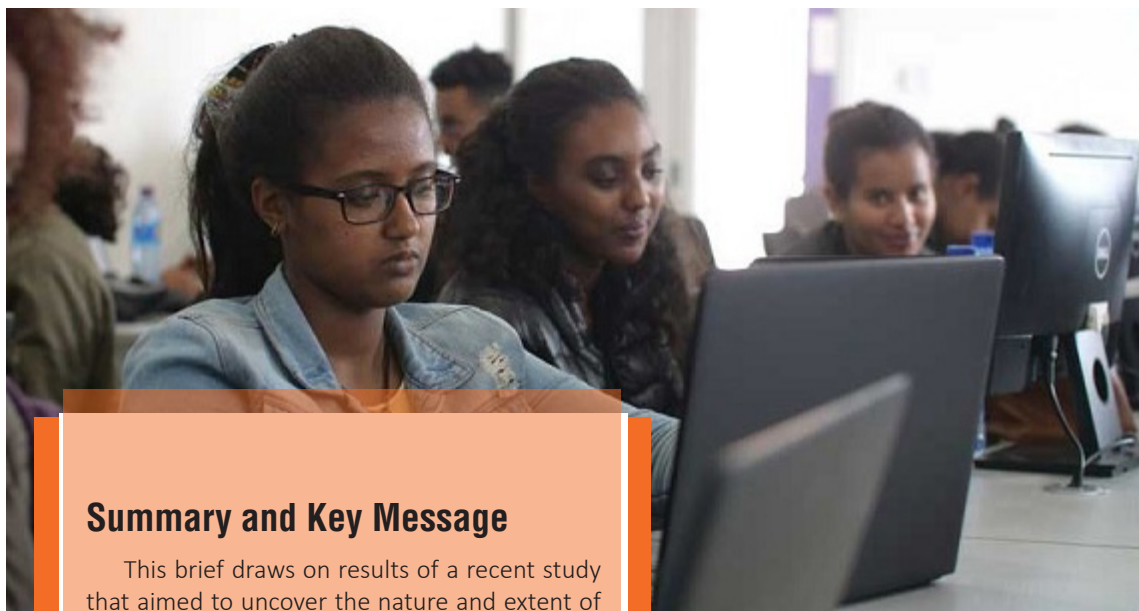


Aspiring and Hopeful Generations:

Young Ethiopian men and women in livelihood changes

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Summary and Key Message

This brief draws on results of a recent study that aimed to uncover the nature and extent of aspirations and resilience of young women and men in Ethiopia. It highlights how aspiration of youth is essentially inclined to creating 'successful' economic opportunities through business development and fairly to educational attainments; and perceived dignified and fulfilling work is valued in relation to income, conducive work environment, and violence free settings where there are appropriate measures taken against gender, ethnic, religion-based violence. It also highlights the realities youth face while navigating through employment and livelihood opportunities. The data reveal how youth struggle to landslide over life scrambles and at the same time are optimistic seeing through a promising future despite the hurdles. The key message is that for youth to have a meaningful breakthrough, there is a need to create opportunities to express their priorities, engage in initiatives that are aspiration-led. Their voice must be heard and needs must be met by policy makers and implementers if interventions are to realize greater impact.

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Background

Ethiopia is characterized as a young population. According to The National Reproductive Survey in 2020, 20% of the population is aged between 15 to 24 years old while 70% of the population is less than 35 years of age. While the number of young people entering the labor market is increasing at an alarming rate, employment opportunity is inadequate to accommodate this new labor force, particularly showing much higher rate for urban youth. According to Ethiopian Central Statistical Agency rate of unemployment among urban young people in Ethiopia that was 16.9% in 2016 has risen to 19.1% in 2018. Low educational attainment one of the key factors responsible for high unemployment rate of the youth as most of them are less likely to pursue their education beyond primary education. Failure to pass national examinations to pursue education in upper-secondary schools and universities is thus another challenge for the Ethiopian youth. For this reason, greater number of young women and men are engaged in the informal sector to earn their livings. Moreover, the income-generating activities that young women and men engage in are highly gendered and only few young women can establish viable businesses¹. Despite the blue print concerning youth challenges of accessing livelihood opportunities, there has been limited research on young people's aspirations and their perception of dignified and fulfilling work in a manner to include youth voice in policy crafting.

Therefore, this policy brief presents insights from a research study commissioned by the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR) in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. The study conducted in seven regions of Ethiopia, namely, Oromia, Amhara, SNNPR, Southwest, Sidamo, Somalia Addis Ababa. The analysis is based on an interdisciplinary, mixed-method research centered on listening to young women and men and allowing insights to emerge from their voices and narratives through survey across different regions, key informant interviews conducted with relevant stakeholders and focus group discussions with young people in selected research sites. The next sections discuss our main findings.



Aspirations

Aspirations is defined as having a strong desire to achieve something high or great. Our study emphasized on the aspects of hope, expectations, and dreams as unwavering and pragmatic aspects of aspirations, together with having realistic plans for the future. Our study uncovered that aspirations and understanding of success among young people in Ethiopia is associated with economic empowerment and financial independence. It refers to managing own life and being independent from others' support and engaging in productive work or business. It is also becoming self-sufficient and securing a decent source of income. Aspirations and hopes of young students were allied to their educational pursuit. Young people mentioned aspects such as learning, graduating and getting employment for self-sufficiency and economic independence to shape own livelihood as attributes of success.

Results of our survey and our qualitative findings reveal that majority of youth participants consider good job at 32% as the priority in their aspirations followed by good education at 22%.

With the increasing inflation in the country and scarcity of employment opportunities, youth aspire to become financially independent through 'profitable' self-employment most preferably in trade and service sector. Our survey results attest to this interest of youth in business as **47% of youth** reported to prefer self-employment followed by employment represented by 18.5% of youth. Preference in self-employment was

¹ Gina Crivello, Agazi Tiumelissan and Karin Heissler (2021). *The Challenges Made Me StrongerTM: What Contributes to Young People's Resilience in Ethiopia? Young Lives Ethiopia*

dominated by running small scale businesses followed by engagement in agribusiness.

The findings underlined that pursuing education with the purpose to secure decent jobs is an important aspiration. Obtaining a university degree dominates among participants as indicative of their education aspiration. Despite recent changing attitudes, young people in Ethiopia consider education as the path to secure employment in government sectors. The increasing number of university graduates who are unemployed however impacted such interest of youth toward formal education and give precedence to skill trainings on successful business or to find a desired job. In line with this, *23.5% of our survey participants are interested in technical and vocational training followed by 15.7% who are interested in agri-based training.*

It came out in our study that young women and men no more consider the importance of education for success owing to absence of job opportunity for the educated. Youth are concerned that the educated widely remain unemployed and become a burden on their families.

Apart from the economic and education aspirations, young people also have socio-cultural aspirations including for marriage and migration. About 70% our young women and men aspire marriage and take it to have an important place in their future self. On the other hand, as regards migration aspiration, results show that majority of youth do not prefer to migrate to other countries but prefer to stay where they are currently living as they tried to build their lives and attain their livelihoods. Others, would like to migrate to bigger cities like Addis Ababa in search for better opportunities for employment and work.

Our findings largely depict that aspirations are more dictated by societal values and norms which frame access to livelihood resources. Secondly notwithstanding prioritized aspirations are common for the majority of youth, categories are at times vary for different groups based on gender, age, socio-economic status, educational level, location, and disability as important variables determining aspirations.

Perspectives on dignified and fulfilling work

Young people in Ethiopia aspire for dignified and fulfilling work. Generally, for young people in Ethiopia, dignified and fulfilling work refers to opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace, respect and non-discrimination at the workplace, freedom for people to express their concerns, and where there are opportunities for self-growth. Other factors include, equality in terms of remuneration and between gender, unbiased promotion, availability of benefits, room for free expression of ideas and appeal to key decision makers and accountability are among the attributes of fulfilling work. Participants also added that ability to create employment opportunities for others and thus contributing both for the community and the country is also defined as dignified or fulfilling work. Some expressions include:

'Dignified work is the work that enables youths to become self-sufficient, create employment opportunities for others and help their families'

'Dignified and fulfilling work is a work that enables me to achieve what I dreamed in my life'

'I think whether a job is dignified and satisfying depends on the worker's level of satisfaction. The amount of money received, or profitability may not be the sole criteria used. Dignified and fulfilling work is one that aligns with internal motive and interest. Thus, a person who engages in work of interest that goes with his/ her internal motive may get satisfaction than earning large amount of money'

Another important point that came out as an attribute of dignified and fulfilling work, is engaging in the field of study one has graduated from. In this relation, a young woman stated as:

'I believe the reason I didn't get the type of job I wanted was because the employers required experience. However, I believe that both public and private organizations should give less experienced employees the opportunity to gain new knowledge and abilities'

Young people indicated that they are productive if they find a job aligned with their field of study. Complementing this, the majority of our survey participants indicated that they are influenced by their interest in the field when making a decision in the kind of job they want to acquire.

Another way of understanding dignified & fulfilling work was revealed to be the level of employees' satisfaction and

prospects for career development aligning to the interest of the individual. To pursue their interest, young people have opted to open and run their own businesses.

Relatedly, young people's pursuit of dignified and fulfilling work is faced with challenges across Ethiopia. From our findings, the main obstacles that impede young people's quest for dignified and fulfilling work include lack of finance and adequate skills and training. Participants also pointed out a number of factors, including limited employment networks and job fairs, absence of minimum wage policy, the mismatch between educational preparation and available occupations, job seeker attitudes, fear of taking risks among most youths, inadequate organizational integration, lack of culture of work ethic, limited technological advancement, and lack of motivation.

The challenges of dignified work are interconnected with social and economic dynamics and norms. Hence, access to dignified and fulfilling job is determined by sex, age, ethnicity, educational level and training, social status, and disability. Young women, in particular, mentioned that they face significant obstacles to getting dignified and fulfilling employment due to lack of experience, lack of skills, and discriminatory attitudes on their role in the workplace, and prejudiced views towards their position in the workplace. Disability is mentioned as one of the variables that adversely affects access to good employment.

Policy recommendations

Based on the findings, this policy brief outlines the following recommendations:

- **Expanding and strengthening youth participation in policy making:** Policies and programs should, at early stage of design and implementation, consider what the varying youth aspirations are, to address the need of youth rather than applying top-down 'I know for you' approach.
- **Promote youth entrepreneurship and facilitate financial access:** Results of our study show that economic empowerment and financial independence with specific preference to **self-employment is the priority** of youth as their main aspirations. Facilitating financial access such as loans and opportunities for self-employment will help youth in making livelihood changes.
- **Support appropriate and youth-led education/skills training for youth livelihood change:** Another finding suggests that education is one of the important aspiration of youth in Ethiopia. Investing on youth education, specifically on curriculum that aligns with the country's priority development agenda to curb the challenge of skill mismatch. TVET and agri-based training are preferred education emphasized by youth in our study. More research is relevant in this regard to make decisions of lines of educational investment by government.
- **Stimulate and share the values underscored by youth in dignified and fulfilling work in youth policies, strategies and programs:** Policies and programs should share values of dignified and fulfilling work as: job security; well and equal pay; violence free settings especially GBV; respect for differing identities such as gender, ethnicity and religion, unbiased promotion; availability of benefits; room for free expression of ideas and appeal to key decision makers; and accountability and others;
- **Focus on policies that recognize the relevance of soft-skills trainings for youth:** Communication skills, business trainings, good work ethic trainings, technological skill trainings are vital for youth transformation into realizing dignified and fulfilling work. These will address some of the barriers for expanding economic and educational opportunities supporting young men and women to realize livelihood transformations. They will also upsurge the technical and social capacities of youth in securing meaningful connections and networks with important actors.

The policy brief was written by Adamnesh Bogale, PhD, (Addis Ababa University) and edited by Joel Otieno, Jim Kaketch, Daniel Doh. It has been produced as part of the Africa Youth Aspirations and Resilience (AYAR) research in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation. AYAR is a three years' research and uptake project that aims to understand youth aspirations, resilience and perspectives on dignified and fulfilling work. Project is implemented in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria and Senegal.

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