

The Unrealised Promises of Education: The Challenges of School to Work Transition in Ethiopia

Yisak Tafere and Nardos Chuta



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Summary

This working paper focuses on how young men and women make the transition from school to work and the problems they encounter in doing so. It draws on Young Lives longitudinal qualitative and survey data which documents the link between education and work over time. The paper addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the patterns of school to work transitions? (2) What jobs are available for young people? (3) What institutional arrangements support the transition from school to work? (4) What challenges does the transition process face? (5) What are the policy implications of the study?

The findings suggest that the schooling levels of the young people in this study were diverse, as were the areas in which they were employed, which included formal employment, temporary wage work, youth cooperatives, working in the family business, and running their own businesses. All, except one young woman, had found employment without having a university education. Despite their childhood hope to finish university before employment, they had started work after technical and vocational education and training (TVET), secondary or primary education. This suggests that childhood aspirations have not helped them move into their dream jobs. Schooling is a protracted process and consequently, the transition to the labour market becomes irregular, characterised by multiple and sometimes reverse transitions.

Based on the findings, there are a number of recommendations that would help when revisiting existing policies and programmes. First, it is important to improve the quality of education and skills training. TVET should be expanded to be accessible, and needs to be equipped with the necessary resources and qualified trainers. In the transition from school to work, it is important to ensure gender equality (Sustainable Development Goal 5) by providing equal access for boys and girls to TVET training. Second, we found weak institutional coordination in the transition from school to work, and suggest that coordination among training institutions, job facilitating institutions and employers should be strengthened. Third, in the context of a challenging employment environment, for reasons that include the mismatch between education and skills and job opportunities, career guidance programmes should be considered. Finally, the increase in youth unemployment can be tackled by creating jobs that, as much as possible, reflect the skills and aspirations of young people. This would enhance human capital development by encouraging families and young people to invest in education and contribute to national economic growth.

1. Introduction

Since the late 1990s, the Ethiopian government has expanded educational opportunities. Primary schools were built at the community level, including in remote and historically marginalised areas. In response, parents sent their children to school, investing the scarce resources they possess. Children also dreamed that they could reach the highest levels of education. As they went through school, young people hoped that their education would translate into gainful employment and that they would achieve better lives than their parents.

In Ethiopia, education is categorised into primary (Grades 1-8), secondary (Grades 9-10), preparatory (Grades 11-12), and university levels. Post-secondary technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has been adopted (Ministry of Education 2008) to provide middle-level skills that would help young people join the labour force. TVET aims 'to create competent and self-reliant citizens to contribute to the economic and social development of the country, thus improving the livelihoods of all Ethiopians and sustainably reducing poverty' (Ministry of Education 2008).

TVET education is provided in former secondary schools. Since the introduction of the Ethiopian General Secondary Education Certificate Examination (EGSECE)¹ at Grade 10, secondary schools have been divided up to serve either as TVET colleges or as preparatory schools for those who passed the EGSECE. Initially, only public TVET colleges offered the training but private training providers have since joined the programme. The skills training prepares young people to work in sectors including manufacturing, construction, trading and services. The TVET curriculum includes technical skills (specific to each sector) and entrepreneurship courses. The programme is organised using a modular approach in which each module or a combination of modules is expected to provide trainees with the required set of competences. The training involves at least 70 per cent practical apprenticeship at TVET schools.

TVET equips young people with skills and prepares them for employment. Graduating trainees are evaluated, with those passing receiving a Certification of Competence (COC). This certifies that they have achieved occupational qualifications and are ready for different employment opportunities, including running their own businesses, being hired by different institutions, or organising as micro and small enterprise (MSE) cooperatives.

The expansion of schooling and skills training requires corresponding employment opportunities. However, with ever-increasing numbers of graduates and new labour market entrants every year, many young people are either underemployed or unable to find employment. Every year, more than two million youth are estimated to enter the labour market (JCC 2020). The increased number of unemployed youths has created a push for institutional arrangements that would help the transition from school to work. In response, the federal government established the Job Creation Commission² (JCC) in 2018 to coordinate all government and non-governmental endeavours to create job opportunities in Ethiopia. Its main objectives are to: (1) provide a clear institutional framework for employment

1 The Ministry of Education announced in 2020 that this exam will no longer be provided. However, there is not yet official policy documentation on this change.

2 See: www.jobsccommission.gov.et

management and promotion; (2) promote productive and freely chosen employment for all job seekers; and (3) support the development of a globally competitive, skilled and productive workforce.

The JCC is mandated to coordinate national activities to tackle the fast-growing youth unemployment in Ethiopia, through different implementing government offices at the local level. The civil service prioritises highly skilled and university graduates, while other sectors take a lower-skilled workforce. In the last decade, among those engaged in wage employment, 48 per cent are employed in the public sector, and 52 per cent in the private sector.

2. Literature review

There is a clear link between education and work. Educational aspirations are motivated by the hope of having a certain level of employment. Children study hard to accomplish their dreams of gaining a decent job. Young people expect a working life at the end of their schooling pathways, and occupational expectation is heightened by educational expectation (Andres et al. 2007).

Aspirations are not static; they can change depending on circumstances and students' achievements. Some studies have also shown that children lowered their aspirations over time, mainly those whose educational achievements were already relatively low, but with differences across genders and across locations. For example, by age 12, aspirations to join university for rural boys from the Younger Cohort in Young Lives had fallen by 12 per cent compared to the Older Cohort (Boyden et al. 2020).

The relationship between educational and occupational aspirations has been contested in both theory and policy dialogue. Some have argued that in the developing world, where job opportunities are limited, there is a need for 'reorienting' (Wellings 1982), implying young people have to 'lower' their occupational aspirations. This would help a smooth transition to the jobs that do exist. However, others maintain that it is important to maintain young people's aspirations and respond so that they achieve them (Tafere 2014). In this study, we therefore argue that aspiration is a valuable motivation for achievements.

The transition from childhood to adulthood can be marked by different stages. Occupational careers represent one of the entry points to adult roles (Hogan and Astone 1986). A more comprehensive categorisation is that the transition from childhood to adulthood is established through the 'Big Five' social markers of adulthood: finishing school; finding a job; leaving home; getting married; and having children (Settersten, Ottusch and Schneider 2015: 3; Valentine 2003).

The transition from school to work is an important life stage in the life course (Schoon et al. 2001), which usually occurs between full-time schooling and full-time employment (Hannan and Werquin 1999). Ideally, a completed transition is marked by stable or satisfactory employment (Allen and Velden 2007), irrespective of the type of job. However, different studies suggest that it is simplistic to consider the transition as a linear movement from school to work. The pathways are irregular, sometimes involving multiple trajectories (working while in school, or having more than one job) or reverse transitions (going back to school) (Allen and Velden 2007).

Generally, the transition from school to work is becoming more complex, changing from a clear departure and pathways to more uncertain work destinations (Pavlova, Lee, and Maclean 2017). The mismatch between education or skills and available jobs makes the transitions irregular. To reduce the mismatch, young people need career guidance (Rogers and Creed 2000; Savickas 1999). The main challenge to a successful transition is this mismatch between educational preparation and available jobs. This is a global phenomenon, but it prevails in much of the developing world. A skills mismatch is a serious issue in sub-Saharan Africa, with only 10 per cent of youth's skills matching the demands of available employment (Bandara 2019). The majority are under-educated, while some are overqualified for the expected jobs.

Rogers and Creed (2000) provide a summary of psychological discourses relevant to the transition from school to work. They indicate that supporting the transition may include providing skills training and career guidance, and helping young people know their capacity and potential for existing job opportunities. All these may help students make successful and adaptive transitions.

Gender disparity is also present in the process. Women have been found to be disproportionately vulnerable to skills mismatch (Addison, Liwen, and Orgul 2020). Generally, young females find the transition harder than males. They are less likely to make the move to formal employment, and their wage rate is far below than that of their male counterparts (United Nations 2015).

Education as a pathway to development has been promoted in the last two decades, with certain targets set in the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals (Nilsson 2019). The successful transition from school to work also signifies the value of education. Primarily, it may be an important return on investment in schooling. Through education, human capital development can be achieved, broadly contributing to poverty reduction and overall achievement of the MDGs (UNECA 2011) and SDGs because it augments the skills and productivity of poor people. Moreover, through education, people can achieve social mobility (St Clair and Benjamin 2011). Better education can lead to decent jobs, increasing people's status in society. However, our study shows that this is not always applicable, as there is no guarantee that education leads to employment and a better life.

3. Study objective and research questions

Most studies focus on either education or employment and use distinct and cross-sectional data. However, this study, which draws on both qualitative and survey data produced by Young Lives, documents the link between education and work. It addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the patterns of school to work transitions? (2) What jobs are available for young people? (3) What institutional arrangements support the transition from school to work? (4) What challenges does the transition process faces? (5) What are the policy implications of the study?

This paper focuses on how young men and women make the transition from school to work and the problems involved in doing so. It investigates the transitions within the context of young people's childhood educational and occupational aspirations. The analysis considers how gender, age, location and wealth affect young people's opportunities to make successful transitions. It also considers changing views on the usefulness and relevance of the education system to the job market.

During this study, the young people had reached the age when the transition from school to work is expected. We were therefore able to examine the extent to which schooling had helped them to move into employment, and whether education had delivered what it had promised.

4. Data sources

The paper is based on data from Young Lives, an international study of childhood poverty and transitions to adulthood following the lives of 12,000 children in four countries (Ethiopia, India,³ Peru and Vietnam) since 2001. Young Lives aims to provide high-quality data to understand childhood poverty and inform policy and programme design. In Ethiopia, Young Lives follows 3,000 children in two cohorts (2,000 in the Younger Cohort born in 2000/1 and 1,000 in the Older Cohort born in 1994/95), from 20 communities across five regions (Amhara, Oromia, SNNP, Tigray, and Addis Ababa). The study involves surveys every four years with the young participants and their households. Since 2007, it has also conducted qualitative research with a sub-set of the children and their families, including a longitudinal study following more than 100 girls and boys across a 13-year period from childhood into early adulthood. Round 6 of the survey, which was due to be carried out in 2020, has been postponed and replaced with mobile phone surveys.

Young Lives Ethiopia has so far carried out five rounds of survey and qualitative study. The paper is mainly based on fifth-wave core qualitative data, but also draws on previous qualitative studies and the Round 5 survey. The analysis focuses on the Older Cohort, who have already experienced the transition from school to work.⁴

4.1 The study communities

The study focuses on five core qualitative study sites from the 20 Young Lives sites in Ethiopia. Two communities were selected from each region: the two urban sites of Bertukan (Addis Ababa) and Leku (SNNPR), and the three rural communities of Tach-Meret (Amhara), Leki (Oromia), and Zeytuni (Tigray) (Table 1).⁵

The communities provide different job prospects for young people. In Bertukan, vegetable and fruit markets provide some income-generating activities such as transporting goods,

3 In the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

4 See Tafere and Tiemelissan (2020) for details on the educational trajectories of young people, and Pankhurst and Tafere (2020) for details on work and employment.

5 The names of the communities and people used in the paper are pseudonyms, to maintain anonymity.

retail or storage. In Tach-Meret, private haricot businesses attract young people, especially girls, who sort out dust from the haricot. Most girls in the study have been involved in this activity, usually earning about 60-80 birr per quintal of sorted beans. In Leki, private irrigation schemes that grow vegetables attract many young people. Young boys are also involved in fishing in the nearby lake. The flower plants close to the community similarly provide wage labour, while the (Bulbula) industrial park under construction in the nearby community attracts daily labourers.

In Zeytuni, large quarry and stone crushing private enterprises have created the opportunity for young people to collect, carve and supply stone from their neighbourhoods to the crushing factories. Moreover, some private irrigation schemes offer wage labour roles. A recently built plastic and chemical factory in the community and Mekelle industry park in the neighbouring area provide different opportunities for young people with diverse skills, including daily labouring, bricklaying, installing water and electric systems, and other activities. In Leku, a new (Hawassa) industrial park, which started operation in 2016, provides opportunities for female youth employment in different activities, such as tailoring.

4.2 Methods and participants

Data collection involved individual interviews with young people (60), their caregivers or spouses (60), 29 key informant interviews with local service providers and 20 focus group discussions (FGDs) with community representatives and young people (Table 1). There were roughly an equal number of male and female participants.

Table 1. *Research participants*

Region	Site	Individual interviews	Key informant interviews	Focus group discussions
Addis Ababa	Bertukan	23	6	4
Amhara	Tach-Meret	24	6	4
Oromia	Leki	24	6	4
SNNPR	Leku	24	6	4
Tigray	Zeytuni	25	5	4
Total		120	29	20

Key informant interviews involved individuals with specific roles and knowledge of the local context. In each community, we interviewed the local administrator, job creation or agriculture officers, employers, women, children and youth officers, and TVET and education officers.

Through FGDs, the study explored young people's context and resources, and the challenges they face in their transition from childhood into adulthood in their communities. This included community contexts, and young people's marriage, family formation and transition to the labour market. Considering the gender diversity of experiences and views, in each community we carried out two FGDs with male and female community representatives, and two FGDs with male and female young people separately.

5. The transition from school to work: findings

This section focuses on three areas: education levels and skills, the type of youth employment, and the institutions that facilitate the transitions. The following sections present the transitions of young people from school to work explaining their educational levels and types of jobs they occupy.

5.1 From school to work: employment types

Young people had high educational aspirations, and believed that such school achievements would potentially lead to decent jobs. For many, their childhood dreams were to finish school and join the formal labour market. However, many were unable to achieve their educational dreams, and instead were forced to make the leap from different levels of education into uncertain employment circumstances. This section outlines the diverse school to work trajectories experienced by the youth.

Young Lives data show that 78 per cent of youth aged 22 were involved in work (68 per cent of urban versus 89 per cent rural) (Araya, Woldehanna and Pankhurst 2018). While rural young people were engaged in family agriculture (81 per cent), urban youth were engaged in small income-generating activities such as daily labouring or small businesses.

Among the 60 young people in the whole qualitative sample, 27 (15 male and 12 female) had transferred to the labour market. This paper focuses on those 27. They were engaged in different types of occupation, including formal employment, MSE cooperatives, wage labour, self-employment, and family work (Table 2).

Table 2. *Education level, aspiration and job*

Community	Pseudonym	Sex	Occupational aspiration	Current level of education	Current work	Type of work
Bertukan (urban)	Netsa	Female	Civil servant	College – second year	Nurse	Apprentice
	Afework	Male	Doctor	College – second year	Business	Self-employed
	Senia	Female	Business	Grade 12	Tailor	Salary
	Bereket	Male	Civil servant	Grade 9	Car broker and car decorating	Self-employed
	Ramla	Female	Own tailoring business	TVET	Messenger/clerk	Wage
Tach-Meret (rural)	Azezu	Male	Business	Grade 10	Family farm and casual work	Farming
	Bezach	Female	Business	Grade 8	Haricot picking and washing	Wage labour
	Meselech	Female	Business	Grade 10	Haricot picking	Wage labour (left after marriage)
	Selamnesh	Female	Bank teller	BA degree	Cashier	Civil servant – permanent

Community	Pseudonym	Sex	Occupational aspiration	Current level of education	Current work	Type of work
Leki (rural)	Hassen	Male	Doctor	Grade 6	Vegetable growing	Wage labour
	Beletech	Female	Doctor	Grade 6	Farmer	Own farm
	Ayu	Female	Teacher	Grade 3	Petty trader	Own small café
	Gemechu	Male	Teacher	Grade 2	Agriculture	Family farm
	Tufa	Male	Vegetable growing	Grade 5	Farmer/ vegetable growing	Family farm
	Biritu	Female	Bank teller	BA degree	Family work	Family work
Leku (urban)	Seifu	Male	Doctor	TVET	Driving bajaj	Family business
	Dembel	Male	Civil servant	Grade 10	Music shop	Own shop
	Yitbarek	Male	Civil servant	College graduate	Auto-electrician	Permanent
	Tagesu	Female	Doctor	TVET	Messenger	Permanent
Zeytuni (rural)	Mihretu	Male	Civil servant	Grade 7	Supplying cobblestones	Cooperative
	Etsegenet	Female	Bank teller	Grade 10	Textile	Permanent
	Esu	Male	Driver of own truck	Grade 10	Assistant driver and supplying cobblestones	Temporary
	Maregey	Male	Mechanic	Grade 5	Supplying cobblestones and learning	Cooperative
	Miruts	Male	Driver	Grade 1	Supplying cobblestones	Cooperative
	Berhe	Male	Driver	Grade 8	Farming	Family farm
	Desta	Male	Engineer	Grade 6	Welder	Permanent
	Fanus	Female	Doctor	Grade 10	Wage labour	Temporary

Source: Summary of Young Lives qualitative study.

The young people had left education at different levels. The highest level was a rural girl with a BA degree, while four of the six college/TVET graduates were males from urban areas. This suggests that urban boys had a better chance of completing college education before joining the job market. Most had dropped out at different levels of secondary education (9) and primary school (11). Location matters in education, as those who dropped out of primary school to work were all from rural communities.

5.1.1 Formal employment

During their childhood, the young people had aspired to finish school and get formal employment. Young people prefer professional occupations with public institutions or private enterprises because they involve less hardship and are secure, with regular, good salaries and a pension. In this study, only a few young people were able to enter such professional occupations: only six of those who had left school for work were in formal employment.

The route to permanent jobs usually involves finishing at least secondary education. Some were able to achieve their childhood aspirations. Selamnesh, from Tach-Meret, had aspired to complete a university degree and get a professional job. She is currently working as a cashier in a public finance institute after having completed her BA degree, and earns 3,908 birr a month. Selamnesh demonstrated her agency in pursuing her education despite her family's poor economic situation. She has a good job but is still looking for a better one.

She is in the final process of joining a bank on a better salary and aspires to pursue postgraduate education.

The majority of young people find it difficult to pass the national exam at Grade 10. Those who fail may either aim to get more skills and technical training or move directly into employment. Not all college graduates are able to join the profession that their college education would suggest. Tagesu, from Leku, finished TVET/college after completing secondary school, and is a messenger in a government office. She was working as a cleaner in the office before being promoted. She is still not happy because her current role is far below what her education should deliver. She aspires to continue her education in engineering and get a better job.

When TVET and college education have not led to suitable jobs, some opted to pursue multiple training courses that would give them more options in the labour market. A young man from Leku, Yitbarek, received training in automotive electronics and musical instruments from different training institutes. Initially, he worked in an industrial park on a monthly salary of 1,200 birr. He decided to move to a public water development office where he works as an auto-electrician, a profession that he is trained for, on a better salary of 3,000 birr. For him, the combination of profession and good salary were important for this move.

Some seem to be fortunate enough to move into formal employment without having technical training. Fanus, from Zeytuni, completed Grade 10 and immediately started working at a local plastic and chemical factory as a guard and cleaner. Others were unable to even finish primary school for many different reasons, but still lucky enough to get a job. For example, Desta quit school at Grade 6 and is currently working as a welder. He would like to specialise in welding and open his own workshop in the near future.

Young women try hard to pursue their education and get a job, but marriage looms in the background as an obstacle in this transition. For example, Meselech, from Tach-Meret, completed Grade 10, supporting her schooling through daily work because her family was too poor to provide for her. After finishing secondary school, she had a full-time job sorting haricot beans for a private enterprise. However, in 2018 she had to quit her job after marrying her workplace supervisor. She said,

I left the job I did for five years because of marriage. Now I have given birth to my first child. I will be back to my former job after two years.

Similarly, Beletech, from Leki, left school at Grade 6 due to marriage. Currently, she has three children and runs her own farm.

Others may decline to take up a job because their qualifications don't match it. One example was a young girl who came through hardship to achieve her educational aspirations but is still waiting to accomplish her occupational aspirations. Biritu, from the rural community of Leki, has overcome many of the structural challenges that potentially hinder schooling pathways. Living in a community where early marriage is the norm, her family was poor and the quality of education that the local school provided was low. She refused early marriage, avoided working for cash as a vegetable farm wage labourer, and moved to town to get a better education. She completed her university education in statistics, but has not had a job for the last two years. This has multiple consequences for the young girl. The community is putting a lot of pressure on her either to marry or find a job, which is having a psychological impact. She said:

The people in the community, for example, every time they come across me, they may say, 'Are you still here? Have not you gone?' But, this is nothing for me. I have passed through more challenges.

Her brother, who worked hard to help her to finish her education by protecting her from early marriage, sees the broader impact of her unemployment. He said:

The worth that the community gives for her status is diminishing as she remains unemployed after graduating. The youngsters in the area become discouraged to continue their education by referring to her unemployment. The failure of a single person has an impact on the entire community. I am noticing that her failure is not only affecting herself or her family but also the community and the younger children. This has resulted from the high expectations that they had for her (Biritu's brother, Leki, 2019).

For those who are successful in their education, the level or type of education may not match the available jobs. Biritu remains unemployed because she cannot find a job that fits with her discipline. She said:

I want to get a job that is related to the field that I studied. It may be any job with any ... salary. And I want those jobs that I can carry out sitting in offices. This is the wish I have for myself! I want to work as an accountant in a bank, for example. I wish to have such jobs that require less energy. The jobs that I regard as bad are those that need immense labour (Biritu, 24, unemployed graduate, Leki, 2019).

Young people expect that a certain level of schooling will lead to jobs that fit their level of education. Many are reluctant to engage in blue-collar jobs which require physical labour, like working in industrial parks or MSE cooperatives.

Government officials and employers have different perspectives, and believe that young people are not willing to do the available jobs. They blame the youth for lacking a work ethic. The problem is not lack of job opportunities but mainly that the youth are not willing to engage with what is available. For example, one investor in Leki complained that:

There is a shortage of labour in our locality. As a result, we are employing youths who come from other regions. If you go to the farm site at this time, [there are] more than 1,000 youths who are employed with a monthly salary. The majority ... are youths from other areas. Local youths do not want to work. Youths of the locality who work on vegetable farms do not exceed 2 or 3 per cent.

A local *kebele* leader in Leku shared his experience of how youth are not taking up the available job prospects created by the local administration. He said:

We have five development-oriented packages: agriculture, trade, industry, enterprise, and greenery. We tried to engage youth in these priority areas and packages. A lack of motivation for work contributes to youth unemployment.

In general, it is argued that the high youth unemployment rate is attributable to the youth's attitude to work. In this regard, we see some gaps that need attention. Young people were not taught entrepreneurship in school or colleges and were not provided with career guidance. This is impeding the transition from school to work.

Moreover, low salaries and harmful jobs discourage young people's transition from school to work. In all the communities, young people, parents, and even officials reported that they opted to remain unemployed rather than entering into harmful and low-paying work. Many

youths were unable to work or quit after a short spell working in industrial parks and particularly at a flower company in Leki community. Parents and youth in Leki indicated that working at the flower company exposes employees to significant health risks because of the chemicals that the farm uses. The monthly salary is as low as 800 birr, which is not enough for employees to survive given the current high living costs in the country. Despite the company arguing that they pay a good salary and have health and safety measures, the community remains reluctant take up employment there. Referring to local investment, the *wereda* enterprises and industry development officer said, “in principle, certain investments are expected to give 70 per cent of their employment opportunities to the local people. This is not happening at all.” Currently, the company hires youth who migrate from other areas.

Likewise, the industry park is looking for more female workers, but young female graduates are not interested in working there, and complain about the work hardship and low salaries.

5.1.2 Cooperatives

The ever-increasing number of job-seeking youth has become a large concern for state and local government officials, with some officials reporting that unemployed youth are becoming security threats. As a result, their main priority was youth unemployment. For example, the kebele administrator in Tach-Meret reported that they had registered 456 unemployed youth in 2018. This is a large number for a rural kebele with 1,646 households and a total population of 9,954. In the other rural community of Leki, 460 unemployed youth were registered for jobs in the same year. In Leki, about 1,600 unemployed youth reported for employment.

This suggests that the government has to provide employment opportunities that can cater for such a large number of young people. Nationally, a policy of youth employment in micro and small-scale enterprises (MSE) has been adopted. Youth are supported to organise themselves into groups so that they can engage in different activities. Local officials attempt to exploit existing job prospects where young people can be engaged, and look for activities that can absorb a relatively large number of young people. In the urban communities of Bertukan and Leku, youth are engaged in metal and woodwork activities, leather processing and agro-processing, handicrafts, food processing, brick manufacturing, construction, manufacturing, cobblestone work and hairdressing.

In the rural communities, young people are organised into MSEs that undertake activities such as keeping poultry, animal fattening, dairy, beekeeping, tailoring, vegetable growing as well as loading and unloading vegetables, cobblestone and quarry work, animal hay production, and selling. For example, in Leku community, youth organised to plant and collect vegetables. There are also an additional three associations formed by male youth (groups of 17, 27 and 20) for the loading of vegetables, according to the kebele administrator. Female youth tend to organise for growing vegetables and keeping poultry. There are two associations formed by girls, each having 30 girls planting vegetables and collecting harvests.

In Zeytuni, young boys quit school and organised into cooperatives, mainly for stone-cutting and supplying cobblestones for construction companies. Three boys in the study had related pathways from school to work through joining cooperatives. Mihretu decided to leave education after finishing Grade 7 in 2012. In 2013, he joined a cooperative that cuts and sells cobblestone in his community. His friend Berhe, from the same community, left regular schooling in Grade 6 in 2014 and continued evening school while working in the cobblestone

cooperative during the day. Esu quit school after he failed his Grade 10 national exam in 2017; he then joined the same cooperative as his friends.

Cobblestone production is a profitable activity. The cobblestone cooperative started in 2013 with 13 young people organised by the wereda MSEs office. While the boys collect stone from the community, carve it and load the shaped cobblestones, the only two female members do clerical and financial work. One cooperative member explained the process of organisation and its benefits.

We earn around 7,000-8,000 birr per month. We take our share every five or six months. Shares are transferred from the cooperative account into an individual bank account. We also recapitalise some money in the cooperative's account to upgrade our business. Now, we are planning to buy a stone crusher with the savings ... Currently, I get a good income which is more than those who take an office salary (Mihretu, age 24, Zeytuni, 2019).

This suggests that some young people are benefiting from the existing community resources and growing construction activity in neighbouring towns and cities. On the other hand, the activity seems to favour boys, as only two of the 13 cooperative members were females and they were only accommodated because they can do clerical work.

In other areas, parents and communities were reluctant to share their limited resources. As discussed above, instead of providing formal employment, the government is organising young people into cooperatives using the resources in their respective communities. However, communities are sometimes unwilling to do this. The job creation officer in Tach-Meret said:

In 2015, for example, we faced a serious challenge when the community refused to give some communally owned plot of land for the youths who were in need of job opportunities. It was later on when the youths were about to clash with them that they agreed. Currently, young people are using the plot of land.

In other rural communities, farmers refuse to provide their grazing land to youth cooperatives. Some of the cooperatives' projects required local resources covering a relatively sizeable area. For example, open community grazing land is widely used by youth cooperatives in cobblestone production or other cooperatives engaged in agricultural activities. These create some tension with the local communities. As the government agency has no legally enforceable option, their only option is to persuade the local communities or the youth to pressure the communities. This remains a challenge for the employment of school-leaving youth.

5.1.3 *Informal wage work*

Some young people quit at various education levels to enter informal employment. Five young people in this study are engaged in casual work for individuals, public institutions or private enterprises which requires little or no skill and generates relatively low earnings (Table 2). Others were working as tailors, assistant drivers, or wage labourers in a plastic and chemical factory after leaving school from Grade 6 onwards.

Some young people are working to support their daily livelihood, but others take such activities as a springboard for better jobs. They may consider their current jobs as apprenticeships that provide a chance to save money to establish their own businesses. Senia, from Bertukan, has completed Grade 12 and is working as a tailor in a private

business. She is in the process of organising a cooperative with five female friends to establish their own sewing cooperative. She is using her current job for training purposes and to save some money. On the other hand, Esu, from Zeytuni, had completed secondary school and is currently working as an assistant driver, in addition to working in a cobblestone cooperative. He wants to get a more advanced driving licence, save money, and hopes to have his own truck.

Young people move into informal employment before finishing their education for different reasons. Family problems may force some to quit school and start working. Poverty is the underlying reason for young people to quit school and move into work. For example, Bezach dropped out of school when she was in Grade 8 due to her family's economic difficulties. She said, "I am from a poor family, school and work became hard for me. Then, I decided to quit school and do wage labour." Her parents were too old to earn a living. She tried to work and study at the same time but was unable to do so and repeatedly missed classes. She has been working at an oilseed enterprise sorting haricot beans for a monthly salary of 1,000 birr. She also washes clothes for cash.

Others use temporary work as a transitory engagement until they get jobs that fit their skills and interests. For example, after graduating from a TVET institution in embroidery and tailoring, Ramla from Bertukan had had different jobs, including working as a messenger and a clerk. She said:

I got training in tailoring five years ago. But I am working as a messenger and clerk for a private enterprise. We are in the process of forming a cooperative in tailoring. We are given a workplace. Of course, I prefer to work on my own. I want to have my own business.

5.1.4 *Self-employment*

Six of the young people (Table 2) who were unable to find formal or informal employment or organise into cooperatives opted for self-employment. They have a range of levels of education, from primary school to TVET college. They usually engage in activities they have been doing while attending school. For example, in Leki vegetable growing and selling, and in Zeytuni stone carving and selling, are the major opportunities for income-generating activities.

It has been five years since Hassen dropped out of Grade 6. In the last three years, he has been working for wages at his uncle's vegetable farm in his community and has saved 12,000 birr. Despite his childhood aspirations of finishing university and becoming a doctor, Hassen now has his own business, including transporting goods using a horse cart, as well as fishing. His friend, Tufa quit school at Grade 5 to help his parents. He has bought land with the money he saved from wage work during the vegetable harvest. Currently, he runs his family farm, cultivating beans and vegetables.

In Zeytuni, young people can be members of a cobblestone cooperative but can also work on their own. Maregey carves stones in his neighbourhood and sells them to construction companies. He said, "I shape around 300-400 stones per day. I sell a single cobblestone on average 50 cents up to 1 birr." He also has a goat-fattening business. His friend, Miruts, left school in Grade 1 and is currently working in cobblestone production. He produces up to 7,000 cobblestones a day with his four friends. He would like to be a driver in the future because he thinks drivers make a good income.

Unlike the other types of jobs, self-employment provides the flexibility to undertake multiple activities. Two young people from Bertukan illustrate why young people opt to run businesses, dropping their childhood educational aspirations and leaving education. Afework, 24, runs his own game zone and pool house. He earns good money. He said, “after deducting all my expenses, I earn a net profit of 10,000 birr per month.” He quit university because of insecurity and joined a private college in his home city. However, he then left education again and fully engaged in his own business. He had previously aspired to attend university and become a doctor.

Bereket has a business decorating and furnishing cars, and brokering car sales. We have followed his story from childhood. As an orphan, he has been supporting himself since he was able to engage in income-generating activities, for example, washing cars. In the process, he began to be more inclined to his work than education, and started to weigh the value of continuing his schooling. This was reflected in a change in aspiration (Tafere 2014). At age 13, he expressed his dream of obtaining a university degree and becoming an engineer, but at age 17, he instead wanted to continue developing what he had been doing, to run a car business. He argued:

I am not interested in the lessons. I do not regret quitting school. I am happy with my work. Education has no use. Even if I learn at night, I will complete Grade 10 so as to have the certificate. I am angry because I did not start work earlier, not with my interruption/dropping out.

Bereket is now married, has a child, and leads a good life.

In Leku, young people have different job opportunities. Seifu, who finished TVET education with a diploma in electrical installation, is currently driving a bajaj⁶ and works at a family-owned business (selling traditional clothes with his father in the market). He wishes to buy a four-wheeled bajaj and a minibus in order to set up his own transport business. Dembel has finished secondary education and runs his own music and movie rental business. He explained why he left school at Grade 10 and started working. It was very much related to his interest in overcoming the serious family poverty which had affected his schooling. He said:

I had no interest to continue after Grade 10. As you know, I was economically inferior to my classmates. I did not even have enough [school] uniform while others had. My family was incapable of meeting my needs. Getting food after school was a problem in the family. Thus, I wanted to get employed and fulfil my requirements by stopping my education. So I did not prepare well for the national exam and failed eventually. I am better now because I am pursuing my interest. I have never regretted the decision I made because I am better now and growing from day to day. I still have the chance to continue my education. But first I want to have my own wealth, earn enough income, and pull myself out of poverty (Dembel, 24, Leku, 2019).

Currently, for Dembel, work comes first. He is prioritising improving his economic situation by working before considering further education.

For girls, the route from school to work may be mediated by marriage. Ayu quit school at Grade 3 to marry. Currently, she cares for her two children while running a small restaurant.

6 A three-wheeled motor used for public transport.

She chose the job because it is an extension of a gendered activity which involves preparing food for sale.

In general, the transition from school to work had two major characteristics. First, young people had been combining some sort of work with schooling before quitting school and fully engaging in the activity. Second, combining education and work meant they had the opportunity to consider the trade-off between staying in school and fully moving to work. They tended to choose the latter, with a view to improving their lives by developing what they had already been doing. For example, those who worked in vegetable fields as wage labourers started their own vegetable business; others who had been hired to pull horse carts to transport vegetables to towns now have their own horse carts. Some who had been collecting stone from their backyards, then cutting and selling them, were now organised with their friends into larger cobblestone cooperatives. With the good income they receive, they are starting their own business. Combining work with schooling as children and young people has given them the opportunity of a route to an adult occupation.

As discussed above, the young people moved into work before achieving a university degree, which was their early life dream. In their childhood, they had high educational aspirations that they hoped would lead to better jobs. The survey carried out in 2009, when the children were aged 15, showed that most children hoped to complete a university degree (88 per cent of urban, 64.1 per cent of rural; 78 per cent of boys, 69.5 per cent of girls) (Tafere 2014). Currently, nearly all (except Selamnesh) of the young people who were employed did not have any university education. Six had gone through TVET or private colleges, but the majority quit at secondary school (9) or below (11 were in primary school). This suggests childhood aspirations have not materialised to help them move into their dream jobs.

5.2 Employment-facilitating agents

This section discusses some of the institutions that facilitate the transition of young people from school to work. These include those which provide skills training and others that facilitate youth employment.

5.2.1 *The role of TVET*

Despite some shortcomings, TVET plays a pivotal role in the transition from school to work. It was planned to equip young people with the skills necessary to increase efficiency and earnings. More importantly, it serves as a route to employment. After completing secondary education (the final national exam at Grade 10), students have two options. If they pass the examination, they can continue preparatory education for university; if they fail, they can join TVET.

TVET offices and training centres are usually available at the wereda level. Admitting the trainees, delivering training and following up with the graduates are some of the TVET roles that enable the school to employment transition. TVET colleges generally provide skills training and business management courses. The training covers Levels I to IV and takes up to three years. Subjects include IT, garment manufacturing, quarrying, food processing, hairdressing, entrepreneurship, animal fattening, construction (building, cobblestones, and foreman), and car and motorbike maintenance. Females tend to take hairdressing, food preparation, and beauty therapy courses. Trainees are assessed in their specialised areas and those who pass are given a COC to join the labour market.

TVET also provides short-term training for young people who are ready to organise into businesses. If the MSE cooperatives are newly formed, TVET provides preliminary training that includes entrepreneurship and finance management. Members of existing cooperatives also get training on saving and scaling up a business.

TVET institutions also function as a linking agency between the trained youth and potential employers. They have staff who support the allocation of jobs by periodically making market assessments and identifying potential employers, which could be either public or private enterprises. The TVET office in Oromia collects the details of qualifications prospective employers require. The office then recommends relevant TVET graduates apply to the respective vacancies.

TVET is highly valued by both trainers and trainees. In the transition from school to work, skills training may be more appropriate than a university degree for local job opportunities. A TVET official from Hawassa, SNNPR, shared his observation:

Since graduates of TVET are better than graduates of universities in having a required skill, they have a greater probability to get employed and to create their own job. That's why the majority of TVET graduates joined either of the jobs (i.e. being employed or create their own job).

In other words, university graduates fall behind TVET trainees in practical skills as their studies are focused on theory. TVET graduates start working directly in jobs requiring practical skills.

The challenges TVET faces are related to entry criteria, resource limitations, course quality, and levels of training. As TVET focuses on those who did not pass the Grade 10 national exam, those who do not make it to university after Grades 11 and 12 tend to be missed. This requires a policy revisit. A girl from the Addis Ababa site experienced this problem. She took the Grade 12 exam but did not get the university entry points. Yet she could not get TVET training because she had already passed Grade 10. She said: "I tried to register at TVET to get training in hairdressing or cooking but it did not work. Government should at least arrange to accommodate these [Grade 11 and Grade 12] students" (Netsa, 24, Bertukan, 2019).

TVET officials indicated that the programme is not well resourced in terms of material and human resources. The training inputs and budget to run the programmes do not match the service they plan to offer. In some communities (e.g. in Leku), the TVETs do not have enough qualified trainers in certain fields. These problems prohibit young people from undertaking training in their areas of interest. This leads to low-quality training and contributes to a skills-job mismatch. Many trainees also fail the final exams for the COC.

In general, TVET is supporting young people to join the labour market. However, in some contexts, the training provided and the available labour markets are not well matched. Most employers want young people trained in Level III and IV, but TVETs, particularly in rural areas, provide Level I and II. Job vacancies are rare for those with only Level I and II. Market demand exists in Level III and IV if the trainees are qualified through COC. For example, employers like Castle Winery and Shere Ethiopia floriculture in the Oromia community had job opportunities, but these required Level III or IV graduates.

While youth from urban areas and better-off families can continue training at Level III and IV, those from rural areas and poor families find this hard, as they could not access this training, which is mainly located in urban centres and if they could it is costly. This creates a disparity in accessing all levels of training and employment opportunities.

5.2.2 *Jobs Creation Commission*

Young people's employment is facilitated by government offices organised at different levels. The federal Jobs Creation Commission, which is the main responsible institution, works with different government institutions at different levels. At the wereda level there are offices which handle job creation activities by coordinating different stakeholders, including public institutions such as trade and labour offices, TVET, and private enterprises. Job creation offices at the wereda level have different titles, including Enterprise for Industry and Development (in Leki and Leku), the Job Creation and Enterprise Development Office (Bertukan), and the Micro and Small-Scale Business Enterprise Office and Job Creation Committee (Zeytuni).

At the wereda level, officials periodically register unemployed people, including youth, in their area. They document the demographic characteristics and educational backgrounds of job seekers, then identify their interests and categorise the types of job they want. The federal government currently supports school-leaving youth to organise into groups and engage in income-generating activities. Two approaches were followed: making local resources available for organised youth; and providing loans for those who are engaged in different activities. The federal government established the Youth Revolving Fund through Proclamation No. 995/2017 to help young people create their own job opportunities; provide financial assistance for young people's organised income-generating activities; and to ensure their overall participation and benefit. The federal government has allocated the Youth Revolving Fund 10 billion birr, and the fund is managed by the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia. Young people can use this as a base for future investment and contribute to the industrialisation process in Ethiopia. The fund works as follows:

Criteria. The local offices identify those who want to and can enter formal employment or organise into a group. The major criteria include: those aged 18-65, residents of kebeles who can show their ID card, and individuals have to be job seekers, able to work, and not students or government employees.

Screening. For example, in Leki, the kebele established a screening committee comprising the chairperson, manager, and development agent. The committee recruits potential cooperative members based on the criteria and format outlined by the wereda job creation office. Members can be young people who have different education levels (university, college, TVET or below), and who do not have jobs or farmland (in rural areas).

Loan. Young people are helped to organise by the job creation offices and other relevant institutions. Cooperatives receive some initial capital from the Youth Revolving Fund allocated to each wereda. The loan amount depends on the type of activity the young people engage in. For example, in Leku, a cooperative with a group of 5-7 youths are able to get a loan of between 92,000–170,000 birr. Generally, cooperatives are expected to have collateral of 10 per cent, and the loan incurs an interest rate of around 8 per cent.

Challenges. These are associated with both the capacity of the coordinating offices and the youth themselves. Officials coordinating youth employment reported that they did not have enough staff and resources to respond to the demands of the fast-growing number of job-seeking youth. For example, an official from EID in Leku reported that his office had planned to create jobs for 2,067 young people in a year but they only managed to provide 1,568. Despite the availability of money for loans, job creation staff also complained that young people did not want to go through a long process to secure a loan.

Although MSE cooperatives have the potential to provide major opportunities for young people, they are not attractive to all young people. Many young people do not want to be involved in a group, and would rather work alone. Some believe that other members may not have the same level of commitment as them and the cooperative might fail if they worked collectively. For example, in Leku some young people wanted to buy a bajaj or taxi and run their own businesses. However, cooperative organisers prefer young people to organise around activities that can be done in a group and require low levels of investment.

Young people reported that the amount of collateral and the interest rate are too high for many youths from poor families. Employment officials in all communities also confirmed that these are hindering their efforts to help young people transfer into the labour market.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This section frames the discussion around three major areas: the features of the transition from school to work; the facilitating agents of transition; and the mismatch between youth preparation and available jobs.

6.1 Irregularity in the transition from school to work

Theoretically, the transition from school to work is demonstrated by young people having a job after completing their education (Hannan and Werquin 1999), with one life-course phase (schooling) followed by another (employment). However, the evidence in this study suggests otherwise. Young people are transitioning from different levels of schooling (including primary, secondary, TVET, college, or university) to different types of employment or work (Table 2). The young people in this study are similar ages but they finished or left school and began work at different times in their lives. For many, schooling is a protracted process and consequently, the transition to the labour market becomes irregular.

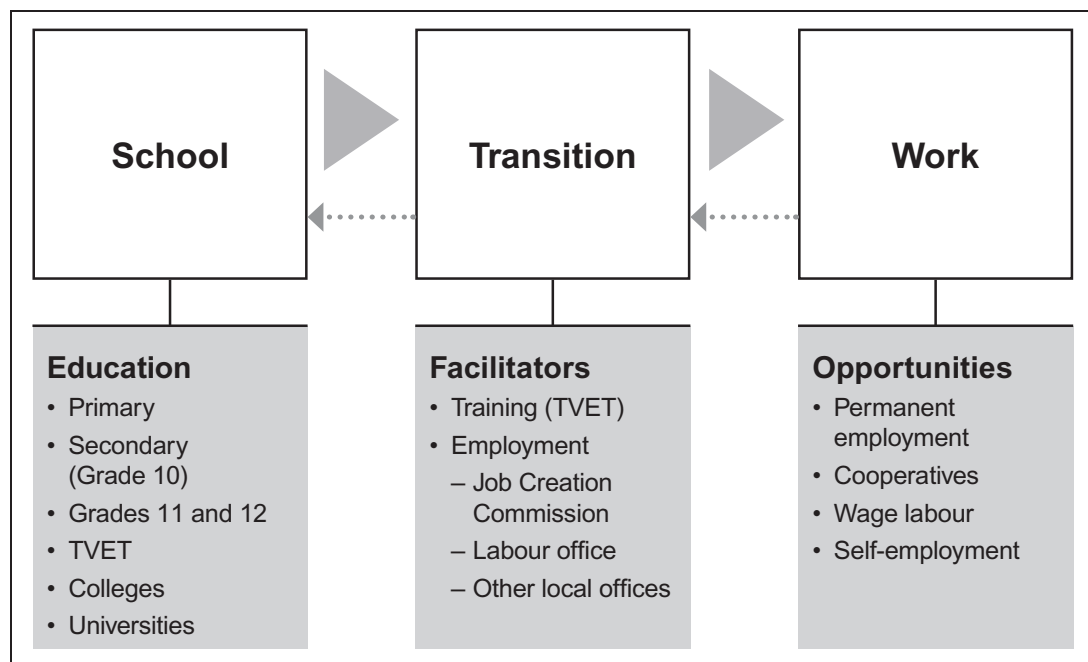
Ideally, a completed transition is marked by stable or satisfactory employment (Allen and Velden 2007). The transition is considered to be fully executed if young people finish their education and move into a full-time job. However, our findings suggest that there is neither a discrete departure nor a distinct occupational destination. The transition is complicated by uneven educational pathways and the complex nature of the occupational destinations. Many young people have moved into informal employment, with less job security and low pay. Over time, the school to work transition is becoming more uncertain (Pavlova, Lee and Maclean 2017).

This uncertainty has different features. It may be difficult to talk of a transition from school to work if the work young people do is not directly related to their education. For instance, the cooperatives which have absorbed a large number of young people require little formal education, with members instead learning how to carve cobblestones and grow vegetables from others in their communities. Their childhood activities have developed into lifelong occupations. Moreover, some young people are still working and studying, making it difficult to visualise a transition or to see a boundary between school and work. It can perhaps be explained in vague terms as a transition from combined activities to work, or from school to work.

Another feature is that multiple and reverse transitions can occur (Figure 1). Because of poverty, some children left school to earn a living. Then they returned to school, before again moving back into work. Here, gender plays a role. We found some young women who had to leave school, began working, and then left work after getting married (e.g. Meselech and Beletech); others quit school, got married, and then resumed working (e.g. Ayu). This suggests that transition is not only a one-time but also sometimes a multi-phase event, sometimes involving reverse transitions (Allen and Velden 2007). The transition is much more complicated for children from poor families, rural areas, and for young women.

While difficult contexts hinder young people's smooth transitions, the findings indicated that employed youth still want to pursue their childhood educational and occupational aspirations, and therefore both external factors and young people's agency contribute to such irregular transitions. The aspiration for better schooling and work remains a motivator for young people to keep switching between education and work.

Figure 1. *School to work transition in Ethiopia*



The transition from school to work of young people in Ethiopia is complex and dependent on context, which makes it difficult to adopt a general definition. Our findings suggest that it is useful to begin to conceptualise this transition but it is not possible to come to conclusions that accounts for all cases. Explanations should be grounded in the real experiences of the young people within their existing contexts.

6.2 Schooling and skills training

Despite high expectations, very few young people have achieved a successful transition from school to the labour market. The low employment rate is related to different factors, including poor-quality education and low skills, the mismatch between educational preparation and available jobs, the mindsets of job seekers, and weak institutional coordination.

The findings indicate that most of the young people were not able to acquire the educational level and skills necessary for employment. Very few have moved into formal employment after completing their education. The rest left school at different levels and undertook temporary employment. They neither completed their education nor did they find decent jobs.

TVET is one of the major facilitators of the transition from school to work. It provides skills applicable to existing job opportunities. In some cases, TVET graduates are more readily employable than university graduates. However, the programme has some weaknesses that should be addressed so that its ability to facilitate this transition is enhanced.

One shortcoming is that it was not locally oriented and its relevance was questioned. For example, in communities like Leki and Zeytuni, vegetable growing plays a large role in creating job opportunities. However, young people are not supported with skills training from TVET, which does not include a course on how to modernise vegetable production. An employer who is an expert in horticulture in Leki suggested that “the skills training should be correlated with the resources that the locality has. There is no education or training here that is correlated with vegetable production”. Young people continue to do these activities as they learn these skills from others in their communities.

TVET provides skills training at four different levels. In rural areas, Levels I and II are the main levels offered, but in urban areas these extend to Levels III and IV. Young people from better-off rural families also move to towns to access these levels of training. The lower levels (I and II) are not sufficient to find employment, and this was a common complaint among young people and even among employers. The study findings suggest that all four levels should be offered across both rural and urban areas, so that young people get equal access to better training and good-quality education (as promised in SDG 4),⁷ irrespective of their economic status, location or gender.

We found that some levels of schooling were not catered for in the process of the transition. As only those who fail the Grade 10 exam can access TVET, young people who reached Grades 11 and 12 but are then unable to go to university cannot access the training (e.g. Netsa), and therefore fall into a gap between TVET and university education.⁸ This creates

7 SDG 4 aims to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education for all by providing lifelong learning.

8 Some education officials have argued that secondary education should return to the previous position, where it ended at Grade 12. The federal government recently planned to drop the Grade 10 national exam and instead have students take the secondary school leaving exam in Grade 12. However, as yet there is no official policy change.

economic and location disparities, and serious consideration should therefore be given to providing public TVET training for all.

A mismatch between education and skills and the jobs that are available was another challenge for the transition process. In all the communities, there were too few job opportunities to accommodate the growing number of young people leaving schools, TVET, and universities. Neither public institutions nor the private sector are able to provide sufficient jobs.

The number of graduates has been increasing but there are limited jobs that fit their specific qualifications. During their childhood, young people had identified their ideal education and future occupation, but they later found out that there were no opportunities in the labour market.

6.3 Facilitating institutions

The large number of young people leaving school is putting pressure on the government to respond quickly. In addition to the existing employment institutions such as the labour office, the government has established an institution that focuses on coordinating youth employment – the JCC. The Commission works closely with training institutions (including TVET and colleges), financial institutions and employers (public, private and cooperative), as well as supporting regional institutions to facilitate youth employment.

As this paper shows, employment opportunities depend on the context. There are more local employment opportunities than other external investments that have helped to absorb a considerable number of job seekers. However, officials and young people have stated that there remains much to do in terms of expanding job opportunities.

The gender gap was relatively narrow when children were at school, but widened during the transition to the labour market. A majority of MSE cooperatives provide jobs that are considered more appropriate for boys. While boys have more options, girls seem to have very limited options. Male youth have a variety of opportunities, particularly in construction, while young females are limited to keeping poultry or some degree of vegetable growing. For example, the lucrative cobblestone cooperative businesses in Zeytuni seem to be only open to boys, while industrial parks look for female employees but the types of work they are offered are harmful and low paid.

The study also shows that some jobs, particularly in the public and private enterprises, present health risks and offer unsatisfactory pay, although employers rejected this characterisation. In line with SDG 8, which Ethiopian Government also wants to promote, increased levels of education should be translated into 'decent work' and contribute to national economic growth.⁹

Moreover, in this study it was clear that the facilitating institutions have to address major weakness in order to respond to increasing demands for youth employment. In all communities, there are local offices that coordinate the employment of young people, but these offices are poorly staffed and budgeted. Moreover, young people complained that the offices do not respond to their demands. For example, the key resource the federal government has allocated is the revolving funds earmarked for youth employment in MSEs in the communities. However, the process to apply for these funds is lengthy and bureaucratic.

9 SDG 8 calls for 'decent work and economic growth', ensuring everyone has access to productive employment and decent work.

In some contexts, there were reports of alleged corrupt practices by officials who run job creation activities and administer loans.

6.4 Mismatch between aspirations and mindsets

The mindsets of young people and even their parents are also impacting young people's transition to the labour market. We noted a key evolving dialogue in the communities around the question of who is responsible for youth employment.

Parents clearly indicated that their obligation was to help their children attend school. For them, providing good-quality education and equipping young people with marketable skills, and more importantly, employment, has to be the responsibility of the government. Young people who have had high educational and occupational aspirations since childhood also expect the government to find them jobs that match their educational levels. Those who finished college and university education expect to get permanent jobs at public or private organisations. Despite such expectations, even completing the highest level of education does not guarantee employment (as we saw with Biritu's story). On the other hand, employers and government officials consider that the issue is partially young people's attitude to certain types of work. They argue that young graduates are not willing to take the jobs that are available, and instead they tend to look for white-collar jobs which are rarely available.

Here, there is a trade-off between responding to children's aspirations and informing them about the main opportunities available to them. The children that Young Lives has followed for over two decades maintained their high educational and occupational aspirations and worked hard to realise their dreams. However, in reality, none of the young people have achieved their childhood aspirations. Even the few who were able to accomplish their educational ambitions were unable to get their dream jobs. Their current jobs are considered to be temporary and transitory. They are hoping to move to better jobs but they are not certain they will do this, because of their low educational levels and limited job opportunities.

In the context of an increasing mismatch between aspirations and available jobs, education is not fully realising its promises. As such, young people and families are questioning the value of investing in education. If education is not leading to employment, it is failing on its promises of improving the lives of those educated and contributing to national economic growth. Limited employment opportunities for educated young people mean that younger children are losing the motivation to pursue their schooling, and have started to question the benefits of education. Lower educational aspirations may lead to low aspirations for future employment.

For girls, a slow transition or an inability to move from school into employment mean that marriage is likely to occur earlier. Young girls who, against all the expectations or pressure for early marriage, complete their schooling need to get jobs. Otherwise, their parents, communities, and the young people themselves contemplate marriage. We found some girls who had pursued their schooling and rejected early marriage were now experiencing big pressure from their community to marry as they had not found employment over a long period of time (e.g. Biritu).

The mismatch between expectations and reality should be narrowed, but it is important to recognise possible unintended outcomes. Unlike some (e.g. Wellings 1982) who advocate 'reorientation' and maintain that young people should be encouraged to adjust their 'unrealistic aspiration', we argue that young people should maintain their aspirations and

employment agencies should try as hard as possible to respond to their dreams. Career guidance should focus on providing career information helpful for decision-making and problem-solving (Rogers and Creed 2000).

Career guidance should not lead to a lowering of occupational aspirations. Limiting their employment dreams reduces children's motivation to pursue the highest level of education. In contexts of high unemployment, some youth (e.g. Bereket) questioned the value of education and left school to start working. This study found that young people took up some jobs but continued to pursue skills training or higher education, change jobs or do multiple jobs. If young people's current jobs do not meet their expectations, it is important for them to use them as routes to dream jobs. Thus, career orientation should focus on motivating youth to take up existing jobs while enabling them to maintain the dream of moving onto better jobs when the opportunity arises.

7. Policy issues

Fast-growing youth unemployment is becoming a big challenge to the nation. There is an influx of unemployed young people to urban areas in search of jobs. Officials and local people in all communities reported that unemployed youth are becoming security concerns. Although youth employment is a priority for the federal and regional governments, existing capacity seems to be able to help only a very small portion of the job seekers. As this study indicates, young people are engaged in temporary and uncertain jobs. The youth unemployment bulge raises important questions. If properly addressed, this bulge could be a valuable aspect of national development.

To improve the transition from school to work, below we raise some issues that could be helpful when revisiting existing policies and programmes. Our suggestions focus on youth preparedness, facilitation of the transition, and improving available job opportunities.

7.1 Improving young people's preparation for employment

7.1.1 *Extended and uniform secondary education*

The completion of secondary school at Grade 10 has made it difficult for young people in many ways. Those who pass the Grade 10 national exam attend university preparation classes in Grades 11 and 12. If they fail in Grades 11 and 12, they then have no opportunities for further education or training. We therefore support the idea of extending secondary education up to Grade 12. This would help to provide a uniformity of transition either to university (those who pass the national exam) or to TVET training (those who do not). If this change is put in place, it would be possible to talk of a transition from 'full schooling' to 'full employment'.

7.1.2 *Improving TVET*

The weakness of schooling in preparing youth for employment has been compensated for by TVET skills training. To enhance its role, TVET should be strengthened so that it prepares young people to fit the demands of the existing job market by providing high-quality and relevant skills training. Most of the young people in this study are trained to Level I and II, but

the market mostly requires Level III and IV training. Thus, it is necessary to ensure access to training at the highest level possible. Moreover, context-focused training should be considered. This includes skills training in vegetable growing, cobblestone production, and other agricultural activities, where the main employment opportunities are found for young people in this study.

To this end, TVET should be expanded to be accessible to all eligible young people, and needs to be equipped with the necessary resources and qualified trainers. These were the obstacles that emerged in the programme.

We also found some TVET training and cooperatives favour boys over girls. This calls for serious consideration in the school-to-work transition programme to ensuring gender equality (SDG 5) by providing equal access to boys and girls.

7.2 Youth career guidance

In this study, one clear hurdle in the transition from school to work was the mismatch between youth expectations and the existing labour market. A career guidance programme is important so that young people have realistic expectations of jobs. The guidance should be designed and communicated in a way that it does not reorient them to downgrade their aspirations, but encourages them to base their expectations on the level of their education and skills. It has to leave open the chance to pursue their childhood aspirations through further education. The guidance could be included in the education curriculum, but more importantly, integrated into TVET training. Teachers and counsellors can play an important role in this regard (Savickas 1999).

A comprehensive youth employment programme should have strategies aimed at promoting attitudinal change. The guidance should involve different levels of support during young people's schooling, with the aim of helping them achieve their dreams rather than restricting their aspirations to certain occupations (Rogers and Creed 2000). Moreover, as the findings indicate, the broader expectation by the community that the government take all the responsibility for youth employment is high. Awareness-raising programmes should be provided for young people and the community to guide their job choices, and communities need to share their local resources to help their young people find employment. This task could be coordinated between the JCC and local authorities.

7.3 Strengthening institutional capacity

The JCC and other local agencies working on youth employment are playing a vital role in facilitating youth employment. However, there are a number of challenges that need attention. As the offices are poorly funded and staffed, they reported that they are unable to fulfil their plans. In some areas, local institutions were able to cover less than 50 per cent of their planned activities. Their capacity should therefore be strengthened so that they facilitate the growing youth employment demands. Moreover, while the Youth Revolving Fund is helping young people to start their own businesses, both youth and officials agree that the 10 per cent collateral and 8 per cent interest rate are too high for young people, particularly those from poor families. That discourages young people from taking loans and starting work, and needs revisiting.

7.4 Creating more jobs

Growing private investment and public projects in the study communities have directly benefited young people. All the respondents considered the expansion of job opportunities to be a national priority to reduce youth unemployment. The government should encourage private investors and local authorities to coordinate with local communities to share resources for youth self-employment. Job opportunities, as far as possible, need to reflect the skills and aspirations of young people. This would enhance human capital development by encouraging families and young people to invest in education, and contribute to national economic growth.

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The Unrealised Promises of Education: The Challenges of School to Work Transition in Ethiopia

This working paper focuses on how young men and women make the transition from school to work and the problems they encounter in doing so. It draws on Young Lives longitudinal qualitative and survey data which document the link between education and work over time.

The paper addresses the following questions: What are the patterns of school to work transitions? What jobs are available for young people? What institutional arrangements support the transition from school to work? What are the challenges? Finally, it examines the implications for policy and programming.

This working paper and the accompanying policy brief are part of a set of eight working papers and eight policy briefs on gendered transitions into young adulthood in Ethiopia.



An International Study of Childhood Poverty

About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty and transitions to adulthood, following the lives of 12,000 children in four countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam). Young Lives is a collaborative research programme led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the four study countries.

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

Young Lives Research and Policy Partners

Ethiopia

- *Policy Studies Institute*
- *Pankhurst Development Research and Consulting plc*

India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana)

- *Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad (CESS)*
- *Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalam (Women's University), Tirupati (SPMVV)*

Peru

- *Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (GRADE)*
- *Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (IIN)*

Vietnam

- *Centre for Analysis and Forecast, Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences (CAF-VASS)*
 - *General Statistics Office of Viet Nam (GSO)*
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