



Afework's story

A profile from
Young Lives in Ethiopia

"I will educate myself and have my own job but I will never be anybody's servant. If you do well with your job, you might be able to be the manager. You can even have your own company."

Afework's story

Afework is now 16 and is generally happy with his life. He is still living with his brother and cousin, and they have a good system for managing the house together. Afework is in a private school, paid for by a scholarship for orphans, and is about to take his national exams. And the last few weeks have brought the family a big and welcome surprise ...

When the Young Lives team arrives, Afework is proudly wearing a new white T-shirt, printed by the church with quotes from the Bible. Everything in his house is very clean and tidy, with pictures of saints on the walls, and a shared kitchen. The three young men have a system for household chores – Afework washes up, cleans the house and washes his clothes and school uniform, and Bekele does most of the other jobs like making the beds, cooking, baking *injera* (Ethiopian bread) and preparing tea. Addisu is in charge of the household and finances and makes the rules.

This time there were also some big differences in the house, including new furniture, a television, and even a PlayStation. The roof was new too, and the old linoleum on the floor had been replaced by tiles. This was all the doing of his sister, said Afework happily. Last time, he was sad because she had gone to work in the Middle East. But today he is delighted because she has just come for a visit. He came home from school and there she was, waiting for him.

“What did she say to you?”

She gave me a kiss. We had food and drink together and she gave us games, blankets and other household things. The next day, she bought us a cabinet from the market. She asked me what she should bring me next time and promised to send me a laptop computer.”

He was also very happy because at the time of his sister's arrival, he had been preparing to invite his *mahber* (informal community association) friends for St Mary's Day. He had been postponing this because he was not able to prepare all the things needed for the feast. When his sister came, she helped him. He was very proud. He invited his friends and neighbours for food and soft drinks. His celebration was the best of all the feasts prepared by other association members, he says.

Addisu also acknowledges how much the family has benefited from the support of his cousin (whom he too calls 'sister').

“We are changing in good ways. Every year, things are getting better.”

Afework was 12 years old last time we visited him. His mother died when he was 7, and his father when he was 10. Since then he has been living with his older brother, Bekele, and his cousin Addisu, who is like a brother and father to them both. Afework had a scholarship to go to school because he was an orphan. He liked school and wanted to be a doctor or a football player when he grew up.

What is the reason for the changes?

We have a sister abroad and it is her help that has changed most of the things here. We used the money she sent us to buy what is needed in the house. We also have cousins on my father's side who send us money once a year and we buy things that are really necessary with that."

Addisu talks a little bit about his own life, which he says was much harder than Afework's. He had no-one to advise or support him. His mother was forced to marry his father at the age of 14, and died soon after he was born. Addisu was sent to live with his aunt, as his father was a soldier and often away. Then his father was killed, and his aunt starting beating him, ordering him to work a lot and insulting him. One day he left the house and went to live with his friends. He worked as a shoeshine boy. He believes that Afework is very lucky "because he has not seen the bad life" like he has.

Afework thinks he has a good life. He has many friends and is still at school. The orphans' scholarship allows him to go to a good private school. He says he is now preparing for national exams and working hard.

"I see my friends studying hard and am motivated to study. I get good grades.

Who helps you when you need support?

My older brother has completed Grade 10 and is in vocational school. My teacher also helps me."

Afework says religion has become very important to him.

"When I was around 10 years old, I did not like going to church. I was forced to go. My family told me going to church was a good thing. But one day, I started to like it and now I to go to church all the time. And I became a member of the church choir."

He says he admires the father of a boy in his community, who is a professor. In Ethiopia, he admires the prime minister for his leadership skills and knowledge to lead 'this poor country'. In the world, he admires President Obama because he is the first black American president. He says he also admires the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo and Teddy Afro, a popular Ethiopia singer. And the singer Justin Bieber.

In terms of his future, he says he is still keen on becoming a soccer player, but he says he is also leaning towards being a doctor or an engineer, after discussions at school.

*"We are changing in good ways.
Every year, things are getting better."*

“I will never be anybody’s servant”: children’s understandings of wealth and poverty

Afework and some of the other young people in his community had a number of discussions about what it meant to be rich or poor. This is what he said:

“Nobody gets wealth from their mother’s womb. One gets wealth by means of education and work.

How for example? Having your own job?

I will educate myself and have my own job but I will never be anybody’s servant. But if you do well with your job, you might be able to be the manager of that company or be in another position. You can even have your own company.”

The boys agreed on a list of things that would apply to a boy who was not doing well, and that the reverse would be true for one who was doing well (not in any order).

- Lack of a play space
- Lack of a space for studying
- House located near dirt, hence susceptible to diseases
- Being bad-mannered
- Lack of family love
- Spending time with drug users
- Leading an inadequate life
- Unable to learn
- Involved in child labour
- Unable to get a balanced diet
- Leading a hopeless life
- Works but does not get enough money
- Eats dirt
- Lives in a house made of plastic.

Young Lives is unusual in looking at children’s subjective well-being. Our interviews suggest that in general, children see well-being as encompassing material, social, personal and family resources. Rural children give more emphasis to material resources such as land and livestock, while urban children stress the importance of services, such as education. Ill-being, or living a bad life, comes as a result of not having or not being able to access these resources.

See also: Laura Camfield (2012) “‘Pen, Book, Soap, Good Food and Encouragement’: Understandings of a Good Life for Children among Parents and Children in Three Ethiopian Communities’ in Jo Boyden and Michael Bourdillon (eds) *Childhood Poverty: Multidisciplinary Approaches*.

Beyond orphanhood

There are an estimated 5.4 million orphans in Ethiopia as a result of the death of one or both parents, with around 15 per cent believed to have been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. Within the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, up to one in five of the older children had lost one or both parents by the age of 15, and one in ten of the younger group by age 8.

There has been a widespread assumption that orphans have poorer life chances than other children. However, our findings indicate that:

- inequalities in schooling and health outcomes are larger between urban and rural children and according to household poverty level than between orphans and other children.
- the vast majority of orphans are, like Afework, cared for by family members and play an important role in supporting the households in which they live.
- children's experiences are shaped not only by parental death and which parent has died, but also by the wider social and economic contexts of their daily lives, including their gender, age and household poverty level.

Our in-depth interviews with children show that being an orphan does not necessarily result in negative impacts on children's experiences and life chances. Orphans tend to rate themselves lower in subjective well-being, suggesting that parental loss impacts on children in other ways, such as their identity, and effects may appear later. However, many of the problems faced by orphans are also faced by other children in their communities. It is poverty, not only orphanhood, that is at the heart of the difficulties these children face. So rather than policies based exclusively on targeting specific groups such as orphans, increasing the coverage of basic services and social protection schemes would be a better way of reaching the poorest and most marginalised children.

Source: Kिर्रily Pells (2012) *Beyond Orphanhood: Rethinking Vulnerability in Ethiopia*, Young Lives Policy Brief 16.

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Country context: Ethiopia

Ethiopia, a country in the Horn of Africa, has a population of 80.7 million. It is Africa's oldest independent country but remains one of the world's poorest, although progress has been made in recent years. Child mortality has fallen, access to healthcare has improved and advances have been made in primary education, in part due to the commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The Government has also introduced a number of Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes.

For the last seven years, Ethiopia has had double-digit economic growth rate – around 11 per cent on average each year. More than 60 per cent of government spending now goes to what the Government calls pro-poor sectors, namely education, health, roads, water and agriculture.

But in 2011, the United Nations still ranked Ethiopia 174 out of 187 countries in terms of human development. Almost 40 per cent of the population survives on less than 1.25 dollars a day. The country also suffers regularly from drought, which affects up to 13 million people. Many families are unable to buy or grow enough food to feed themselves, and so need food aid each year to survive. The effects on children are devastating.

- One in every 13 children dies before reaching their first birthday, while one in every eight does not survive until they are 5 years old.
- Nearly one in two children under 5 are stunted (short for their age), 11 per cent are wasted (thin for their height), and 38 per cent are underweight.

Despite significant investment to increase enrolment in primary schools, they are often poorly staffed and equipped. There are large differences in children's attendance between urban and rural locations, between boys and girls, and between and within regions. Overall literacy is low, at 31 per cent for rural and 74 per cent for urban residents.

Sources: Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report 2011*; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children 2012*.

Young Lives is a unique international study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. By following the lives of 12,000 children and young people over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support effective policies for children.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from the interviews we did with the children individually and in groups. Each one is accompanied by a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that children are having to contend with, but also gives a sense of the wider context of their lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and their families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed here. The accompanying photos are of children in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

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Young Lives 
An International Study of Childhood Poverty