

# 2 Work in children's lives in Ethiopia: examples from Young Lives communities

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## Children's work in Ethiopia

The role and value of child work are under scrutiny as never before in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, where the rapid expansion of formal schooling, as well as broader social, political and economic changes, bring into sharp relief competing definitions of what a 'good childhood' should look like for this generation of children. Although working from a young age was historically considered a normal part of childhood and of socialisation processes, this view is being challenged by current policies which emphasise the negative aspects of child work, meanwhile championing the positive aspects of schooling. Yet, for many children and families, work remains a defining feature of childhood and an important part of managing everyday risk and pursuing long-term well-being. For them, school and work are not 'opposites', although many children find it difficult to juggle multiple and sometimes competing demands on their time.

In an earlier study conducted in southern Ethiopia, Abebe (2008: 3) describes these societal shifts in terms of 'the tension between young people's daily lives and their future wishes on the one hand and, on the other, what they are required to learn through formal education in order to become full members of society'. In the previous chapter, Abebe argues against a 'silo' approach to child labour in favour of attending to the broader structures and politico-economic contexts within which children's lives unfold. The current study complements Abebe's macro-focus by taking a close look at the life worlds of working children in three Ethiopian communities. In this chapter, we ask: *'What is the place for "work" in children's lives and life trajectories, and what do children themselves have to say?'*

## **Young Lives and the current study**

The current study is a part of *Young Lives* research project in Ethiopia which provides a useful example of how children's work consists of both positive and negative aspects, and how their work continues to be embedded in social, political, cultural and economic life. This micro-view allows us to see the importance of social relations and experiences of work in differing contexts and circumstances, as well as for different groups and categories of children differentiated by age, gender, location, wealth, migration history, family and sibling composition, and birth order.

*Young Lives* is a longitudinal study of childhood poverty following 3,000 children, their households and communities over a 15-year period since 2001 in each of four countries; in Ethiopia, it covers five major regions (Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Region and Tigray).

This chapter reports on analysis of qualitative data collected as part of a sub-study of children's work completed in 2013 in three *Young Lives* sites (two urban, one rural), and is contextualised within findings from the wider *Young Lives* study.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the study was to deepen understanding of the socio-biographical factors motivating children's pathways into and through work, and to record children's perspectives on the risks and benefits associated with their work. A team of experienced Ethiopian fieldworkers approached and interviewed children and young people aged between 9 and 19 years (from within and from outside the *Young Lives* sample), in order to investigate a range of children's work activities and histories.<sup>2</sup> Our analysis focuses on data collected with children: 88 individual interviews plus group-based discussions involving 75 children, evenly distributed on gender lines, but slightly weighted towards younger children who were below the legal minimum age for waged work.

We present our data in four main sections. In the next section, we present the types of work that young people do in the three sites, and how these vary by location, gender and age. The second section considers the complex relationship between school and work. In the third section we seek to understand, mainly from the perspective of the children themselves, how benefits, risks and harm from work are inter-related. The fourth section focuses on the social contexts of children's work, and on the fundamental role of children's relationships in shaping individual work histories and experiences.

## **What work which children do where**

The work that children do depends on the interplay of a range of factors, including (1) the context they grow up in and changes in the demand for (or opportunities for) child work; (2) age and gender norms and their transformations; (3) educational opportunities and changing expectations; (4) family circumstances, especially poverty

and shocks; and (5) children's relationships and networks. In this section, we will consider the first two of these.

### **Contrasting and changing community contexts**

The study was conducted at a time when transformations in the economy were bringing about rapid changes with implications for children's work.

**Leki**,<sup>3</sup> the rural site in Oromia Region, is in an area where there has been recent expansion of private irrigated commercial farms growing vegetables and flowers – an expansion which has characterised development in the Rift Valley. This has created a demand for both boys and girls in their teens to work in planting, weeding and harvesting vegetables, and for older girls to work in flower farms and vineyards. The site is close to an expanding town which offers opportunities for work in construction, transport and services. Being close to a lake and in close proximity to the town has meant that men and boys earn income from fishing, girls make fishing nets, and younger children have started to collect fish bones to sell to a new factory producing animal food.

Both urban communities are in poor areas of large cities: Addis Ababa, the national capital, and Hawassa, the regional capital of the SNNPR. Recent urban development, private investment and government-sponsored housing schemes are having a range of impacts on local communities, increasing the demand for labour, including that of children, in informal-sector work in construction, services and transport, and especially in informal petty trade. Some of the work is gendered: boys work as taxi assistants, in garages, as shoe shiners and as lottery-ticket sellers, whereas girls have more limited options, which tend to be in domestic work, food sales, waitressing, or washing clothes.

**Menderin**, the site in central Addis Ababa, is one of the poorest areas of the capital, with most households involved in the informal economy, especially in petty trade in the market area. There are many women heading households, relying on their children to help them survive. The site is adjacent to areas that have undergone much urban redevelopment, although to date it has not yet been directly affected.

**Leku**, situated near the centre of Hawassa, is also an area of informal market activities, with opportunities in petty trade and portering. Many of the residents, including children, are in-migrants with important networks and linkages to the agricultural hinterlands, and some children find employment through brokers; urban development planning is also transforming the area, although less radically and quickly than in central Addis Ababa.

We consider the work that children do under four broad categories (Bourdillon et al. 2011: 28–35): (1) household domestic and reproductive work, including unpaid care work; (2) household productive and income-generating work; (3) the child's own income-generating activities; and (4) wage employment. These categories are inter-re-

lated, and the distinctions are somewhat artificial, since children's work is embedded in the household economy and there is a degree of overlap: domestic and reproductive activities performed primarily by girls and women are vital in enabling household productive work; an activity such as preparing food may be unpaid or paid, and a catch of fish may be consumed or sold; households make decisions to allocate available labour to different tasks, and some children's own income-generating activities and employment may be initiated, sponsored, or controlled by parents or siblings, although children have a degree of agency in choice over the amount of time spent on domestic, income-generating, and paid work. In both urban and rural contexts we find all the four categories of work. However, there are variations in their relative importance, and the amount and type of work that children do depend on the local work context, as well as on schooling systems and gender–age expectations.

### **Gender–age norms, expectations and transformations**

Throughout Ethiopia, as is borne out in this study, children make an important contribution to the household economy (Boyden 2009; Heissler and Porter 2010). A major change has been the availability of work in commercial farms, which has provided opportunities for girls to earn income as well as boys. In the urban sites, gendered work norms also allocate most domestic work to girls, and work outside the home, particularly in employment, is more gendered.

### **Younger children's work**

Among the younger children some gender differentiation is visible, although this is less pronounced in the urban sites.

#### *Domestic work*

In Menderin both boys and girls run errands, clean the house, make beds and collect water; some boys as well as girls are involved in going to market, making fires, preparing food, cooking and making coffee. However, younger girls do more of the domestic work and almost all of the sibling care. In Leku (urban), both younger boys and girls fetch water, wash clothes and look after siblings. Boys are also involved in shopping, taking grain to mills, preparing food and making fires, although only girls cook and they spend more time on household chores. In Leki, the rural site, there is somewhat more gender differentiation: younger girls do most of the domestic work—cleaning, looking after younger siblings, collecting wood and water, grinding grain, brewing beer and baking *injera* (a sourdough-risen flatbread made from *teff* flour), whereas younger boys are more involved in herding and working on family farms. However, some younger boys also collect water and wood, and a few make coffee or look after siblings.

*Income-generating work*

In all three sites, some younger children are also involved in petty business for the family or by themselves, and in waged work, with more opportunities for employment in the rural site and for petty business in the urban sites. The distinction between income-generating work for the household and work by the children on their own account is more blurred among the younger children, as many work to assist their mothers or siblings, sometimes doing the preparatory work prior to sale. One young boy in Leki was supplying the fish that he caught to his brother, who sold them in town and gave him a salary. In Leki, both boys and girls collect left-over vegetables for sale, often by their mothers – although some also sell them themselves. In the urban sites, younger girls assist their mothers with petty trade and selling *injera* or preparing the dough or brewing beer. There were also cases of girls helping in family shops in both Menderin and Leki. Some boys from better-off households in Leku work for their families in restaurants or woodwork.

*Own-account work*

Work performed by both boys and girls by and for themselves in the urban sites includes selling vegetables and sugar cane in Leku and selling chewing gum in Menderin. Boys-only activities include shoe shining in both sites, portering in Leku and lottery selling in Menderin. Only girls are involved in selling cooked food. In the rural site, the main income-generating work performed by younger children consists of fishing by boys and making nets by girls.

*Waged work*

Younger children are much less involved in waged work than are older children, and this is more common in the rural site. Both boys and girls work on agricultural farms, mainly planting and collecting vegetables. Some boys earn wages from cart driving or working in shops. In the urban sites, girls earn wages — often given to their parents — as maids or babysitters.

**Older children's work***Domestic work*

Among the children in their late teens, domestic tasks are mainly assigned to girls. In Menderin, most domestic tasks within the home are performed by older girls, although some older boys do clean and make beds. In Leku, some older boys fetch water, cook, wash clothes and take care of siblings, particularly in the absence of sisters able to do so. In Leki older boys are engaged primarily in farming and fishing and they seldom do any domestic work unless there is a labour shortage in the household.

### *Income-generating work*

In Leki, there are clear gender-differentiated productive activities. Older boys work on family farms or work on their own and fish, whereas older girls brew beer or distil alcohol, trade in vegetables and fruits, and make fishing nets. In Leku there is some gender overlap: both older boys and girls are involved in the vegetable trade, and in family shops or trade. Older girls are involved in selling food and drink, whereas boys sell lottery tickets and second-hand clothes, or earn income from donkey carts or hand carts. Some older boys work in family woodwork businesses.

### *Waged work*

For older children there is some gender overlap in the rural site, whereas differentiated work is more common in the urban sites. In Leki, both boys and girls are employed in commercial farms, but only girls in the flower farms. Both boys and girls are involved in shop keeping and Safety-Net public works,<sup>4</sup> but only boys are cart drivers and only girls are waitresses. In Menderin, boys are engaged in a wider range of activities, including working in garages, as taxi assistants, in woodwork, daily labour and pool houses, whereas girls are involved only in domestic paid work and washing clothes. In Leku, some older boys as well as girls are involved in domestic work, and some girls in stone transport.

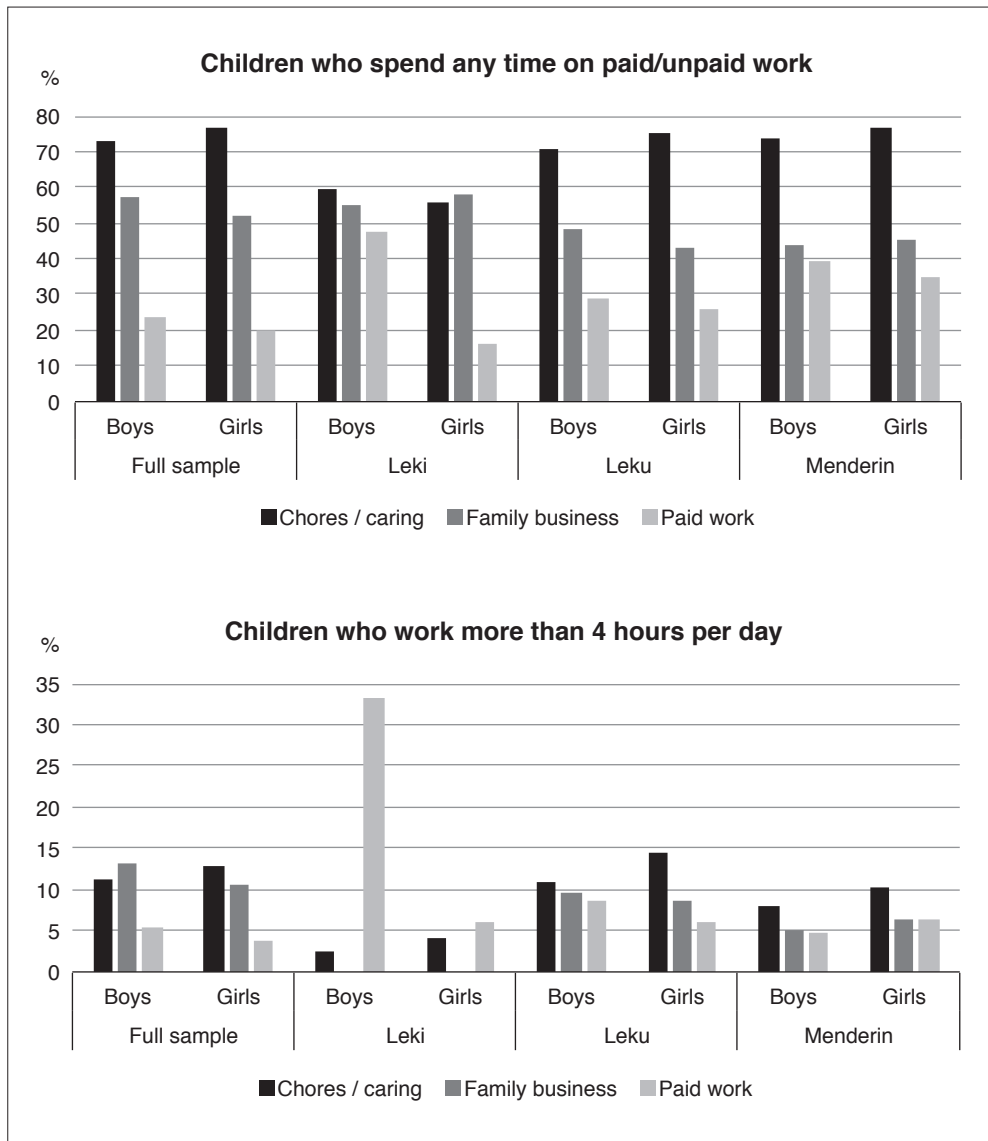
Overall girls are more involved than boys in combining work across the different categories, and the burden of work and responsibilities that they shoulder is much greater for the older girls than for boys. They undertake most of the domestic work along with their mothers, but are also involved in income-generating work for the family, often assisting their mothers in petty trade, as well as working themselves in informal activities for pay and to some extent in formal paid employment.

Gender-age norms are clearly changing. Compared with their parents, children are more likely to have to juggle the demands of school with different kinds of work, including not just reproductive work, but also assisting their households with income-generating work, and their own petty businesses or employment. Gender norms in reproductive work seem to be fairly enduring, leaving girls (especially as they grow older) with more of the burden of domestic work, if they do not migrate or leave the household. Income-generating work in the informal economy offers more opportunities in the urban communities for petty trade and related activities for boys and girls in the vicinity of markets. Paid work in the urban areas is still strongly gendered. In contrast, in the rural site waged work in the agricultural sector is a recent change, providing opportunities for younger girls to work alongside boys, and more opportunities for older girls, who are preferred in the flower farms.

### Comparing children's work across rural and urban contexts

Major rural–urban differences in children's time-use relate to rural livelihoods and household income-generating work. The rural economy depends on family farms and herds. However, the rural context has been increasingly influenced by commercial investment. In contrast, in the urban sites petty trade, mainly in food and vegetables, is more common, particularly among younger girls, and some children in better-off households work for family businesses.

Figure 1: Children's paid and unpaid work by site and gender



In terms of children's own income-generating activities, there are similarities between the rural and urban contexts, although children are involved in a greater variety of informal work types in urban areas. Trade in vegetables and some fruit is common in both the rural and urban sites, and older girls also prepare food and drink for sale. There are clear rural–urban differences in the forms of children's wage employment, with virtually no overlap, and the gender-based division of labour is more clear-cut in the urban areas. In the rural site both boys and girls work on irrigated commercial farms, and some boys and girls work as shopkeepers. Older children in the rural site sometimes work on the Public Safety-Net Program, and younger boys may exceptionally substitute for parents. Gender-differentiated work includes horse-cart driving by boys and waitressing by girls.

Finally, there is a clear gender-related difference in terms of migration patterns. In the urban sites, in-migrant children tend to be engaged in more paid work. In both urban sites, in-migrant girls are mainly involved in paid domestic work, although in Menderin one girl worked as a daily labourer in construction and sold food in the market. In-migrant boys in Menderin are involved in shoe shining, selling lottery tickets, and portering. In Leku (urban), in-migrant boys are involved in portering, working in tea rooms, selling vegetables, biscuits and second-hand clothes, and in donkey-cart and hand-cart transport. By contrast in Leki (rural), out-migration is more common, and a few older boys are involved in daily labour in towns in construction, guarding, working in mills, and as *bajaj* (mototaxi) drivers, whereas a few girls go to towns to become waitresses, and many older girls hope to migrate to the Middle East like their sisters or their peers. However, there are also some in-migrant children from other parts of Oromia and the Southern region, attracted by the prospect of waged work in the commercial farms.

## **School and work**

The relationship between school and work is complex and depends on the site context, the types of schooling available, the demand and opportunities for work, changing gender–age work norms, and household circumstances. Rural–urban differences in educational opportunities mean that rural children face greater challenges in their efforts to complete primary school and continue to secondary school. In Leki, government-provided primary schooling is available in the village on a half-day basis; to continue their education thereafter, students need to go to the nearest town, 8 km away, incurring costs for travel, accommodation, and food unless they can stay with relatives. In the urban sites, there are more schooling options, including private schools as well as evening classes, for those who do well enough and can afford it. In Addis Ababa all the schools operate on a full-day basis, but in Hawassa the government school operates a half-day system, with morning and afternoon shifts alternating every fortnight, while the private schools are full-day.



In this section, we first consider drop-out and the extent to which this relates to work; we then explore the opportunities and constraints experienced in combining school and work for the younger children, and the differences that emerge with secondary schooling.

### **Dropping out and getting back into school**

The Young Lives school survey reveals that among children in Grades 4 and 5, about 17 per cent reported having dropped out at some stage (Aurino et al. 2015). The drop-out rate for the two urban sites in this study, around 17 per cent, is similar to the average for Young Lives urban sites; but the drop-out rate at Leki is 34 per cent, the highest among all the sites and considerably higher than the average of 20 per cent for rural sites. This may be related to the availability of greater opportunities for work in commercial farming, fishing and nearby urban employment. However, the school in Leki is known to face serious problems of teacher absenteeism and poor quality of schooling, which may affect parents' and children's decisions about the value of investing in schooling (Tafere and Pankhurst, this volume). Of all Young Lives sites, Leki had the lowest percentage of children who reported repeating a grade. At seven per cent this was almost half the average of 13 per cent in Oromia sites and far less than the rural average of 20 per cent: allowing students to continue to the next grade, despite poor performances and absences, may be an indicator of poor school quality.

Several children currently at school who reported having dropped out at some stage attributed their drop-out to illness affecting them or their parents. For example, Gudina, a boy aged 13, started school late at the age of 10, since he was the first son and his parents needed him to herd the cattle. While in first grade, he fell down a ravine, suffered a serious head injury, and spent a long time in hospital. As a result he dropped out of school for two years, but has started again and is in the first grade.

*Table 1: School attendance and drop-out by site, gender and age cohort*

School attendance	Gender	At school			Dropped out			All children		
		Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both
Leki	Younger	8	8	<b>16</b>	2	1	<b>3</b>	10	9	<b>19</b>
	Older	0	3	<b>3</b>	5	3	<b>8</b>	5	6	<b>11</b>
	All	8	11	<b>19</b>	7	4	<b>11</b>	15	15	<b>30</b>
Leku	Younger	7	5	<b>12</b>	1	3	<b>4</b>	8	8	<b>16</b>
	Older	5	7	<b>12</b>	2	0	<b>2</b>	7	7	<b>14</b>
	All	12	12	<b>24</b>	3	3	<b>6</b>	15	15	<b>30</b>
Menderin	Younger	6	8	<b>14</b>	2	1	<b>3</b>	8	9	<b>17</b>
	Older	6	4	<b>10</b>	1	0	<b>1</b>	7	4	<b>11</b>
	All	12	12	<b>24</b>	3	1	<b>4</b>	15	13	<b>28</b>
Sub-total	Younger	21	21	<b>42</b>	5	5	<b>10</b>	26	26	<b>52</b>
	Older	11	14	<b>25</b>	8	3	<b>11</b>	19	17	<b>36</b>
Total number	All children	32	35	<b>67</b>	13	8	<b>21</b>	45	43	<b>88</b>

Reasons for dropping out were mainly related to accidents or illness of the child, to accidents, illness, death, or other problems facing a parent or close family member, and in a few cases to economic problems facing the household, notably poor harvests and food shortage in the rural areas and cost of living and high rents in the urban areas.

Health problems loom large in many of the children's accounts, as in the following case. Banchi, a girl aged 12 living in Leki, dropped out of school from Grade 3, when her father fell and broke his leg, and then she and her mother caught typhoid, and her family had to borrow money and rely on friends in order to survive. In addition to household tasks, collecting wood and water and looking after siblings, she sells sugarcane and works on commercial farms. She hopes to rejoin school next year but plans to continue with her sugarcane business.

After dropping out because of ill health, children sometimes start engaging in work and then do not return to school during that year. For instance, Demiksa, a 13-year-old boy in Leki, dropped out last semester from Grade 6 when he had a toothache; he started working in his uncle's shop for 300 birr, half of which is given to his parents. At weekends he keeps cattle and farms for his parents, and he also trades sugarcane. He hopes to resume school next year in the morning shift and earn money by driving a horse cart in the afternoons.

Sometimes a particular problem or 'shock' might trigger temporary drop-out, but further problems may prevent a child from going back to school. Mule, a 13-year-old boy in Leki who is in Grade 3, dropped out of school when his father, who worked as a guard, was imprisoned after the theft of a pump. Mule did not resume school, as he had a neck swelling. He works on the family farm and herds livestock, works on commercial farms for wages, fishes in the fasting season, and drives a cart two days a week.

Returning to school may be contingent on other family members resolving the problem, as in the following case from Leku. Fourteen-year-old Felegebirhan dropped out and began working as a daytime domestic worker when his family could not afford the rent on their house, which was more than 60 per cent of his mother's income. He is hopeful that he will return to school when his older brother delivers on his promise to cover the rent.

Sometimes children have been in and out of school for a while, as in the case of Mestawut, now 18, living in Leku. She had attended school only sporadically due to economic problems since she was 12; she began selling *kolo* (a grain snack) that her mother roasted; her parents divorced and her mother became paralysed; she then migrated with her father when she was 13, and they went through a hard time doing daily labour on construction sites; so she began selling vegetables. She would like to become a daytime domestic worker, to enable her to go to night school.

In the urban sites, many in-migrants were not at school, and in Menderin all the drop-outs were in-migrants. However, migration was not generally the cause of their dropping out of school, and some, such as Ejigu, aged 16, had never been to school.

He worked on his family farm in Amhara Region and then decided to migrate with his brothers to Addis Ababa and now works as a porter. Gedion, aged 13, did attend school, but he often missed classes to help his father on the farm, which affected his school work. He heard from friends about the possibility of making money selling lottery tickets in the capital and dropped out of Grade 4 when he came to Addis Ababa; but he hopes to go back and resume his schooling. One boy in Leku even migrated *because* he was not allowed to go to school. Feleke, now aged 18, lost his mother when he was 14 and his father when he was 16; he was taken in by his uncle, who would not let him continue his schooling. Angered and frustrated, Feleke migrated to Hawassa and, after working as a shopkeeper and in a tea room, he rented a hand cart, with which he now earns a living.

Once they drop out, some children do not feel comfortable going back to school. Salayish, a girl in Leki now aged 16, stopped attending school while in Grade 5, to help her family when the harvest was poor. The next year she could not face the prospect of going back to school in a class with younger children and decided to get married at the age of 14.

The evidence from the three sites thus suggests that dropping out of school is often not a direct result of working. Rather in many cases shocks affecting their households led children to drop out of school (temporarily or permanently) and contribute to the family income. Often additional shocks prevented children from returning to school, although many still had hopes that this would be possible soon, and we have seen that some of those currently in school had dropped out at some stage. Among the migrants to urban areas, lack of schooling opportunities, or family circumstances that did not allow them to go to school, were often an incentive to migrate, rather than the migration resulting in school drop-out.

In some cases children who had dropped out were able to go back to school with the income that they earned. Erist, a 15-year-old girl in Leki who is in Grade 7, manages to work after school; she is engaged in brewing beer, making fishing nets and doing agricultural waged work, as well as working on the family farm and performing domestic tasks, including washing, grinding grain and cooking. She was able to go back to school this year with the money that she made which enabled her to cover her own costs as well as helping her mother to pay *iddir* (funeral association) contributions.

### **Juggling work and school**

The ways in which children manage both school and work depend on the schooling system, their sex and their parents' expectations (cf. Orkin 2012). In Leki, the half-day morning school means that children can do some domestic or farm work before school; but most of it is done in the afternoon and weekends. Asmamaw, a 13-year-old boy in Grade 3, works on the family farm before school and tends cattle afterwards

and at weekends; he does domestic work and goes to market; he collects left-over vegetables for his mother to sell; he works on Safety-Net public works, replacing his parents; he also fishes in his spare time. Gadise, a girl in Grade 5, as the oldest girl in the family performs domestic tasks including cleaning, grinding and cooking, works on the family farm weeding in the afternoons, substitutes for her parents on Safety-Net public works, sells left-over vegetables on Saturdays, and does waged farming work during school holidays. She says she is absent from school only if her mother is ill, which happened on three days this year. Fishing by boys tends to take up a full day and, unless they are doing it only at weekends, it can make it more difficult for them to keep up with school. Fantaw, who is in Grade 6, began farming at the age of 11, when his father was unwell. At the age of 12 he started selling fish and now fishes four days a week for his brother, who pays him 300 birr a month. He says that the fishing interferes with his education but he hopes to continue with his studies and migrate, if possible abroad.

In Leku, the government-run shift school enables children to work before or after classes, depending on the shift, while some work more at weekends. Fiseha, aged 12, is in Grade 6 and shines shoes at weekends. Yilma, an 11-year-old, is in Grade 4 and helps his brother with his garage work, but mainly works in the family restaurant before and after school. In addition to domestic chores, the girls are mainly involved in petty trade. Taitu, aged 13, is in Grade 6 and sells boiled potatoes and sugarcane after school.

In Menderin, the full-day schooling makes it more difficult for children to manage school and work. Some boys work mainly at weekends. Mekonen, aged 12 and in Grade 4, sells boiled potatoes and says he does not miss school to work. Two 13-year-old boys who sell chewing gum mentioned sometimes missing school in the afternoons, although one of them said his absences were not due to work but because he does not feel like being at school. Some of the girls are involved in petty trade after school or at weekends. Shemsia, aged 12 and in Grade 4, sells goods on the street; her mother buys tissue paper, biscuits, sweets, cigarettes, mobile cards, and chewing gum, and Shemsia sells them after school. Filagot, who is the same age and in the same grade, sells *injera* after school for up to six hours, giving the money that she earns to her mother. Most of those working say that they do not miss school and manage to work after school or at weekends. However, Yimenashu, a 13-year-old girl in Grade 6, sells lollies and is sometimes late or absent from school in the afternoon; her grandmother begged her teachers to be considerate about her need to work, and they are understanding.

### **Secondary school, private schooling and evening classes**

Opportunities and inequalities in education are more apparent among the older children, and differences between the rural and urban sites and between rich and poor are

accentuated by private school and evening classes, although evening classes can also offer opportunities for working children, especially boys.

In Leki, none of the children have been to private school or attended evening classes, and joining secondary school in town presents challenges of distance and cost. Both the children who had gone on to secondary school dropped out. The boy, Moti, dropped out of Grade 9 because his family could not finance his education in town, where he now lives earning a living from fishing. The girl, Edilam, completed Grade 10 four years ago, but did not have good enough grades to continue.

In Leku (urban), there were cases of girls in private schools and boys in evening classes – but not the reverse. Some girls in full-day private schools are also involved in paid work, such as 13-year-old Maralem (Grade 6) who sells cabbages and *kitta* pancakes when she finishes school at 3:30. Several of the boys attending evening classes are migrants. Serekebirhan, aged 14, migrated to Hawassa after his father died and, after portering on the streets, was taken in by his uncle and started selling biscuits through a middleman.

In Menderin, there are government and private day schools and evening schools. Some older girls are involved in types of work that can be done after school or at weekends. For instance, Mistre, an 18-year-old, is in Grade 12 in a government day school. She earns money braiding hair in her spare time after school and at weekends. Some boys find it difficult to avoid missing school for work. Bekele, aged 18, is in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in a government regular school; he works as a taxi assistant and says he sometimes misses school to work. However, evening schools can enable older children to work during the day. Yared, another 18-year-old boy, completed 10<sup>th</sup> grade; he attends a private college in the evenings, learning accounting, and works in a pool house to earn money. Unlike in Leku, some girls go to evening schools. Misrak, aged 18, completed 10<sup>th</sup> grade, studies at a private evening college and works in a brick-making association. She sometimes misses classes because the work is far away and makes her tired, affecting her concentration.

Indeed, for most children, combining work and school is a daily balancing act, obliging them to juggle multiple demands on their time. Children's pathways through schooling are, therefore, intimately linked to their pathways through work and to their evolving household responsibilities—not least because many use their earnings from work to cover the costs of their schooling. Although some types of work and working conditions are not compatible with local school systems, we have noted that one of the main reasons why pupils miss school is illness and injury (their own or others), rather than the demands of their everyday work. From children's perspectives, it is important to be able to balance school and work, but the risks and benefits of their work need to be assessed in broader terms than schooling alone. In the next section, we examine children's definitions and assessments of the positive and negative aspects of their work.

## Children's views of the benefits, risks and harm associated with their work

The benefits, risks and harm that children face because of their engagement in particular types of work can be properly understood only in the context of children's everyday living environments and their relationships, and with regard to children's own definitions, priorities and views. We find that there are risks associated with most of the work that children do, but that risks do not necessarily translate into actual harm. And even in situations where children report limited choice and agency in their work, they identify benefits derived from it. In real life, children often accept the risks as inevitable and undertake work for the advantages that they see in it. We define benefits as the advantages that children see resulting from their involvement in the work. Risks are the potential problems, hazards or challenges associated with the work in which the children are involved. Harm comprises the negative consequences that are actually experienced by the children because of their engagement in the work that they do.

### Benefits

Benefits mentioned by the children can be categorised into benefits primarily for themselves and benefits for their families. However, those who said that they derive the primary benefit themselves often also mentioned that their families or siblings benefit in some ways, either directly or indirectly. Likewise, those who said that the major gain was for the family tended also to mention personal benefits, including instances when they were employed by other people.

Most of the children in all the three communities who were engaged in paid activities or income-generating work mentioned that their work enabled them to become at least partly independent of their care givers, in that they could fulfil their own basic needs. For example, they were able to contribute to the costs of food, clothes, shoes, school materials, and school and college fees, as well as sanitary and cosmetic goods for girls. Most of these children, except those who are migrant workers, rely on their parents for shelter and food; so the income that they obtain is a supplement to parental care. Although the children identify themselves as the primary beneficiaries of the income that they earn, they also mention the relief that it gives to care givers in terms of meeting children's needs. Many children, regardless of their age, save part of their earnings in *equb* (credit associations), which often require daily deposits. Zewdnes, an older girl in Menderin who is engaged in domestic work and earns 200 *birr*, saves her money at the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia.

Helping parents with household chores is common, and most of the children mention this as benefiting their families. Although some children said that it was only their parents who benefited, most said that they benefited indirectly or directly as part



of the family. Some of those who take on more household chores free their parents or elder siblings to engage in paid work or income-generating activities, particularly in the two urban areas. Bitew, a younger boy in Menderin, felt that taking on household chores to free his mother to engage in income-generating activities was part of his filial responsibility; he said, "most boys do not obey [their parents] and they will regret it when they become adults". Those in the rural site support their families in agricultural activities, which has a direct connection with family well-being as it is linked with production and subsistence. Children who were involved in family businesses felt that they were making a useful contribution to the household income.

Some children who are engaged in paid activities give all their earnings to their families. Boys seem to have more independence and control over their income than girls, and they face less pressure to contribute to the household.

Some children in the two urban sites had migrated away from their families and were sending money to their parents and siblings living in other areas. Children were able to help younger siblings or sick family members from their savings. Gedion, a 13-year-old immigrant boy in Menderin who sells lottery tickets, said, "I send 100 to 250 *birr* to my family every month. My parents are able to buy clothes and school materials for my two younger siblings." Bamlaku, another boy in Menderin, aged 13, whose father had died and who sells chewing gum to support himself and his mother, said:

I had saved around 300 *birr* over the last six months. Then my mother got seriously sick. She had no money to be treated. I gave her all the 300 *birr* for medical treatment. Now she is very well. I am happy to have done so; I used the money for the right purpose. I would be sad if my mother did not get the treatment because of financial problems.

Another way of looking at the benefits is in terms of what the children think they gain, irrespective of what they are doing. The obvious reward for most of the children engaged in work for pay or in income-generating activities is financial. For children employed in paid domestic work, another gain is that they receive food and shelter and also, depending on the good will and commitment of employers, access to schooling.

Gaining skills was another prominent benefit that children associated with some types of work. Those who are engaged mainly in household chores (mostly girls, but also some boys), appreciate that their skills will be important for their future life. Some who worked in small businesses considered skills such as financial management and the handling of customers as useful for possible future engagement in business. A few boys working in garages, as taxi assistants, and in woodwork mentioned gaining skills for the specific professions that they want to pursue. Mersha, an older boy in Menderin, who is engaged in woodwork, is also studying woodwork in a technical school. He said, "I like the work and I will be competent after finishing my studies as

it enables me to put theory into practice.” Girls who were involved in different self-initiated small businesses and those who work for their family business said that they were learning financial management skills and how to deal with customers, which might help them in their future life.

There are also non-material social gains that are highly valued by children. Many children mentioned praises and blessings from their care givers, from God, or from both. These are seen by the children as very important, especially in contrast to reprimands, punishments, insults, or curses if they fail to do the required work or perform badly, which can have negative impacts in their lives. Social acceptance and recognition by family members and people in their neighbourhood is also seen by some children as invaluable. Some children were proud that after they started to work their family members began to respect and consult them. This was especially true in the urban site in Addis Ababa, because parents and other people value children's engagement in work for preventing them from becoming idle and hence falling victim to bad habits like smoking, or chewing *chat* (a stimulant leaf). Mersha commented:

I believe that my behaviour has improved after starting the work. I believe that my work has saved me from spending time from doing silly things like many other youth in the community, which would have no use for their future life. I think I would have been one of the bad boys in my neighbourhood who spend their time in video houses, who do not go to school, who have bad relationship with their families, who are disliked by the community, and who have no feeling of worth for their lives.

Psychological satisfaction was also mentioned by many children, who felt proud to be able to play their part in supporting their care givers and siblings. This was common for all the children who play a major role in supporting their families across the three sites.

In reviewing the benefits identified by children, we have shown that it is not only, or even primarily, the material financial aspects or the skills that they acquire that children see as advantages motivating them to work; the psychological satisfaction, social approval and moral fulfilment that they derive from their work are also important to their sense of purpose and self-worth.

## **Risks**

Risks that children faced can be divided into physical accidents, health-related risks, economic threats, social risks, and gender-related problems. Unlike benefits, risks were not mentioned by all the children in the study. Most of the risks that were mentioned are specific to the type of work performed, and they tend to be physical.

Physical risks of accidents were the most frequently mentioned. Many children, mostly girls but also some younger boys in all the sites, who were working in house-



hold chores, whether for their families or for others, mentioned the risk of burning their hands or cutting their fingers while cooking. Some children in the urban sites mentioned electric shocks while using stoves (mentioned by younger girls and boys and older girls) and working on electrical systems of cars (cited by older boys who work in garages).

The next most important group of risks mentioned by many children are health-related. The risk of headaches and backaches was mentioned in the rural site by many children engaged in agricultural work (including unpaid work for the family) and in waged work that is tiring and exposes them to the sun for long hours; such risks were also cited by boys and girls involved in petty trade in open-air markets, and by boys involved in portering.

Another important category includes risks related to the workplace. Dangerous machines were mentioned by children working in wood workshops in Addis Ababa, but others who were engaged in similar activity in the other urban site did not mention this. Exposure to harmful chemicals was another risk mentioned by children working in flower farms. Car accidents were mentioned, especially in the two urban sites. These were often mentioned by children who work as taxi assistants and those who move around as ambulant petty traders, or still others who work by the roadside as shoe shiners and traders.

Some children also mentioned economic and financial risks. Children who generate income from petty trade mentioned theft and cheating (often by older children). Others involved in wage or other paid activities, especially those engaged in agriculture, mentioned employers' refusal to pay, or delays in payment, or failure to pay the full agreed sum.

There were also social and gender-based risks. These included punishments, curses, insults, intimidation and reprimands, which were mentioned by some younger girls and boys and older girls. These mostly resulted from failing to perform tasks satisfactorily. Girls working as maids mentioned the risk of rape. Gender discrimination by employers was mentioned by younger girls in the rural site. This included their preference for hiring boys in the first place and not paying equal sums for similar work. Some girls in the rural site also mentioned being frightened by boys on the way to engage in waged work.

## **Harm**

The actual harm that children encountered was mentioned much less frequently than perceived risks. Like the risks, most of the incidents of harm are related to the type of work in which children are engaged, and to their working conditions, and they tend to be physical.

In general, children engaged only in household chores and family businesses reported less harm. However, some, mainly girls and some younger boys, mentioned

injuries such as minor cuts while chopping onions or splitting wood, and minor burns while making fire or cooking. Three cases of broken arms and legs were also reported – two in the rural site. Gadise, a younger girl, broke her hand while carrying a sack of tomatoes, and Mekuanint, a younger boy, hurt his leg while working on Safety-Net public works. The third case is that of Misrak, an older girl in Addis Ababa who worked in a brick-making association. Some children reported backaches and headaches, especially in the rural site, where most are involved in agricultural work and many boys in fishing, and in the urban site, where boys are engaged in portering. Some children who worked outdoors said that they had caught colds, flu or typhoid while at work.

A few children mentioned sustaining psychological harm, notably children working as domestic workers, who were intimidated and thus felt undermined by their employers; these were mostly girls.

In some cases, work threatened children's schooling because they were not allowed to go to school until they had finished their work, or they were too tired or late to attend. Some said arriving late or missing school negatively affected their performance, with potential knock-on effects on their future life chances.

In sum, context is vital for understanding children's definitions of the benefits, risks and harm associated with their work, and why, for example, they often pursue work that they themselves rank highly in terms of risk. Most children's work poses some risks and offers some benefits, and all children perceive positive aspects in their work that often go beyond financial remuneration. Even those children who are under strong pressure by family to work, or whose difficult circumstances make work seem inevitable, mentioned some benefit – for themselves directly, and/or for their families.

## **Children's relationships**

So far in this chapter we have described the types of work that children in our study do, as well as children's views on the risks, harm and benefits associated with their work, and how these reflect differences rooted in gender, age, location and poverty. This final section focuses on the social context of children's work, and on the fundamental role of children's relationships in shaping individual work histories and experiences. Our analysis identified three important aspects of children's relationships which we explore here. The first relates to the role of children's networks in getting started in work, in changing jobs, and in mediating the risks and protective factors for individual children. The second aspect concerns how children's work is organised in relation to adults' work through different relations of dependence and interdependence. The third concerns household relations, and the ways in which shocks and changes in family circumstances motivate and mould individual work histories across childhood. Although material factors are a major reason why many children in the study work, we

argue that the forces involved are more complex and cannot be reduced to 'poverty' alone. Rather, a relational view draws attention to the way in which children negotiate poverty and work in the context of their relationships, including their evolving roles and identities within their families, peer groups and communities.

### **The role of children's networks**

The norm of children starting work from a young age has been amply documented in the Ethiopian literature and is confirmed by our study (Boyden 2009; Heissler and Porter 2010). However, there is less evidence about how children become involved in paid work. Many children reported that they were nine or ten years old when they first began earning money, although a few started earlier. In Leki, Bona guarded his family fields from birds and pests (unpaid), and by the age of eight he was getting paid 150 birr per month to protect another family's maize crop from animals. When he was 13, he started working in the irrigation fields alongside friends who got him the job and taught him the techniques. His friends also taught him how to fish, which has since become his main source of livelihood. Indeed, children's access to paid work often relies heavily on the quality of their social networks, as sources of information about job availability, for putting in a 'good word' to potential employers, for imparting relevant skills, for offering mutual protection in the work place, and for supplying loans and start-up funds.

#### *Getting started*

In rural Leki, where children's paid work is mainly agricultural (working on other farmers' or investors' land), there is less need for 'start-up' funds, compared with the types of work done by children in the cities, which often require initial investments, however small. Nonetheless, in rural areas, peer relations are particularly important for initiating children into work, with younger children often shadowing older ones in the fields until they can perform at their level. Kelela, a ten-year-old girl, is a good example: "Initially when I started doing waged work [aged nine], I was going with older children and watching what they were doing on the farm. It is in this way that I gained some knowledge and started doing the work on my own initiative." Another popular activity among young children (particularly girls) is selling sugarcane, which children can do alone or in groups and which they can fit around schooling and other commitments; many had been initiated by friends who were already selling sugarcane.

Children have their own networks which differ from those of adults, and children often help and encourage each other to work without the influence of adults. For example, 15-year-old Erist (female, Leki) recalled: "Once I encouraged my friend, who was dependent on her parents, to start this work [making fishing nets] and now that's what she's doing." This was also the case in the urban neighbourhoods, where the visibility of working children seemed to motivate other children to work in particular

occupations, such that when they were asked why they chose a particular occupation, many children responded that they “got the idea” when they “saw other children”.

For example, Hirba was 16 years old when he migrated to Hawassa (Leku) following the death of his parents; he met a boy renting the room next to his who was selling second-hand t-shirts, and who initiated him into the business. Two years on, Hirba claims to have helped six other boys in his neighbourhood to get started in this line of work. Young people are active in tapping into their own networks to facilitate other children's work, especially when they associate work with improving well-being. In Addis Ababa, 13-year-old Bamlaku (male, sells chewing gum) helped a friend to move from begging to selling chewing gum, “...because the child does not get food most of the time, and he was begging me for money. I thought that he was facing food shortage. I advised him to start the business, so he's working and covers his and his sister's daily meals if possible.”

Children also rely on their family networks to access paid work, including instances when they require start-up capital. The majority of children in our study who needed an initial investment secured small loans or contributions from their parents, grandparents or other family members, and in a few cases from neighbours or boyfriends. Children in the cities reported greater need for initial loans, compared with children in the rural site, especially those wishing to get involved in petty trade. They borrowed money to buy their first small stock, for example of sugarcane, lottery tickets or potatoes, and they paid back the loans from their takings, then reinvested the rest in new stock. Thirteen-year-old Taitu in Hawassa is a good example of this; last year there was nobody in the household who was earning money, there was a food shortage at home, and she temporarily dropped out of school. She thought of selling sugarcane and asked her mother for a loan to buy her first stalks of cane. She paid the loan back and bought more sugarcane; over time she has been able to use the money saved from sugarcane sales to buy potatoes, which she boils and sells in the evenings, and she has since returned to school.

Sometimes children's care givers take out loans on their behalf and then the children work to pay off the debt. For example, Eskindir (aged nine) started working when his mother was unable to pay for his semester school fees (50 birr). His family pitched in and gave his mother a loan to cover the fees, and Eskindir started selling sugarcane to pay them back. These examples illustrate how children's paid work may fit into broader family strategies of securing education, livelihoods and well-being. Indeed, decisions to invest in children's early ‘careers’ often represent collective interests and well-being. For example, Fiseha (aged 12, Leku) was raised by his grandmother since his mother left him when he was a baby, and he does not know his father's whereabouts. His grandmother was getting old and her health deteriorated in the past few years so that she was unable to continue selling charcoal and potatoes, which was their main source of income. She encouraged Fiseha, at the age of ten, to start shining

shoes. The grandmother borrowed 300 birr, which was used to buy soap, a sponge, a brush and kiwi cream. He eventually paid his grandmother back so that she could clear the loan, and nowadays, after he has contributed to household expenses and his own needs, he is able to save small amounts of his earnings in a wooden box.

### *Migration*

Several children in the study who were working in Hawassa and Addis Ababa were migrants whose relocation was typically prompted by a household shock or by chronic poverty. In these cases, sibling and peer networks played a vital role in facilitating their migration. Some children called on distant family acquaintances and other members of their ethnic group for support when they arrived. Boys were more likely than girls to report precarious arrivals, in the sense that some boys slept rough on the streets until they were able to secure shelter and earn money, and their jobs were generally in the public sphere (carrying loads, assisting taxi drivers, etc.). For example, Serekebirhan migrated to Hawassa two years ago when he was 12 years old, following the death of his father (his mother died in childbirth). He moved there with his brother and a few of their friends from the village. They slept on the streets and tried to make a living portering around the marketplace. One day, he unexpectedly met his 'uncle' on the street and was taken into his home and helped to get a job selling biscuits; his uncle acted as a guarantor for Serekebirhan, which is sometimes a requirement for securing a job.

Young female migrants tended to move directly into the homes of relatives or with employers (as domestic maids). Live-in domestic work appears to increase girls' vulnerability, since, although family networks may be useful for relocating girls from rural to urban households, once in the city, the girls risk social isolation and being cut off from potentially protective social networks by the nature of their work. They are frequently at the vulnerable end of the three cross-cutting hierarchies of class, age and gender (Bourdillon et al. 2011: 157). The case of 13-year-old Sinidu demonstrates the basis of risk in gender, age and poverty, as well as the fragility of children's protective networks in migration contexts. She had been raised by her grandmother since she was a new-born, when her parents split up, and when she was 11 years old she relocated to live with her father in Addis Ababa. She enrolled in first grade (although she was in third grade in the village). Within a year, her father decided that she would begin work as a housemaid (aged 12). She explained, "I was not able to refuse because he did not consult me on the matter... he already agreed to send me." In the first household there were four children (two older), and she had a heavy work load and long hours, and she was punished often. She was not allowed to attend school, and she could not leave the household compound. Her earnings were given directly to her father. Sinidu recalled how one morning she was at home alone with the eldest son, who entered her room when she was sleeping and tried to sexually assault her, but she escaped. When

her father found out, he moved her into a new household; but work conditions there were also poor: she was ordered around and beaten. With this family, however, she was allowed to go to evening school, where she developed a close relationship with a teacher. She described the moment when things changed for her:

One day the house owner beat me seriously just as I was getting ready to go to school... I sat in the class crying with sorrow. My teacher... she came to me and we talked together. She made me to calm down and she called my father and she asked him why he let me face such problems. She warned him that she would report him to the government ... then he let me leave that house.

The father felt pressured by the teachers, who subsequently helped Sinidu to enrol in full-time day education. She continues to do paid work and she believes that by working she makes her father happy, which is important to her.

In sum, there were positive and negative accounts of migration and of work, and children's experiences were in large degree mediated by the quality and strength of their social relationships.

### *Families and strangers*

It is widely assumed that working for family means better work conditions and promotion of children's well-being through unproblematic socialisation processes, but we found that working for family is not necessarily more protective or positive than working for strangers. Children sometimes experience domestic work as confining or less rewarding than paid work (cf. Bourdillon et al. 2011: 32), and they wish for activities outside the household: "I want to go out of the home and I can play on the way" (Rashida, age 10, Menderin). For others, it is more about the quality of working relations, and children reported a wide spectrum of experience. For example, 13-year-old Kiya works for his father, renting out a set of speakers for weddings and other events. Kiya did not complain about not getting paid for his work, but he did show concern for his relationship with his father: "My father is an odd person. He does not understand any of my ideas. He does not want to listen to what I want to say. I cannot say 'no.'" In Menderin, 13-year-old Gedion's relationship with his older brothers is similarly strained: having migrated with him to the city, Gedion hands all of his earnings from lottery-ticket sales to his eldest brother, who controls how the money is spent. He described how he had gone to bed the night before in tears because the brother had broken his promise to buy him new clothes and shoes. He feels unable to confront his brothers because he gets yelled at and is told that he must work to live there, lest they send him back to the village, "where I'll not see a single cent".

At the same time, there are positive examples of children working for strangers, who sometimes support children to save money and to continue in school. Fourteen-



year-old Demelash is perhaps an exceptional case, having fled violence at home and migrated on his own to Hawassa. He used a broker to find employment as a live-in domestic worker and established a good relationship with his employer, who allowed him to enrol in school (Grade 5). Demelash stressed that much hinges on the goodwill of employers, and that good employers can be life changing.

### **Links between children's work and adults' work**

Children's and adults' work must be seen as interconnected and as part of shared socio-economic strategies. We find children's biographical data particularly valuable for examining how their work is organised in relation to adults' work through different micro-relations of dependence and interdependence. We include in our analysis other intra-household factors shaping the work that children do, such as sibling composition and the child's relationship to the head of household. These links are briefly described, with examples, before we move on to the next section, which takes a deeper look at children's work histories within the context of their households.

#### *Children working alongside adults*

Many children started off their working lives by accompanying a parent or a sibling on the job, before eventually transitioning into independent work. For example, in Menderin, Shemsia began assisting her mother and sister as an itinerant trader (*suk-bederete*, literally 'carrying your shop on your chest') when she was nine years old, and two years later her mother provided her with start-up money so that she could go independent. She said that selling with her mother and sister gave her courage to work independently, but she continues to hand over most of her earnings to her parents. Twelve-year-old Filagot is also engaged in petty trade and sells *injera*, which she began to do at the age of nine; she would stand guard over the products and call her mother when customers came to buy. By the age of 11, Filagot was selling *injera* on her own in the marketplace, and there is a sense of pride in how she talks about this transition to independent work.

I believe that I have better skills [now]. I learned how I can attract customers... I can do everything for myself. I can do these activities even in the absence of my mother. I think that it will be useful to show for my children what [work] I was doing when I was their age.

Thus, it is difficult to tease out who is dependent on whom when livelihood responsibilities are dynamic and shared across the generations, and roles gradually shift from parents having a guiding and supporting role to children assuming greater responsibility for themselves and others. In some cases, parents who initially involved children under their guidance become positioned as dependants of their children in the context of work. Twelve-year-old Mekonen in Menderin provides a clear example. His father

died when he was very young; rather than leaving Mekonen alone at home, for years his mother took him with her when she went to sell boiled potatoes in the marketplace. Recently, he has again started to work closely with his mother, who cannot read or write, in response to concerns that she was being cheated by customers. He said that because he is able to calculate sales and give correct change to customers “no one can deceive her”, and her income is improving.

### *Children substituting for adults*

Another way in which children's work is linked to adults' work is through substitution: children replace adults in work that is primarily considered the adult's responsibility. In rural Leki, it was not unusual for children to report filling in for parents in the Productive Safety-Net Program (PSNP), although the minimum age for participation is technically 16 (Tafere and Woldehanna 2012: 20). Generally, children did not like PSNP work; the tasks were difficult (digging, planting, carrying stones, etc.) and the work was often located in the sloping hills. Thirteen-year-old Mekuanint does PSNP work to replace his parents, who are both experiencing poor health. In his view, PSNP work is risky, tiring and “heavy for children my age”; he was injured last year when he fell into a ditch. Nonetheless, he said that the local administration and programme officials do not prevent him from joining in. Other children reported substituting for their parents in PSNP when the parents preferred to attend to other (perhaps better-paid) work elsewhere.

Not all substitution is so negative or risky. For example, several children reasoned that, by taking on the bulk of housework, they freed up parents and older siblings to take on paid work outside the home. In the children's view, this was a kind of substitution that brought benefit to the family. Children also substitute for adults in paid work. Abtew (Menderin) has been doing paid work since the age of 12 – collecting iron and carrying loads. Now aged 17, in addition to working in a woodwork shop he substitutes for his mother, guarding the communal water pipe in the neighbourhood, usually after he returns home from school. He does not feel that he has a choice, since his mother was given the chance by the local authorities to earn money by taking responsibility for the pipe. He reasons that if he is not present at the pipe, disputes might break out, which would compromise his mother's reputation and therefore their main source of income.

Other processes of work substitution are more gradual, and are typically in response to the reduced work capacities of ageing grandparents or parents. The relationship of 13-year-old Yimenashu with her grandmother is an apt example (Menderin). When she was one year old, her father died and her mother left, so she was raised by her grandmother, who prepared and sold *injera* for an income. When the grandmother felt unable to continue the *injera* business, Yimenashu suggested she switch to *beredo* (flavoured ices). Now, the grandmother prepares the ice at home and



Yimenashu sells it: "It is because my grandmother cannot do it because she is getting older and unable to perform some of the work... and she also cannot sell the ice in the road or at school. So I have no choice but to do this activity."

These cases spotlight two scenarios of children's changing work: one shows children taking over responsibility from ageing parents as a kind of basic survival option; the other presents children taking on less valuable/well-paid work or unpaid work to enable adults to engage in more lucrative work. And we documented a third related scenario, where the money that children earn is used directly by adults to initiate new separate business ventures, in which the children may have little or no involvement, or from which they derive no benefit. For example, when 14-year-old Hamere's parents died, she moved to Hawassa to live with relatives. She cooks and cleans, as well as earning money as a housemaid (in a different household). She turns over her earnings to her relatives in exchange for being able to stay with them, and they used the money to start their own business.

#### *Division of child–adult responsibilities within a shared job*

There are many practical reasons why families divide a shared job between children and adults: it may save time and be more efficient, or it may fit in with different individuals' schedules. For example, in Hawassa (Leku), one of nine-year-old Ephrem's main jobs is to purchase each morning the biscuits and bread that his mother later sells at a bank for the tea and coffee break. He is still in school, so cannot sell the biscuits at that time.

In Yimenashu's case (above), part of the reason why she started selling ices was her grandmother's inability to sell in the road or school, perhaps because she was growing too frail. Indeed, the division of work and children's responsibilities may be part of a wider cultural context generating rules about 'appropriate' work (in terms of age, gender, etc.), and children are active within these systems. For example, in Menderin, the mother of ten-year-old Rashida depends on her daughter to navigate the public domain where she sells boiled beans for their family livelihood. Being Muslim, the mother performs her work activities within the home, and it would be inappropriate for her as a married woman to sell in the streets. Being young and unmarried, the same moral restrictions do not yet apply to Rashida (and her sister), whose main job it is to sell the cooked beans that her mother has prepared at home. Rashida explains: "My mother is *tiliq sew* [literally 'a big person']. She does not feel good going house to house to sell the food, so I and my sister do this part of the work. We collect the money and hand it over to her." Thus, through the division of labour, children like Rashida contribute in fundamental ways both to the material economies of their families and also to the moral economies through which honour and shame are negotiated in particular cultural contexts (cf. Bass 2004; Katz 1996; Schildkrout 2002). In these complex systems, children are central, not marginal.

### *Siblings and other children*

Children's sibling relations – contoured by gender, birth order, relation to head of household and sibling composition – can all have a strong bearing on who does what work, at what age (cf. Punch 2001). Earlier in this chapter we have described how certain household tasks are associated with and delegated to younger children, and at very young ages there appears to be little gender difference. Older boys residing in households with adolescent girls were less likely to engage in significant household work, as domestic tasks become increasingly assigned along the lines of gender–age. Likewise, younger boys did less housework when there was an older sister present in the household. In Menderin, 17-year-old Amira appears to resent shouldering so much of the household work while her younger sisters do little, especially when compared with the amount of work that Amira said she performed when she was their age. Their father died five years ago, and their mother suffers from a chronic illness which limits her capacity to work. Amira washes uniforms (*tuta*) for pay and sells vegetables. Referring to her sisters, she commented: “Nowadays, these children are relaxing... All of the adults take care of these two children. However, I take care of them most of the time. They are not kids actually; they are nine and ten years old. They are not kids any more.”

In other households, workloads tended to be more complementary between siblings. For example, in Leki, in 15-year-old Erist's household, the girls and boys make distinct yet complementary contributions: the older girls are responsible for more difficult household chores and waged work, while the older boys do the fishing and ploughing; younger girls are assigned the simple household chores, and younger boys are responsible for herding the cattle and fetching water. Although some families, like Erist's, are large and include several children of differing ages, other families are small and may have only one or two children living in the household, such that the workload cannot be spread across gender–age lines.

There can also be problems when boys are made to do work that is considered girls' work or the work of young children. Such was the case for 18-year-old Bekele in Menderin, who needs to work to cover his daily expenses and schooling, and who, for the past nine years, has been earning money carrying loads. He recently got a job as a taxi assistant and gave up load carrying. Although he felt it was OK for him to earn money carrying loads when he was a child,

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

The way in which work is organised between children in households also goes beyond sibling relations, and in the cities we documented several cases of rural girls living and working in households to which they had been relocated and employed. The work that they provide for the household relieves other children in the household from domestic work, freeing them up for schooling and leisure. For older children who worked outside the home, it sometimes meant not having to worry about domestic chores and being able to concentrate on paid work. It is common for 'relatives' to be brought in from the countryside, sometimes with the promise of continuing schooling in the city, and almost always with the understanding that they will do household work in exchange. In Hawassa, 17-year-old Sinetibeb's cousin came from the rural area to live with her family, with the idea that the girl would attend school. While all of the girls in the household perform some domestic chores, there is a greater work burden on the relative, who washes clothes, bakes *injera*, and cleans. The relative goes to school in the shift system so that she can do household work during the day; meanwhile, Sinetibeb and her siblings attend full-time private schooling (8 hours per day), which they manage alongside light housework.

Sixteen-year-old Agerie migrated to a relative's household in Hawassa when she was 12 years old and left school before she began working selling vegetables in the city, and taking responsibility for the housework. The four other young people in the household are male; they go to school (unlike Agerie) and they do no chores, as Agerie explained, "because they are boys", and no doubt the boys' relation to the head of household also matters. Rashida (Menderin), explaining why her household did not have a housemaid, and equated domestic work with girls' work: "There are three females in our home, so why do we need a housemaid?"

Thus, it is not correct to focus exclusively on the linkages between child and adult work; important dynamics exist between siblings, relatives and other children, shaping the way in which work is divided within and between generations.

### *Children choosing to maintain family harmony*

It may appear as if children have little agency in the work that they do, or that children are forced to work as a result of parental ignorance and extreme poverty. It is true that a recurring theme in boys' and girls' accounts is the basic necessity of working in order to earn their 'daily food', which is perhaps unsurprising, given the study's focus on poverty and working children:

I have no choice but to sell chewing gum because it is my livelihood... I would face hunger if I didn't sell gum. (Tekalign, 13-year-old boy)

We are very poor, so we should work to fulfil our basic needs. (Abteu, 18-year-old male)

My mother does not force me to do work... however, our income can be affected if I refuse... I cannot get my daily food. (Rashida, ten-year-old female)

Our household has so many problems, like our parents are not living together. As a result, we don't see any hope; we are trying to earn our daily food. I am supposed to do daily work and earn money for my food. (Bekele, 18-year-old male)

No doubt, for many children, the little money that they earn by working is barely enough to put some food on the table, while others earn enough to save regularly or to reinvest small sums to improve their work and educational pursuits. But as children work to earn their 'daily food', they also navigate their social relationships, such that some of the work that they do can be interpreted as moral practice, in which young people negotiate their roles, identities and relationships in work, as part of families, as good sons and daughters, brothers, sisters and friends.

For many children who were asked *which aspects of their work they had a choice about*, the question was almost unfathomable. They view 'choice' through both a material and a moral lens; one of their main explanations for why they do not have much choice in their work is that, through their work, they strive to maintain positive family relations (particularly with parents, grandparents and heads of household). This included work that would by many standards be deemed risky and exploitative. We have already referred to the case of Sinidu, whose father placed her in work situations that resulted in abuse. Despite her experience, she was not able to imagine refusing to work: "I have never refused to work. Rather, I tried to make my father happy with my work... My father can be happy when I work well. And he may not be happy if I do not work." Ten-year-old Rashida's work is less risky (selling boiled beans), but she also focused on the impact that refusing to work would have on her relationships at home: "Our relationship with my mother and father and sister will be spoiled... [My father] punishes us when we refuse to work." Other children feared the threat of punishment, either physically or through the withholding of food, but spoiled relationships were also of utmost concern.

Recall the case of Yimenashu, who sold flavoured ices for her grandmother because her grandmother was unable to do so. She said: "I don't feel comfortable refusing to do it. It might create a bad spirit (mood) at home. ... My grandmother does not force me to work... I should work because I have to contribute something from my side, and just to make smooth our relationship at home." Like many children, Yimenashu was unable to describe to the researcher what happens when she refuses to work, because she has never refused. She referred to a wider cultural logic concerning why children should work: "You know, nobody likes those who do not work."

Maralem (11 years old, Leku), whose mother suffers from a serious chronic illness, is compelled to work by the emotional bond that she has with her mother, and by her recognition of her mother's vulnerability:

My mother tries to do most of the [household] activities even though she has health problems. She does not force me to work. However, I don't want to complain about working because I don't want to see my mother work when she is sick... She feels badly when I work, and she is seriously sick. So I want to show my mother that I am comfortable in my work.

Amira (17 years old) is in a similar situation, since her mother is also chronically ill; yet she continues to work, along with other family members. She asks:

What would it mean if I refused to work and did something else instead, meanwhile my family is working? They are working in jobs they do not want to do. Imagine my grandmother... she is around 60 and she washes uniforms (*tuta*) at that age. That means she doesn't have the choice to be selective, otherwise she wouldn't be able to earn money easily.

Clearly, children's sense of family obligation influences their willingness to work to support 'smooth' relationships and a good 'spirit' at home; this may reflect both their affective ties with others, as well as wider generational hierarchies that legitimise (through punishments, rewards and blessings) particular types of work that children are expected to do (or not to do) for their households.

### **Children's work histories: the role of household shocks and family change**

This final section addresses the question of shocks and other events or changes affecting children's households, and the consequences for children's work. Much attention is given in research and policy to the association between poverty and child work (with a particular interest in their causal relationship), but we know much less about the role of shocks in shaping the timing and nature of children's work (Woldehanna 2010; Chuta 2014; Ogando and Pells 2014). Our analysis focuses on the shocks identified by *children* in their accounts of their work histories, wherein they tended to emphasise changes occurring within the family (rather than environmental or agricultural shocks or wider financial crises). Across the three sites, children reported a range of shocks, including illness and injury (of children and of care givers); parental death, absence and divorce; parental job loss and change; parental imprisonment; and violence within the home. These occurrences also sometimes motivated children's migration for work. Sometimes, shocks propel young people into their first experiences of paid work, as in Kumlachew's case (Hawassa): his family suffered significant financial loss when his father was caught selling contraband and his stock was confiscated; both Kumlachew (then aged 11) and his mother sought out paid work, Kumlachew selling lottery tickets, and his mother selling *injera*. Other changes affecting children's work included the birth of new siblings or offspring, and, as aforementioned, more gradual changes within the household stemming from reduced adult capacities for work brought on by

old age. Children were shown to be very active in familial responses to manage shocks and crises, which sometimes had knock-on effects on other aspects of their lives, such as their schooling and time-use.

### *Death, illness and injury*

Death, illness and injury within the family were common experiences for boys and girls.<sup>5</sup> Parental death, illness or injury often resulted in new and greater demands on children's labour. For some children, parental death meant having to relocate into a relative's household and/or dropping out of school or changing schools (for example, from full- to part-time education); for boys in middle or late childhood, this often entailed migration, either unaccompanied or via sibling and peer networks, to seek out a livelihood. For example, Serekebirhan's mother died in childbirth, and when he was 12 years old his father passed away. After his father died, Serekebirhan and his brother decided to migrate to Hawassa, although they did not have jobs or a place to stay; their sister remained in the village.

It was also common for children to assume care-taking roles for chronically ill and injured parents. Girls *and* boys made vital contributions to support ailing parents; for boys, this could be through paid work outside the household (to which they have greater access, compared with girls), while girls took on more household chores and direct care, and substituted for mothers (in particular) in their paid work. Both girls and boys reported missing school in order to care or cover for ill parents. Thirteen-year-old Maralem and her brother began working when their father was injured in a car accident and was unable to work (Leku). In rural Leki, both Manahlot (17 years old) and Yadeta (13 years old) left school when their fathers became ill and were unable to work. Both boys tried to cover the labour shortfall by combining fishing and waged work and substituting for their fathers in the Safety-Net scheme (PSNP), and although both of their fathers eventually died, neither Manahlot nor Yadeta returned to school.

For many households, children's contributions are essential for managing shocks related to parental illness and injury, particularly in light of low levels of social protection in the country. Sometimes children's entire savings are spent on covering the direct costs of family health care, which may compete with the need for children to contribute to their own school-related expenses. In Leku, Wagaye began selling vegetables (aged 11) to cover school-related costs; she saved one birr per day (through a savings group) and saved other money at home; she used her savings (70 birr) to pay for health care when her mother fell ill. Unlike Wagaye, ten-year-old Gelila does no paid work outside the home, but she cares for her visually impaired mother: for example, preparing special food for her when she is ill, and reading to her for her adult education course.

Unfortunately, family illness, injury and death are not exceptional experiences in childhood, and these shocks account for much of the timing and nature of chil-



dren's work and their roles in responding to adversity. While not all shocks result in immediately damaging outcomes for children, experiencing several shocks can lead into spirals and deepening impoverishment, which poor households without assets, resources or buffers often cannot withstand (Bevan and Pankhurst 2007).

### *Other household changes*

Children's work histories cannot be explained solely with reference to negative events (shocks): changes in children's wider social responsibilities also have an impact on their work. Adolescent girls, for example, provide essential child care when mothers, sisters and aunts give birth, their (unpaid) services looking after the new-born often enabling mothers to engage in paid work. In rural Leki, 13-year-old Enqunesh is the eldest of seven siblings and is in the first grade; she temporarily dropped out of school when her mother gave birth, and she misses classes in order to look after her younger siblings.

The meaning that children give to their work changes in light of their experiences and their social transitions to early adulthood. In rural Leki, 16-year-old Salayish went from paid work to being a housewife. She left school at the age of 12 due a bad harvest and the need for her to generate an income for the family. The following year, her father was imprisoned, which intensified the workload for her and her sisters. At the age of 14, she married and gave up paid work (temporarily) to look after her new-born baby. Reflecting on becoming a housewife, she said:

My current job is less dangerous than what other children of my age are doing. Children of my age usually do heavy waged work, but I only do household tasks... When I consider my current living situation, though I am not expected to work outside the house, the responsibilities I shoulder now are huge. I am a wife, a mother and a housemaid. Thus being at my mother's house is by far much better in many aspects. When I was at my mother's place, I used to come home any time and work any time. Siblings used to help each other with household chores turn by turn. But now, all these are my responsibilities and caring for my husband and fulfilling what he expects of me are all my duties... Though my husband is a breadwinner and provides me with everything. I still think that it is good if I work and contribute to our livelihood.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter is to advance debates on child-centred approaches to child work in Ethiopia by describing the place of 'work' in children's lives and life trajectories and by presenting children's perspectives on what work means to them and how it is intimately linked to their social relations. We show how the types of children's

work differ by location, gender and family circumstance, and how they change as the children move from early to late adolescence. Our study highlights how transformations in both the rural and urban economies in which children live and the expansion of schooling have altered the context of children's lives, presenting them with more opportunities for work outside the household – but also more challenges in combining school with work responsibilities. We argue that work is seen by the children as an integral part of their lives, and the potential risks involved, a few of which translated into actual harm, were seen as acceptable, outweighed by benefit for themselves and their families. The children view these benefits not just in material terms, but also socially in terms of defining their roles within their households and their relations with family members. Children see work not solely in terms of filial duty: they also appreciate the recognition and praise that they gain from working well and they are proud to contribute to their households and cover some of their own costs.

While policies on child work tend to be defined by adults, the perspectives of children presented in this chapter suggest that they are capable of articulating their opinions and that they see work as an important part of their lives and social relations with parents, siblings and peers. Interventions aiming to address the problem of 'child labour' should seek to understand how children themselves view their work, and its relevance to their social relations and to their hopes for their future lives. Parents and children value education, and greater flexibility and support for schooling would enable working children to continue their studies. We have also shown that children's work varies according to the context in which they live; it changes as they grow older, depends on family circumstances, and is affected by gender norms and adverse events. Social protection for children should therefore provide broad-based support to reduce vulnerabilities, rather than merely providing narrow targeting of specific sectors, ages or categories of harmful work.<sup>6</sup>

## **Acknowledgements**

We thank the children, families and researchers who participated in this study, and the participants of consultations. We are indebted to the qualitative research officers Asmeret Gebre Hiwot, Kiros Berhanu, Nardos Chuta, Tolosa Mamuye, Tsega Melese, and Workneh Abebe, who carried out the research with interest and care. We also acknowledge the support from our colleagues in the Young Lives teams in Ethiopia and Oxford. We are also grateful to the participants of the African Regional Symposium on Child Work/Labour for useful comments on the initial presentation. Our special thanks go to the OAK Foundation, who believed that this study was important and provided the funding that enabled it to be carried out.



## Notes

- 1 The Young Lives sub-study 'Stimulating Evidence-based Approaches to Child Work/labour in Ethiopia' (2012–2014) was funded by the Oak Foundation. The fieldwork was preceded by three consultations (two at regional level and one at federal level) with stakeholders working on child poverty and well-being in Ethiopia.
- 2 The study also involved adults, including 68 individual interviews with care givers and community members, and group discussions involving 38 care givers.
- 3 Pseudonyms are used for communities and research participants.
- 4 The Productive Safety Net Programme provides support in food insecure areas. Households facing food shortage provide labour on public works schemes in exchange for food.
- 5 In the wider Young Lives sample, one in five children had experienced the death of one or both parents by the age of 12, with greater prevalence reported in urban households (Himaz 2013).
- 6 A research brief summarising the key findings and policy implications with the same title as this chapter is available on the Young Lives website ([www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk); [www.younglives-ethiopia.org](http://www.younglives-ethiopia.org)).

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