partly due to his diabetes diagnosis. When he left Addis Ababa he was escaping a familiar world, albeit one from which he felt disenfranchised. But in Sudan, he and his friends (fellow Ethiopian migrants) lack any sense of belonging: 'We all feel the same. The house belongs to none of us, and none of us belong to the place.'

Being out of place and without roots threatens their sense of themselves, the world and their futures, leading to a loss of ontological security, whereby they lose the ability to give meaning to their lives.²⁷ Ontological security derives from a sense of order and continuity with respect to individuals' life experiences, and when certain events are not consistent with that meaning, the world and one's place within it start to lack sense (Giddens 1991). The 'spaces of possibility' have shrunk. But this does not mean giving up, since people find ways to restore a sense of order and meaning and to make plans for securing their lives. Understanding such efforts by youth, like Miki, should not be reduced to 'individual' struggles or life projects, for they indeed reflect wider power relations and systems of inequality (Porter et al. 2010).

Conclusion

The paper has traced boys' and young men's trajectories across the second decade of life in a sample of Ethiopian communities, and made some comparisons with those of girls and young women. Their trajectories to adulthood are founded on a bedrock of learning, land, love and labour, but their experiences of these and their journeys are diverse. From this varied picture, we draw out four points by way of conclusion, before raising implications for policy.

First, boys' and girls' individual trajectories make little sense in isolation from others' or from the wider social and economic changes that directly and indirectly affect their choices, chances and actions. Their changing aspirations and sense of selves are formed in the context of their relationships with *others* – friends, family, teachers, employers and girlfriends – among them. Growing up in poverty means relying heavily on their social networks and on

27 Stepputat (2009) elaborates further on these theoretical linkages more generally. See also Ahmed et al. (2003) and Rapport and Dawson (1998) on the relationship between mobility, home and belonging, including in transnational contexts.

informal sources of support to get ahead – to access schools, land, cash, work and migration opportunities which are in limited supply. Many also see themselves relationally, somewhere between childhood and adulthood, with marriage marking the transition to adulthood for girls, but not possible for young men until they are able to financially support a family. Many of the young men who have left school and are searching for work feel stuck between ‘hope and a hard place’, no longer deserving of the protection afforded very young children, yet not old enough to access and mobilise the resources available to male adults, such as status, ID cards, land, business loans or membership in work cooperatives.

Second, our relational approach meant taking into account how boys’ trajectories fared in comparison to girls’ and led us to conclude that while there are differences between them, gender is not the only determinant of young people’s experiences. The effects of interactions between gender and other factors are linked to (dis)advantage, including poverty status, age, family social background and geographical location. What it means to become a man or a woman cannot be separated out from other aspects of their identity or from their everyday experiences of poverty.

Third, we discussed boys’ differing trajectories of hope and the factors that influence hope across time and space. A major theme in boys’ and young men’s narratives was their need for progress and to feel as if their lives were improving over time, something they actively pursued with much energy but minimal material resources. In this respect, we found remarkable differences between urban and rural settings. A deep sense of socio-spatial marginalisation was reported by some of the young men from the country’s capital city where aspirations for progress were not being met by economic realities. Their hope was undermined by the apparent disconnect they felt with the rapid urbanisation and development taking place around them, from which they benefited little. For those who were ‘on their way’ to losing hope, low self-image resulted in diminished aspirations. Meanwhile, young men located in villages where improvements in agricultural production were taking place imagined positive views of their future. Young women, however, were more likely to still be enrolled in school, which gave them some sense of moving forward, while those who were married had generally done so to improve themselves and thus redirected their hopes toward building a family, while not necessarily giving up on the idea of work at some point in the future.

Fourth, and to conclude, we conceptualised transitions in terms of ‘vital conjunctures’ to imagine the web of structures that coalesce in individual lives to shape choices, actions and behaviours; these emerge ‘around specific periods of potential transformation’ in their lives (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 870). The longitudinal design of the study meant being able to trace young people’s unfolding biographies over time, capturing the twists and turns in their trajectories. The vital conjunctures marking boys’ trajectories to becoming men and to girls becoming women centred on the relationship between schooling, family life, individual initiative and changes in the wider environment. Specific triggers included child and parental illness, exam failure and teacher conflict, changes at the household level, such as in wage-earning or sibling composition, expansion or narrowing of job options, migration opportunities and the opening up of personal networks, and marriage. Hope was crucial in mediating how they confronted change and new possibilities. Young people’s hope and aspirations are therefore key to understanding their pathways towards adulthood. In this case, hope was not simply about individual dispositions or agency, since different trajectories of hope reflected deeper forms of structural inequality, often leaving the young people caught between hope and a hard place.

Policy implications

1. Policy and programming aiming to achieve later marriage, delayed fertility and empowerment with adolescents in many countries at present is largely focused on adolescent girls, with only a few programmes for or with boys. A more gendered approach is needed that will benefit both sexes.
2. We have shown just how much both boys and girls and their parents value education. Yet in many countries, including Ethiopia, it increasingly seems to be boys who are leaving school early more than girls. Gender-sensitive policies need to be put in place to ensure that both boys and girls stay in school, and that they have opportunities for apprenticeships and decent work when they leave school. This means more relevant and higher-quality education, more flexible school hours, finding ways of supporting boys to return to school, and creating a school environment and quality education that is safer and more appropriate for both girls and boys.
3. We have seen that young men in particular feel pressure to support their families, without the possibility of doing so. Disillusionment with school, combined with poverty, result in a context where even poor quality work seems the better alternative to education, yet does little to break intergenerational poverty. A better match needs to be created between education and skills and job opportunities for both sexes.
4. It is clear that poverty and gender interact with other factors such as location (rural or urban), class, age, birth order. Policymakers need to use this evidence in order to design programmes to reach the most vulnerable of these groups.
5. Research can contribute to this agenda by providing evidence on the relationship between gender inequality and poverty across the life course. Policymakers can use this evidence to improve the lives of girls and boys and to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty.

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Between Hope and a Hard Place: Boys and Young Men Negotiating Gender, Poverty and Social Worth in Ethiopia

In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on adolescence as a key transition to adulthood. Young people are navigating puberty and making life choices around schooling, work, and intimate and family relationships. However, much of the attention has been on girls. This has led to a lack of gendered analysis and has also meant that adolescent boys have been largely left out of the picture.

This paper uses Young Lives research in Ethiopia, carried out over multiple years, to look at boys' and young men's lives, their aspirations, and the obstacles they face as they grow into adults. It examines the diverse strategies they employ to overcome these challenges, and compares their experiences with those of girls and young women of the same age.

- Education is seen by both parents and children as a route out of poverty. Ninety-five per cent of Young Lives boys and girls were enrolled in school at the age of 12. By age 19, there was a growing ambivalence regarding education, particularly for young men who increasingly oriented their aspirations towards the world of work.
- Rural/urban contrasts. Young people growing up in rural areas are often seen as having fewer life chances than those in towns. But the least optimistic young men were located in urban areas where they felt disconnected from development opportunities.
- Livelihoods. Many of the young men had left school and were trying to find work, both as a response to poverty and a vital source of respect in the community. But because they found so few opportunities for gainful employment, some of them were left feeling stuck and hopeless.
- Marriage. Girls see marriage as one way of improving their lives. But for young men, marriage was impossible until they had work that paid adequately, and was therefore a way of entering into adulthood that they could not imagine in the near future.

The paper concludes by drawing out the policy implications of our findings. It calls for stronger gendered evidence on the relationship between gender inequality and childhood poverty, and an approach to gender justice that includes boys and young men, as well as girls and young women, so that none are left trapped between hope and a hard place.



An International Study of Childhood Poverty

About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children in 4 countries over 15 years. It is led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the 4 study countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam.

Through researching different aspects of children's lives, we seek to improve policies and programmes for children.

Young Lives Partners

Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Professor Jo Boyden.

- *Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Ethiopia*
- *Pankhurst Development Research and Consulting plc, Ethiopia*
- *Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad, India*
- *Save the Children India*
- *Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University), Andhra Pradesh, India*
- *Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE), Peru*
- *Instituto de Investigación Nutricional, Peru*
- *Centre for Analysis and Forecasting, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam*
- *General Statistics Office, Vietnam*
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