

SUMMARY BRIEF

OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS FROM THE USAID/ETHIOPIA CROSS-SECTORAL YOUTH ASSESSMENT SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS



Adolescents participate in a Sports for Life Training of Trainers Workshop in Ethiopia.
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PURPOSE

Prepared by YouthPower Learning at the request of the USAID Mission in Ethiopia, the purpose of the “Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment” (CSYA) was to utilize a Positive Youth Development (PYD) lens to better understand the challenges and opportunities Ethiopian youth, ages 18-29, encounter in their transition from adolescence to adulthood. This overview presents assessment findings that emerged from research conducted in September and October 2017. Research methodologies used include 24 focus group discussions with 177 young people living in six regions in Ethiopia;¹ 54 key informant interviews in Addis Ababa and selected field locations with stakeholders from various donors, Government of Ethiopia (GOE) ministries, NGOs, and community-based organizations; and a desk review of over 40 documents on contemporary Ethiopia.

FINDINGS

Ethiopian youth share the same aspiration as their peers around the world – that of a better future – which they hope to achieve by accessing quality education, developing marketable skills, and acquiring a good job. Through successful employment, Ethiopian youth hope to generate the means to establish a home and family and earn the respect of the adult population. However,

¹ Focus groups were conducted in the Addis Ababa, Amhara, Dire Dawa, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region (SNNP), and Tigray regions.

despite investments by the GOE to strengthen the education system and create more economic opportunities in the country, many Ethiopian youth are deeply dissatisfied with their daily lives, and they face significant challenges that impede their ability to turn their aspirations into reality.

The current education system in Ethiopia is of poor quality and does not equip youth with the marketable skills they need to establish a livelihood. Although the growth of vocational/technical institutions and universities in the country might appear to be a positive development, these institutions do not seem to be improving outcomes for young people, as many students become “graduated but unemployed,” or end up working in daily labor jobs despite completing technical or higher education degrees.

Coupled with an ineffective education system is an economy lacking opportunities for Ethiopian youth, which is a major source of dissatisfaction among the cohort. Almost two-thirds of youth focus group participants were unemployed at the time of research and noted that their lack of jobs severely limited their ability to achieve their life goals. For those youth who were employed, many were dissatisfied with the meager income they earned as daily laborers or as street vendors, remarking that the pay was insufficient to meet their needs.



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Consequently, many young people – especially males – spend their days pursuing any means available to them to generate “quick cash,” wandering about in idleness, or using substances such as khat (a local leaf chewed as a stimulant), marijuana, and/or alcohol. Other youth, having lost all hope in achieving their aspirations in Ethiopia, now actively seek to emigrate abroad to the United States, Europe, or the Middle East.

This context weighs particularly heavily on **young Ethiopian women**, regardless of ethnicity (a major factor in Ethiopian politics). Female youth are exposed to high levels of gender-based violence, such as female genital mutilation and domestic violence, and are often married before reaching adulthood. They shoulder the burden of domestic labor, which in many cases prevents them from achieving educational goals. To escape the confines of **social and gender norms**, some young women look to migrate to urban areas such as Addis Ababa or internationally to the Middle East in search of work and new opportunities. Unfortunately, young women are the main targets of human traffickers and are often victims of severe emotional, physical, and/or sexual abuse.

The GOE has tried to tackle **youth unemployment** through initiatives such as establishing credit institutions to lend to youth and by funding offices within vocational schools to support job placement. However, youth noted that these initiatives are crippled by mismanagement and corruption, and young people face discrimination based on political affiliation when trying to access these services. As a result, youth feel that the government is not sufficiently focused on their problems and is not willing to recognize and address their financial issues. The GOE's inability to create an enabling environment within the private sector to absorb the increasing numbers of young people who want to work is a root cause of social unrest among youth, resulting in a strong resentment expressed by many Ethiopian youth toward the GOE.

Youth's resentment of the GOE can also be attributed to **the lack of real opportunities for youth to contribute as leaders in their local communities**, despite scores of government-affiliated youth associations across Ethiopia. Young people's voices are excluded and lacking in community-level decision-making processes, and Ethiopian youth often feel that adults in leadership roles see them as sources of problems and insecurity. Moreover, adults see youth as too prone to ask critical questions about proposed interventions or as unwilling to accept the decisions of leaders.

Additionally, Ethiopia's ethnic federalist system –in which ethnicity is closely linked with political power – blatantly

discriminates against by ethnicity in granting access to government services. Frustrated by government corruption, nepotism, and discrimination that appears to be rampant, many Ethiopian young people feel disenfranchised and become more likely to engage in increasingly fierce outbursts of violence against the government, which began in the fall of 2015 and continue today. Ongoing political instability negatively influences the ability of Ethiopian youth to achieve their aspirations.

PROMISING STRUCTURES AND PROGRAMS PROMOTING POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA

PYD, both as a philosophy and as an approach to youth development, “engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the environment; and transform systems.”² This assessment considered the barriers and opportunities for Ethiopian youth across the four domains of the PYD framework – assets, agency, contribution, and enabling environment.

The CSYA identified several structures as strengthening the enabling environment for PYD interventions targeting youth in Ethiopia. See Box 1 for selected examples based on their approach in helping build youth assets and agency and creating opportunities for youth engagement.

YouthPower Learning also identified examples of promising local organizations and donor-funded programs that are helping narrow the “hope gap” between the bulk of young people in Ethiopia and the relatively small number of economically successful youth in the country (see Box 2). These promising organizations and programs can help vulnerable youth achieve their aspirations and address the root causes of their dissatisfaction, all while aligning with the PYD approach.



Young women participate in a catering class at Agohelma, 2017. Courtesy of Jack Boyson.

² <http://www.youthpower.org/positive-youth-development>.

BOX 1: EXAMPLES OF PROMISING STRUCTURES

The **UK Department of International Development (DFID) youth advisory panel** provides opportunities for youth to contribute to programs targeting their development, and DFID supports alignment of programs to youth priorities.

USAID/Ethiopia's multi-technical office funding scheme for youth programming supports the development of holistic youth development programming in line with the PYD approach. Additionally, the **working group on youth** provides a platform for coordinating and sharing lessons learned and best practices related to youth programming.

The **Youth Network for Sustainable Development (YNSD)** consists of 160 youth-led organizations promoting youth leadership and civic engagement nationwide. YNSD provides a platform for coordinating and sharing lessons learned and best practices related to youth programming. The network strengthens community-based organizations that focus on youth issues, offers opportunities for youth contribution and leadership in the network, and supports youth skill-building efforts.

BOX 2: EXAMPLES OF PROMISING PROGRAMS

A social enterprise based in Addis Ababa, **Abebech Gobena Yehetsanat Kebehabena Limat Mahiber (Agohelma)**, offers a comprehensive set of self-funded services, including health services, psycho-social support, and livelihood training, for hundreds of married and unmarried young women each year. The enterprise strengthens the enabling environment by providing access to youth-friendly and youth-responsive health services; building youth financial assets and livelihood skills; and supporting young women's resiliency and self-efficacy through counseling.

Tigray Youth Association's Youth Development Army at the kebele (village) level and Youth Parliaments at the woreda (district) and regional levels helps Tigran youth develop essential competencies, skills, and attitudes to become productive adults and engaged citizens. The association builds youth assets and agency to pursue livelihoods; provides access to youth-friendly health information; and fosters opportunities for youth engagement in civil society.

World Vision's Youth Ready program targets functionally illiterate young people and helps improve their literacy and numeracy levels while empowering them to become responsible for themselves, their families, and their communities. World Vision surrounds its participants with support through peer groups and mentorship. This program focuses on building life, employability and entrepreneurship skills; offers access to financial assets for youth's micro and small enterprises, such as seed capital, scholarships, and wage support; and strengthens the enabling environment through linkages to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) providers and employers.

The **Swiss Inter-Cooperation/Helvetas' Skills and Knowledge for Youth (SKY) program** is a comprehensive youth development model that provides market-driven information and communications technology (ICT), gender equity and young women's empowerment, life and employability, livelihood, and entrepreneurship skills training for young people. The SKY program focuses on strengthening youth assets and agency through an intensive training program; provides support through coaching; and strengthens the enabling environment by convening employers and stakeholders to support youth placement into employment opportunities.

Similarly, the **USAID Prioritizing Opportunities through Training, Education, Transition, Investment, and Livelihoods (POTENTIAL) program**, implemented by Save the Children, is another holistic youth development model which builds youth assets through its multiphase life and employability skills/entrepreneurship training, which targets vulnerable youth in six regions of Ethiopia. Especially notable is its strong case management system and its catalogue of 116 micro-enterprise development ideas for under \$250. The POTENTIAL program places strong emphasis on offering positive support through coaches and mentors, and by strengthening the enabling environment through market linkages and family/community-level interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA

These promising programs, as well as other examples highlighted in the CYSA, provide a good foundation for connecting Ethiopia's youth with the requisite education, psycho-social support, and resources they need to become productive adults and engaged citizens. However, much more effort is needed to build upon this foundation and scale up the present structures, programs, and partnerships to give all Ethiopian young people a better chance at the futures they desire.

With a bulge of approximately 30 million young people, the GOE cannot afford to disregard the interests and needs of its youth. Such a large youth population entering its productive work years with limited prospects and facing seemingly insurmountable challenges could be a significant driver of unrest and instability for Ethiopia over the next decade and beyond. Alternatively, such a cohort could yield a huge economic dividend for the country and help Ethiopia leap forward toward a vibrant economic and political future.

To turn that positive vision of the future into reality, investments that enable disadvantaged Ethiopian youth

to become productive, engaged adults should be built upon, expanded, and scaled up. These investments should build the life and soft skills that enable Ethiopian youth to exercise agency in their own lives and the employability and entrepreneurship skills that directly correspond to employers' needs and market opportunities.

Furthermore, strategic alliances and investments need to be made to strengthen the enabling environment for positive youth development, with a particular emphasis on creating economic opportunities for disadvantaged Ethiopian youth. Existing nationwide youth workforce development and entrepreneurship infrastructure, such as the GOE's youth centers and "one stop shops", can be revitalized in partnership with the private sector in order to support youth to access job opportunities and business development services. Integrating career counseling and skills training into elementary and secondary schools can transform Ethiopian public schools into workforce development and job creation hubs. In addition, policy reforms around land tenure and access to finance, undertaken with a youth inclusion lens, can provide opportunities for young people to start and expand businesses. Such strategic long-term investments will help Ethiopian youth seize economic opportunities and demonstrate the resilience they need to overcome difficult circumstances.

Authors:

Jack Boyson, Making Cents International
Anne Greteman Bitga, Making Cents International
Zeru Fantaw Desta, Khulisa Management Services
Caitlin O'Donnell, Making Cents International

With contributions from:

Cassandra Jessee, International Center for Research on Women and Making Cents International
Dr. Christy Olenik, Making Cents International

This brief summarizes the USAID/Ethiopia Cross-Sectoral Youth Assessment Situational Analysis, which can be found in full at: <http://www.youthpower.org/ethiopia-csya>

CONTACT

YouthPower Learning

Making Cents International
1350 Connecticut Ave, NW
Suite 410
Washington, DC 20036 USA
www.YouthPower.org

 @YPLearning

 YouthPowerLearning

USAID YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international development. The project leads research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base related to PYD. Concurrently, YouthPower Learning employs expertise in learning and knowledge sharing to promote engagement and inform the global community about how to successfully help transition young people into productive, healthy adults. YouthPower Learning supports the implementation of the 2012 USAID Youth in Development Policy to improve capacity and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to, and benefit from, more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities.

This brief is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of Making Cents International through YouthPower: Evidence and Evaluation Task Order 1 (YouthPower Learning) AID Contract # AID-OAA-I-15-00034/AID-OAA-TO-15-00011. This report does not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.