

October, 2023

Youth Resilience and adaptability:

A Pathway to Navigating through Employment and Livelihood Opportunities in Ethiopia.

Authors : Zenebe Yohannes, Kiya Gezahegne, and Adamnesh Bogale

Key Message

- As significant portion of the Ethiopian population comprising young individuals, their ability to withstand and overcome challenges plays a pivotal role in driving progress and fostering sustainable development.
- In Ethiopia, the resilience and adaptability of its youth stand as a beacon of hope in the face of these socio-economic adversities, particularly concerning employment and access to dignified, fulfilling work.
- By investing in education, skills development, economic opportunities, and support systems, Ethiopia can harness the untapped potential of its youth to drive sustainable development and shape a brighter future for all.
- Therefore, the existing government policies, strategies, and initiatives need to be monitored, modified, and consequently streamlined to enhance youth resilience and employability.

Background

Ethiopia is a young nation in terms of its demographic composition. with approximately 70% of the population being under the age of 30¹. The labor market is experiencing strong pressure with more than two million youth entering the labor force every year². Besides, young people in Ethiopia face numerous challenges when it comes to accessing dignified and fulfilling work and employment opportunities. These challenges include limited access to quality education and vocational training, lack of work experience, inadequate soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving skills, and barriers related to gender, location, and socioeconomic status. Additionally, the informal nature of much of the Ethiopian economy further exacerbates these challenges³. In recent years, entwined crises of the Covid-19 pandemic, political turmoil, war, inter-ethnic conflict, displacement, natural disasters, poverty, and unemployment have posed significant challenges to Ethiopian youth.

In this regard it is very essential to enhance a spirit of resilience that transcends these barriers, forging paths towards meaningful opportunities and sustainable livelihoods. In this regard, resilience becomes not just a personal attribute but a vital collective asset. It serves as a catalyst for innovation, entrepreneurship, and social change, empowering young Ethiopians to overcome obstacles and seize opportunities for growth and advancement. Moreover, youth resilience fosters community cohesion and social capital, as resilient individuals contribute positively to their families, communities, and society at large. By investing in initiatives that nurture youth resilience, Ethiopia can unlock the full potential of its young population, paving the way for inclusive development, sustainable progress, and a brighter future for generations to come.

Hence, based on findings from a recent study on youth aspirations and resilience among young people in Ethiopian, this policy brief highlights the importance of youth resilience to secure employment regardless of socioeconomic and political barriers. It also highlights the challenges that young people encounter in attempting to start their own businesses in their quest to access a dignified and fulfilling job.



Youth Resilience and adaptability

Resilience is understood as the ability to navigate challenges in the job market, adapt to changing circumstances, and persevere in the face of setbacks. Moreover, resilient individuals are more likely to engage in proactive career behaviors, pursue learning opportunities, and effectively manage career transitions, thereby increasing their employability⁴.

Youth resilience, as portrayed in the study, is characterized by a commitment to change and improvement. Resilience becomes particularly crucial during periods of unemployment and underemployment, where traditional employment avenues may be limited. In response, Ethiopian youth have demonstrated a remarkable shift in mindset, moving away from seeking traditional employment to embracing self-employment and entrepreneurship. This shift reflects a broader trend of creating a new work culture among the youth, driven by a desire for autonomy, innovation, and the ability to shape their own destinies.


Furthermore, the study highlights the role of various intrinsic and extrinsic factors in shaping youth resilience. Intrinsic factors such as positive self-image, emotional regulation, and positive thinking are identified as key elements contributing to resilience. Additionally, the support of friends, family, teachers, and community leaders serves as essential resources that enhance youth resilience and empower them to overcome challenges. Strengthening social support networks within families and communities is identified as crucial resource, as strong social bonds and supportive relationships serve as buffers against adversity and promote resilience.

1 IOM (2021). *Ethiopian 2021 Labour Force and Migration Survey Key Findings*.

2 Ethiopia Federal Government (2020) *Plan of Action for Job creation 2020-2025*.

3 World Bank (2018) *Ethiopia Employment in Urban and Rural Ethiopia*. 2021. Ethiopia Economic Update.

4 Ungar, M., Liebenberg, L., Boothroyd, R., Kwong, W. M., Lee, T. Y., Leblanc, J., Duque, L., & Makhnach, A. (2008). *The Study of Youth Resilience Across Cultures: Lessons from a Pilot Study of Measurement Development*. *Research in Human Development*, 5(3), 166–180. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427600802274019>



The COVID-19 pandemic emerges as a pivotal moment that both tests and strengthens youth resilience in Ethiopia. Despite the economic, social, and psychological challenges posed by the pandemic, young Ethiopians have exhibited resilience by engaging in civic activism, alternative business activities, and social innovation. The pandemic has prompted youth to reevaluate their priorities, develop problem-solving abilities, and tap into their creativity to adapt to changing circumstances. Moreover, this study shows that adaptability of Ethiopian youth, as evidenced by their ability to respond flexibly to changing economic and social conditions.

In order to cope with crises in our lives, we must often avoid being trapped in negative thinking or feeling helpless as a result of hardship and adversity. (FGD Female, Hawassa)

Our survey findings also indicate that youth self-assess themselves as highly adaptable, with strong agreement across gender and geographic divides. This adaptability is reflected in various aspects of youth behavior, including taking responsibility, embracing change, and seeking alternative avenues for personal and professional growth.

Barriers of Resilience

This study points out several challenges and barriers that impede the resilience and adaptability of youth in Ethiopia, particularly in the context of pursuing entrepreneurship and enhancing employability. One significant challenge identified is the lack of essential business and life skills necessary for entrepreneurship. Despite demonstrating resilience and adaptability, many young Ethiopians lack access to adequate training and resources to develop the skills needed to succeed as entrepreneurs.

“ Although most of us have degrees from different colleges, we are lacking entrepreneurial skills, knowledge of what it takes to start a business, and access to business development services (Female FGD, Bonga). ”

The study also emphasizes the role of gender dynamics in shaping youth resilience and employability experiences. Gender inequalities in access to education, employment opportunities, and social resources have a profound impact on the resilience of young men and women in Ethiopia. Women, in particular, face systemic barriers that limit their ability to access economic opportunities and participate fully in the workforce. Additionally, it highlights the challenges faced by economically disadvantaged youth, including people with disabilities, women, and those from rural communities. Hence, these vulnerable groups often encounter additional barriers to accessing education, employment, and social resources, further exacerbating their vulnerability, and limiting their opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

“Because no one believes that disabled individuals can perform duties exactly like able-bodied persons, it is difficult to obtain decent and fulfilling work.” (Disabled male FGD, Tercha). ”

Similarly, study participants reported that stakeholders, ranging from policymakers to community leaders, have fallen short in fostering an environment conducive to enhancing youth resilience and adaptability. Their failure stems from fragmented efforts, lack of coordination, and insufficient investment in holistic support systems. Additionally, limited youth participation in decision-making processes hampers the creation of tailored solutions. If stakeholders lack cohesive strategies and genuine engagement, they may miss out on the chance to give young people the skills, resources, and opportunities they need to navigate adversity and thrive in an ever-changing socioeconomic landscape of Ethiopia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this policy brief highlights the resilience and adaptability of Ethiopian youth in the face of socio-economic challenges. Despite facing barriers such as lack of essential skills and gender inequalities, youth demonstrate a strong commitment to change and improvement. They pivot towards self-employment and entrepreneurship, driven by autonomy and innovation. Intrinsic factors like positive self-image and external support from family and community bolster their resilience. Their adaptability is evident in their response to changing economic conditions. However, addressing persistent barriers is essential to unlocking the full potential of Ethiopian youth and fostering inclusive socio-economic development.

Policy Recommendations

1. *Resilience-building Education and Training Programs:*

- Implement resilience-focused education and training programs in schools, vocational training centers, and community centers,
- Integrate soft skills development, such as problem-solving, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, into the curriculum.
- Provide mentorship and counseling services to guide youth in overcoming challenges and setbacks.

2. *Building Resilient Communities:*

- Invest in community-based initiatives that strengthen social cohesion and support networks for young people.
- Encourage the involvement of local leaders, civil society organizations, and religious institutions in promoting positive youth development.
- Provide grants and technical assistance for youth-led community projects aimed at addressing local challenges and fostering resilience.

3. *Strengthening Entrepreneurship Ecosystem:*

- Facilitate access to entrepreneurship training and incubation programs tailored to youth from diverse backgrounds.
- Establish youth-friendly business support centers offering mentorship, networking opportunities, and access to finance.
- Promote innovation and creativity through targeted grants and incentives for youth-led startups.

4. *Creating Supportive Policy Environment:*

- Formulate youth-centered policies that address barriers to employment, including gender disparities, lack of access to finance, and limited market opportunities.
- Ensure the implementation of labor laws that protect the rights of young workers and promote fair and inclusive employment practices.
- Establish mechanisms for youth participation in policy formulation and decision-making processes at all levels of government.

The policy brief was written by Zenebe Yohannes; Kiya Gezahegne, Ph.D; 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.

Disclaimer

The views expressed do not necessarily represent the views or policies of PASGR and the Mastercard Foundation.