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To cite this article: Getachew Shambel Endris, Muluken Gezahegn Wordofa, Chanyalew Seyoum Aweke, Jemal Yousuf Hassen, Jeylan Wolyie Hussien, Dereje Kifle Moges, Million Sileshi, Abdulmuen Mohammed Ibrahim, Kadija Kadiro & Kidesena Sebsibe (2022) A review of the socio-ecological and institutional contexts for youth livelihood transformation in Miesso Woreda, Eastern Ethiopia, Cogent Social Sciences, 8:1, 2152210, DOI: [10.1080/23311886.2022.2152210](https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2152210)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2022.2152210>



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Published online: 05 Dec 2022.



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Received: 01 October 2022
Accepted: 23 November 2022

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Reviewing editor:
Ana Maria Lopez Narbona, University of Malaga: Universidad de Malaga, Spain

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SOCIOLOGY | REVIEW ARTICLE

A review of the socio-ecological and institutional contexts for youth livelihood transformation in Mieso Woreda, Eastern Ethiopia

Getachew Shambel Endris^{1*}, Muluken Gezahegn Wordofa¹, Chanyalew Seyoum Aweke¹, Jemal Yousuf Hassen¹, Jeylan Wolyie Hussien², Dereje Kifle Moges¹, Million Sileshi³, Abdulmuen Mohammed Ibrahim⁴, Kadija Kadiro¹ and Kidesena Sebsibe¹

Abstract: This study was carried out as a systematic review to assess youth aspirations, the context of agroecology, and development interventions for youth livelihood transformation in the Mieso district, Ethiopia. The study found that youth make up an important part of the labor force for food and agricultural production in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas. Nonetheless, very limited attention is accorded to the youth and their occupational aspiration. The youth continue to face major socio-economic, agroecological, institutional and policy-related challenges, constraining their successful transition. The major challenges can be structured around: local customs and norms; financial; education and technical capacity; infrastructure and market; administration and policy related; and environmental. We find that the youth have varying aspirations and dreams. These aspirations are shaped by their own personal experiences, gender, local context, access to media, and role models. However, most of the aspirations remain unmet. Another major finding is that contrary to the popular narrative that portrays youth as averse to agriculture, the majority of the youth envision a future within their home country and the local area. Environmental degradation; limited access to land, and rural-urban inequalities are some of the reasons that make rural youth not pursue agricultural-based careers. General recommendations to increase youth engagement in agriculture may include infrastructural and regulatory interventions; specific training in agriculture; targeting youth in interventions as direct beneficiaries; youth-friendly credit and

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saving; agriprenurship training and startups; and locally adapted and gender-responsive rural finance.

Subjects: Development Studies; Gender & Development; Politics & Development; Culture & Development; Rural Development; Economics and Development

Keywords: youth; youth aspirations; Ethiopia; West Hararghe Zone; livelihood transformation

1. Introduction

Africa has the youngest demographic dividend in the world with 65 percent constituting people under the age of 35 years (Tracey & Kahuthia, 2017). This demography is projected to double by 2045 (International Labour Organisation (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2013). Nonetheless, the continent has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world—at almost 40% youth unemployment rate (ILO, 2020). African youth also accounts for 60 percent of all of Africa's unemployed population (African Union Commission (African Union Commission, 2017). Each year an estimated 10–12 million of its young people seek to enter the continent's job market, but most are without success. This is posing an existential threat to a continent that has the highest rate of poverty and food insecurity.

The extent of youth unemployment varies across countries and the socio-economic, cultural, and policy dynamics of each country. For instance, countries such as Ethiopia represent the highest youthful population in Africa with 70% constituting people under the age of 30. Nonetheless, the country has one of the highest youth unemployment rates in Africa. The larger proportion of the youth population lives and works in rural areas where subsistent agriculture and agro-pastoralism are the dominant sources of livelihood. The youth, make up an important part of the labor force in agriculture and food production in Ethiopia. A key challenge facing rural youth and policymakers today is reconciling the mismatch between occupational aspirations and available employment opportunities in the job market (OECD Development Centre, 2018). Although the youth are regarded as agents for rural transformation in many countries including Ethiopia, they constantly grapple with tremendous challenges to acquire the required knowledge, training, life skills and experiences to compete for job opportunities (Tara et al., 2021), hence most of their dreams and aspirations largely remain unmet.

Some of the principal reasons for unrealized aspirations include lack of money (Costa et al., 2022); difficulty in accessing governmental and other agencies' support; cultural norms and limited availability of business-oriented training and mentorship (Tara et al., 2021), and discrimination on the basis of gender. The youth are also unable to tap into supporting programmes because they are not organized into associations or economic interest groups (Giuliani et al., 2017) or because they don't have collateral to be eligible for getting credit access (Boonabaana et al., 2020). Existing policies and interventions also take little account of young people's views and are hardly aligned with the diversity of the youths' aspirations, shared capabilities, expectations, and challenges associated with access to resources and participation in beneficial collective action (Yami et al., 2019). Such effects are much more pronounced on youth from disadvantaged and fragile ecosystems, such as agropastoral and pastoral locations and female youth. Yet the viability of agriculture and its sustainability depends on young people remaining in rural areas (Giuliani et al., 2017). A growing body of literature (e.g., Anyidoho et al., 2012; Daum, 2018; Leavy & Smith, 2010; Sumberg & Okali, 2006) shows that the lack of support structure for the youth in the agriculture sector including limited access to land, rising price of agricultural inputs and technologies, lack of access to agricultural finance, environmental degradation, and lack of inclusive agricultural extension, is making agriculture unattractive to the youth. The youth also continue to suffer from growing misconceptions and stereotypes from their own community and government. This calls for studies that critically examine youth aspirations and the overall environment they operate to offer insights into areas of prioritization in overcoming youth-specific constraints.

The big challenge facing rural development policy making and praxis today is how to effectively empower, engage and capacitate the rural youth as agents of change for rural transformation in different contexts. Recognition of youth differences and realities, inclusive participation, equitable distribution of opportunities, and facilitating youth agency have recently become important areas for the global and regional development agenda to ensure youth empowerment (e.g., Africa Agenda 2063; UN-SDGs 2030). Nonetheless, the literature on rural youth and their role in rural transformation is limited globally (Arslan et al., 2021) and in Ethiopia. The mainstream literature on how to promote youth inclusion, empowerment, and the agency has an urban bias (Trivelli & Morel, 2020). Much of the empirical literature on rural youth also focuses on identifying the resource-related constraints to achieve food security and poverty, with little attention paid to psychological variables such as aspirations (Yami et al., 2019). Most aspiration-related studies in SSA and Ethiopia are in the area of career development, focusing on the education sector (e.g., Schewel & Fransen, 2018) based on urban contexts. Most of which are also based on secondary data. Hence, it is important to have a better understanding of the rural youth and their aspirations in a local socio-cultural context. The current study is an attempt to understand this scenario.

Examining the enablers and challenges for youth livelihood transformation—mapping the socio-economic and ecological environment where the youth operate, how their aspirations are formed, how those aspirations relate to, opportunity structures, support mechanisms, and challenges is very important. Against this backdrop, the current study aims to conduct a systematic review to assess: the socio-economic and ecological environment in which the youth operate; youth-focused policy strategies, practices, and development interventions; factors affecting youth participation in interventions; enabling environment, and challenges for youth livelihood transformation in Agro-Pastoral/pastoral Areas of West Hararghe Zones, Mieso district. A better understanding of this complex scenario will provide important direction on the rural youth and their aspirations to design an effective policy strategy to promote the rural youth in agro-pastoral and pastoral areas and their effective engagement in the rural economy. This study will add value to the ongoing debate on the inclusion of male and female youth in rural development and enhancing their employability. Results obtained from this analysis may inform the development of research, policies, and interventions for targeting and engaging youth and addressing youth-specific constraints in pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood systems.

The first part of the study presents the study's methodology. The second section presents (theoretical and empirical reviews of youth, youth aspirations and agriculture based on African and Ethiopian contexts. In the third section, we present the socio-economic and ecological environment of the study sites: population and demographic information of Mieso; ecological environment. The fourth section presents a synthesis of the enabling environment and challenges for youth livelihood transformation. More specifically, the section presents the analysis of the institutional environment, market and infrastructure, and services and organizations that enable or hinder youth transitions in the agro-pastoral/pastoral communities. The final section is the general conclusion and recommendation of the study.

2. Materials and methods

This study was carried out as a systematic review of secondary data (both published and unpublished/grey literature sources) to assess the context of agroecology and development interventions for youth livelihood transformation. It aimed to produce reports on existing policy strategies, practices, and development interventions, as well as factors affecting youth participation in existing development interventions. More specifically, the study assessed the enabling environment and challenges for youth livelihood transformation for participation in existing development interventions in Agro-Pastoral Areas of East and West Hararghe Zones.

The literature search for the systematic review was conducted using the following procedure (Baker & Weeks, 2014): predetermine relevant databases and specific terms to search in keywords, titles, and abstract fields of each database; searching keywords and index terms from this

literature search across all appropriate databases; and expand the search by also searching the reference list in the studies obtained in the previous steps. This process was continued until repetition search results were evident within various sources. In addition to published literature, it is important to include unpublished sources (grey literature).

Accordingly, for the literature searches, we used Google Scholar (GS) and SCOPUS search engines were identified to cover academic sources (such as journal articles, book chapters, policy briefs, conference proceedings, books, working reports and theses), and practice-oriented sources (paper and report publications by international organizations and research centers such as CSA, USAID, IFPRI, and FAO websites). The combination of GS and SCOPUS search engines in searching relevant literature in this study was considering the various merits of the two databases and their complementarities. GS has both coverage and citations advantage over controlled databases in some areas such as social sciences and has strength in citation tracking across disciplines because of its inclusion of non-English, free and open-access resources. However, GS cannot serve as a sole source of literature retrieval or scholarly benchmarking because of its lack of quality assurance and lack of transparency about the resources it covers (Halevi et al., 2017) and limited search sensitivity. Such limitations were easily complemented by the use of the SCOPUS search engines. For instance, whereas SCOPUS did not retrieve as many search hits as Google Scholar, search strategies in Scopus can be executed quickly, especially a search strategy for identifying conference papers. Also, since the fields can be searched by predefined limits rather than only free-text search terms, it is easier to evaluate the exact result set of a search. Unlike Google Scholar, search results are static and do not fluctuate depending on which display options a user selects. As a result, it is easy to design a set of search criteria and write up a detailed search methodology (Halevi et al., 2017). For internet sources, the search protocol focused on the article title, abstract, and keywords. Keywords used for searching relevant documents included Mieso district; youth transformation; youth aspirations; opportunity structures; enabling environment; challenges; Agro-Pastoral Areas; Ethiopia; West Hararghe Zones.

In this study, relevant literature and publications between the years 2008 and 2022 were considered for review (unless for general information, in which we also considered older literature). Unpublished documents or grey literature (district performance reports, external evaluation reports, and project reports), obtained from officials at the target woredas in the west Hararghe zones, were carefully identified and sorted out for review based on relevance. To determine eligibility for inclusion of relevant studies and reports, inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed (see, Figure 1 and Table 1 below).

Important parameters considered to determine eligibility were—geographic location, time frame (date of publication), type of publication, name of publisher, type of publication, indexed, reported outcomes, peer review, reports by reputable international and National organizations, and

Figure 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic review of relevant studies and unpublished reports (Researchers' own articulation).

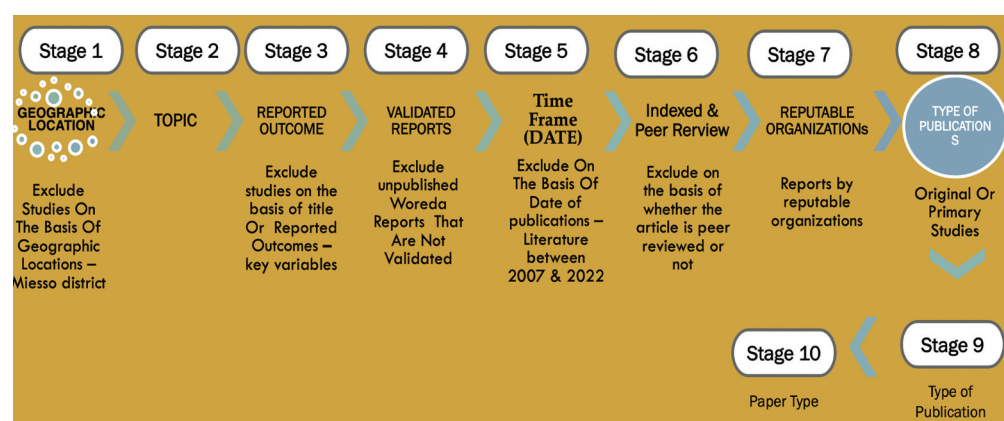


Table 1. Definition of eligibility criteria for inclusion

	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion CRITERIA
1	Geographic location of the study: literature will be limited to the study locations—West Hararhe zone, Mieso district	Studies (literature) will be excluded if not directly related to the target woreda and west Harareghe zone
2.	Reported outcome: literature assessed in terms of the outcome of interest as per the research objectives	Contents will be excluded based on the key variables
3	Topic: Studies/reports containing or directly related to youth transformation, policies, and opportunity structures in pastoral communities in Ethiopia	Article with a generic thematic focus on issues other than youth transformation, policies, and opportunity structures in pastoral communities in Ethiopia
4	Unpublished validated woreda reports (performance reports, external evaluation reports, project reports) on the topic (background information—crops grown, demographic information)	Woreda reports that are not verified
5	Time frame (Date of publication): Literature (2008 onwards)	Reject if under 2008
6	Indexed and Peer review: peer reviewed articles from a reputable publisher	Reject non-peer reviewed articles and journals that are not indexed
7	Name of Publisher	Reject if out of the list of reputable publishers
8	Reports of reputable international and National organizations: studies by FAO, IFPRI, CSA, on to nutritionally important, high yielding, and drought resilience crops and vegetables and fruits	Reject if otherwise
9	Type of publications: original (primary) studies on the topic of interest	Studies based on reviews (secondary data) or are short communications
10	Paper type	Exclude proceeding

Source: (authors')

validated reports (for local level unpublished reports). The definitions of the inclusion criteria are shown in Table 1.

Validation was a very important part of this systematic review. Information for the desk review was triangulated and validated in serious steps: various data sources (unpublished reports, various types of studies, official government reports, reports by international organizations, journal articles, and primary studies) were employed for data triangulation. Successive validation workshops, organized with multi-stakeholder and research translation partners in different stages, were used as platforms to validate draft reports. Modifications were made to the draft reports afterward.

Data from the systematic review were analyzed mainly using thematic and content analysis. As such data were organized into themes. Thematization was undertaken guided by the key research objectives of the study as highlighted in the introduction. As the such, relevant information was reviewed, synthesized, and analyzed based on key predefined topics (parameters) and additional categories (topics) that emerged during the data analysis. Based on the emerging themes, similar sections were merged. The following key topics were used for thematization and categorization; socio-economic and ecological environment; youth-focused policy strategies, practices, and

development interventions; factors affecting youth participation in interventions; enabling environment, and challenges for youth livelihood transformation. Finally, patterns of relationship were established. The final report on the context of agroecology and development interventions for youth livelihood transformation was organized based on the following themes: background information; population and demographic information of Miesso; ecological environment; social and productive environment; enabling environment for youth livelihood transformation; challenges for youth livelihood transformation. Quantitative data showing the distribution of institutions and services; ecological environment; social and productive environment; demographic information; and land were summarized using tables and [Figure](#)

3. Youth aspirations and agriculture

3.1. Defining youth

The term “Youth” has no universally accepted definition; however, the term typically applies to people under a certain age span. “Youth” is a socially defined concept that describes the period of transition between childhood and adulthood (Barau & Afrad, 2017). According to Afande et al. (2015), youths are usually defined concerning their age brackets; and there is little agreement as to what entails the upper and lower limits. The United Nations (UN) uses the ages of 15 to 24, while the African Union Commission uses the ages of 15–35 (Lindsjö et al., 2020). The Ethiopian government uses the ages of 15–29 (FDRE Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, 2004). According to Barau and Afrad (2017), a youth is one in transition from childhood to adulthood. This involves all biological processes, social growth, and economic freedom.

3.2. Youth aspiration and agriculture

Rural youth’s aspirations (“CRP,” 2015; Leavy & Smith, 2010; Proctor & Lucchesi, 2012) remain a relatively unexplored area for researchers (“CRP,” 2015; Pyburn et al., 2015; Sumberg et al., 2012) and are struggling to find its place in sociological or socioeconomic research. Understanding the specific context of youth is critical to developing appropriate and effective strategies and programmes. While some contend that aspirations are ‘hopes and dreams that are not necessarily embedded in reality (Leavy & Smith, 2010), they may also be what people expect to achieve (MacBrayne, 1987). Measuring youth aspirations helps shed light on the possible employment outcomes that can be observed in adulthood and play a role in breaking poverty circles, which is highly relevant for public policy (Costa et al., 2022). Aspirations give us a better understanding of the life trajectory that young people want to have. It enables marginalized groups to exercise their “voice” and reflect on ways to change their situation (Carney, 2003; Appadurai, 2004).

Bernard and Taffesse (2014) have argued that aspirations can have three distinctive aspects: First, aspirations are future-oriented; that is, they are goals that can only be satisfied at some future time. Aspirations are not about immediate gratification but long-term dreams. Secondly, aspirations are motivators; that is, they are goals in which individuals are willing, in principle, to invest time, effort or money to attain (in contrast to idle daydreams and wishes). Finally, aspirations may refer to a specific dimension of well-being, such as wealth or social recognition, but are more generally perceived as an ambition to reach a multi-dimensional life outcome. The key implication is that aspirations can influence an individual’s future-regarding behaviour. In this study, youth aspiration in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas is understood in terms of these three dimensions.

Most aspiration-related studies in SSA and Ethiopia are in the area of career development, focusing on the education sector (e.g., Schewel & Fransen, 2018) and based on urban contexts. Most of which are also based on secondary data. In general, available studies on youth aspiration in agriculture and farming are mixed. In a longitudinal study, Leavy and Hossain (2014) studied aspirations across 23 research sites in 10 countries. The survey covered rural and urban areas. The study found that farming is not a favored option for the younger generation in rural areas. There was also a strong and widespread desire among the youth to use formal education to gain

a respected profession in urban areas. The study also found that the expansion of information technologies and the corresponding desire to consume these technologies shaped youth occupational aspirations and occupational choices. The lack of interest in agriculture among many young people is due to the lack of access to land, capital, and other inputs.

Daum's (2018) study in Zambia revealed a mixed results on youth aspirations and agriculture. Some of the responses from the youth confirmed the growing narrative that farming is an unattractive career and provided a dark picture of agriculture. They expressed that farming is a burdensome and labor-intensive occupation with little or no reward. They perceive farming as an occupation with no guarantee of regular income. They also expressed the risk associated with farming, particularly due to overreliance on unreliable rainfall patterns. Instead of being farmers, they aspire to pursue regular paying careers such as teaching, nursing and policing. In the same study, another group of youth preferred farm life. They aspire to work and make a profitable business out of it. They plan to own draught animals and bicycles or motorbikes for transporting their farm produce to stores or markets. Whereas being very positive about farming as a source of livelihood, they mentioned that limited access to land and lack of access to agricultural finance and ICT are some of the challenges they likely to face. Leavy and Smith (2010) also noted that environmental degradation; limited access to land, social and cultural practices, increasing globalization, aspirations to attain a high standard of living that agriculture cannot support and increasing awareness of rural-urban inequalities as some of the reasons that make rural youth not pursue agricultural-based livelihoods.

Schewel and Fransen (2022) studied voluntary immobility among youth in Ethiopia, India, and Vietnam for the "Young Lives Project". The authors examined the motivations of young people who express the preference to stay put and asks what individual and household characteristics are associated with voluntary immobility. They find that the majority of the youth surveyed envision a future within their home country, and between 32 percent (Ethiopia) and 60 percent (Vietnam) prefer to stay in their current location. Most young people surveyed prefer to stay for family-related reasons. Living in an urban area and engaging in farm work are associated with greater staying aspirations, but only for youth from the most resource-poor or the wealthiest households. Higher levels of schooling, wealth, feelings of self-efficacy and access to paid employment are consistently associated with diminished desires to stay, with stronger effects for youth from rural settings, resource-poor households, and women. The authors argued that the finding has important policy implications for development interventions that seek to decrease migration propensities by creating job opportunities in origin areas. Whether expanding employment will increase or decrease staying propensities depends on the nature and prospects of local employment and the socioeconomic backgrounds of young people engaging in it. For particular subsets of youth—youth from rural areas, poorer households, or young women—accessing paid work may be a stepping stone that provides the networks and financial resources needed to imagine and realize a migration project.

Also, contrary to the popular narrative that young people are constantly migrating to the cities in search of city life, Anyidoho et al. (2012) found that many youths move to work on cocoa farms. For these youth, migrating to work on cocoa farm enable them to earn an income than they may have in their home areas in cities. These youth aspire to pursue farming as a career under better conditions than they were under; they hope to purchase or lease land. In this study, some youth was depending on cocoa farming to provide them with the initial capital to propel them into more appealing alternative sources of livelihood. A similar observation was made among tomato youth farmers in *Brong Ahafo* in Ghana too (Sumberg & Okali, 2006). The pressure on land was the major factor driving them out of cocoa farming. The young people further stated that investment in inputs and technologies, high prices, enhanced access to credit services and investments in measures that are tailored to improve living conditions in rural areas would make them consider cocoa farming as a long-term occupation. These findings suggest that Rural youth outmigration

does not necessarily reflect a permanent, lifetime abandonment of rural life, agriculture, or the possibility of a return to farming (White, 2019, 2019, 2015).

Giuliani et al. (2017) using a combination of qualitative and quantitative participatory research methods studied rural youth's realities, perspectives, and aspirations in dryland Agricultural Livelihood Systems (ALSs) in the Midelt Province, Morocco. The study evaluated young people's perception of pastoral, rain-fed and irrigated systems of agriculture and uncovered gender differences in the participation of young people in agricultural activities. The study showed the youth's dream village is envisioned as a rural place where people have a more comfortable life with their own families, farming better and more sustainably rather than seeking a job in urban areas. A greater proportion of young men were highly involved in agricultural activities than their female counterparts. Young women involved in the irrigated and pastoral system and both genders involved in rain-fed farming had a very negative perception of agriculture. Nevertheless, about two-thirds of young men aspire to stay engaged in irrigated agriculture provided the current terms are improved.

A recent study by Endris & Hassan, (2020) across four dryland districts in Oromia and the Amhara Regional States of Ethiopia found that youth aspirations are driven by a common goal to improve one's income, family, and quality of life. Such aspirations are shaped by social, cultural, environmental, and political realities and exposure to social media. Aspirations are also gendered. Social and cultural norms and the gendered division of labour, and the expectations of family and community shape the aspirations of male and female youth. In all cases, agriculture and working in agriculture were found to be the major aspirations of the youth. Another study by Boonabaana et al (2020) using qualitative research design, compared youth aspiration and transitions across three dryland regions of Uganda: North, North East and Eastern Regions in Uganda. The following were key findings of the study: i) both female and male youth across the three areas aspire to have progressive and better lives, mostly getting themselves out of poverty; ii) common aspirations include better education, housing, becoming community role models, agricultural aspirations, and for male youth in Karamoja, marriage and children are key; iii) youth aspirations were conditioned by local experiences, access to resources and other opportunities, as well as by role models in their communities. In addition, female and male aspirations remain largely unmet due to a myriad of challenges that have resulted in missed opportunities and shattered dreams.

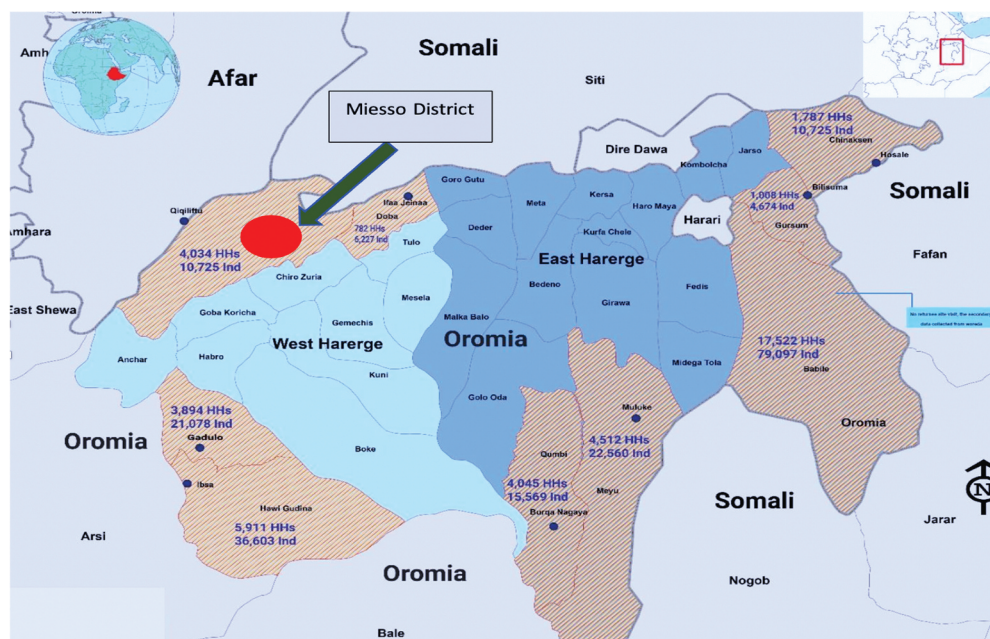
A common finding across the above studies was that agriculture has been held as a common aspiration of the youth across the study countries. For instance, more than half (over 55 %) of the respondents from Morocco; Ethiopia, and Uganda have agriculture as their common aspiration. Living in Urban areas has been the view of the minority. Even those aspiring to go abroad finally aim to go back to their rural areas and start farming.

4. Study location

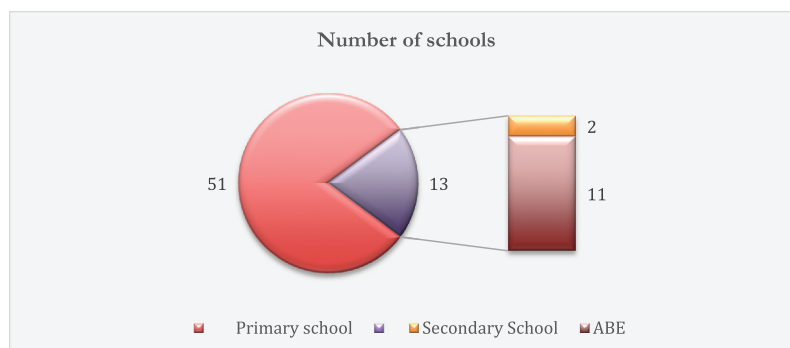
4.1. Location of mieso woreda¹

West Hararghe Zone is one of the 20 Zones found in the Oromia Regional state. It is bordered by the Somali regional state in the North, the Afar regional states in the North-West and North-East, and the Arsi zone in the South-West (Figure 2). The zone has a total of 15 woredas (11 highland and 4 pastoral and agro-pastoral Woredas) and two administrative towns. Mieso, Hawi Gudina, Burka Dhintu and Gumbi Boredede Woredas are among the pastoral and agro-pastoral Woredas in the West Hararghe zone. The remaining 11 Woredas mainly depend on crop production and livestock rearing. Mieso Woreda is one of the 15 districts found in the west Hararghe zone. It is bordered in the east by Doba, in the north by Chiro and Guba Koricha, in the northeast by Anchar Woredas, in the northwest by the Somali regional state, and in the South and Southwest by Afar regional state (Figure 2). According to a report from Woreda's office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021), the district has 31 rural kebeles and 2 towns.

**Figure 2. Location map of miesso district and west har-
 erghe zone.**



**Figure 3. Number of schools in
 Miesso Woreda in 2021 (Source:
 Miesso Woreda education
 Bureau, 2021).**



4.2. Population and demographic information of Miesso

Though there is no recent data on the population size of the Woreda, it is estimated that there are about 31,456 households in the Woreda (i.e., 24,256 rural households and 7,200 urban households). The population size of the Woreda is estimated at 144,750 (i.e., with 115,624 rural population and 29,126 urban population). In terms of crude population density (using the 2007 and 2013 censuses as a base), the Woreda has grown from 51 persons /km² in 2007 to 63 persons /km² in 2013 (Oromia Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project (OLLRP), 2020). The average household size for rural and urban areas of the Woreda was 4.3 and 5.0 respectively (Table 2), with an average of 4.6 individuals for both areas (IBID).

Among the 31 rural kebeles, 29 are in the *kola* agro-ecological zone and inhabited by agro-pastoral households. Pastoralism is the other most important livelihood strategy in the Woreda (Beyene, 2016). In terms of ethnic composition, the Woreda is predominantly inhabited by two ethnic groups: the Oromo (Ala, Nole and Ittu clans) and the Somali (Issa and Hawiya clans; Beyene, 2009). The Oromos are mainly agro-pastoral, whereas the Somalis are pastoral, entirely relying on livestock. Beyene (2009) identified three important features that define the socio-economic conditions of the Woreda and how competition over limited resources may cause conflict. First, different production systems (pastoral and agro-pastoral) coexist in the same Woreda. Second, these two systems compete for land and the way it needs to be utilized. Such competition has long

been resulting in inter-ethnic conflict. It is highlighted that a decline in rangeland resources manifested through the reduction in livestock feed availability has presented a challenge to sustaining the livelihoods of both groups. Grazing land for livestock production, which is considered a priority for both groups, has been constrained more by the threat of conflict than by environmental change and demographic pressure in the Woreda (Beyene, 2009). A report by the west Hararghe zone Disaster Risk Management Office (2019) highlighted that competition over resources triggers conflict in the Woreda and locations bordering the Somali region during drought seasons. Studies on the nature and development of recent conflicts in the Woreda showed a drastic evolution of such conflicts involving armed confrontations resulting in significant welfare loss, mass displacement and destruction of properties and infrastructures (Endris & Hassan, 2020). Such sporadic conflicts have adverse consequences on youth livelihood transformation in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas.

4.3. Ecological environment

4.3.1. Topography

Mieso Woreda covers an area of 257, 344 hectares, of which 82% is plain land, 9% is undulated land, and the remaining 9% belongs to mountains. The Woreda is a part of the Northwestern Rift Valley Escarpment. Most of the Woreda is bounded by the chain of *Chercher* highlands. The highest point of the Woreda is Asebot Mountain. The lowest place of the Woreda stretched to the Awash River to the extreme west.

4.3.2. Climate

Agro-ecologically, West Hararghe Zone is divided into three distinct zones: 10% highland (*Dega*), 38% midland (*Woyna Dega*), and 52% lowland (*Kola*). The altitude of the zone ranges from 900 to 2500 masl. Most of Mieso Woreda is found in the tropical climatic zone and classified as lowland. According to Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021), p. 95% of the Woreda is classified as *Kola* (lowland), while 5% is *Woina-dega*. Out of the 31 rural kebeles, 29 are in the *kola* agro-ecological zone and inhabited by agro-pastoral households. The average annual rainfall of the Woreda ranges between 500 and 700 mm, while the mean temperature ranges between 24°C and 36°C (Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource, 2021).

There are two commonly known rainy seasons in the woreda: the “*Ganna*” and “*Arfasa*” seasons. The “*Ganna*” (marking the main rainy season) falls in the period between June to September; while the “*Arfasa*” season falls from March to May. These seasons are the basis for the preparation of the community’s seasonal calendar. For instance, during “*Ganna*” season, pastoralists have good access to water for livestock, get moisture to prepare land and plant shorter-duration crops like maize. Whereas land preparation and sowing for long-season crops such as sorghum is performed during the “*Arfasa*” and harvested during “*Birra*” (October to November) season. The movement of livestock is a major seasonal event and coping mechanism in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas. It occurs during the dry season (*Birra* season). During this period, pastoralists move their livestock to dry areas in order to access enclosed areas for pasture. The intensity of livestock mobility is greater towards the “*Bona*” season (December to February) and lowers towards the commencement of the “*Arfasa*” season as animals and herders begin to march back home with the expectation of the start of the rainy season. Livestock is also marketed on a seasonal basis. For instance, most animals are brought to the local markets during “*Ganna*” and “*Arfasa*” seasons, due to high moisture and feed availability which translates into good body conditions and the price of the animals.

4.4. Social and productive environment

4.4.1. Agriculture/farming system

The Woreda has two dominant farming systems: sorghum/pulse/oil crops/livestock (mixed crop/livestock farming system) and the pastoral system. The rural youth constitute an important part of

Table 2. Population sizes of the 31 rural kebeles and two towns disaggregated by sex

No	Population	HHS			Population			Total		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Rural	19,009	5247	24,256	46,860	44,508	91,368	65,869	49,755	115,624
2	Urban	5616	1584	7200	11,311	10,615	21,926	16,927	12,199	29,126
	Total	24,625	6831	31,456	58,171	55,123	113,294	82,796	61,954	144,750

Source: Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021).

the labor force in both production systems. The crop/livestock farming system is predominantly a *Woina-dega* livelihood zone. The total number of farm households in this zone is estimated to be 18,336 (83%), with a total population of about 96,651. The total cultivated land (annual and perennial) in this farming system is estimated at 21,877 ha. The total area of the farming system is about 145,864 ha. The average landholding in this farming system is 1.2 ha per household. The common crops grown under this system include maize, sesame, groundnut, haricot bean, teff, flax, and sorghum. *khat*, sesame, mung bean, vegetables, fruits, coffee and tuber crops are grown as cash crops. A recent study (Endris and Hassan, 2019) shows that mung bean is also increasingly adopted by farmers in the locality mainly to generate income. Most of the cereals are primarily cultivated for farmers' own consumption. The vegetative part is fed to livestock during drought periods.

The Pastoral system is the other most important livelihood zone in the Woreda (Beyene, 2016). A study by MPLSDAPD (2005) classified pastoralists in the Mieso area into two. One type of pastoralist is sedentary and lives in one area, but with occasional mobility during drought periods to other areas searching for feed and water for their livestock. However, this type of pastoralist does not widely practice crop farming except under very rare circumstances. The other type of pastoralists are mobile types and have no fixed residential area as they frequently move with their family and livestock in search of feed and water for their livestock.

Livestock production is a major livelihood activity prioritized by both pastoral and agro-pastoral households in Mieso. The youth actively participate in livestock production in the district. Livestock is an important source of household income and food security (Sofia, 2010). According to Oromia Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project (OLLRP; 2020) and the Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021), cattle and goats are the major marketable livestock commodities most dominant in the farming system, followed by camel (Table 3).

5. Enabling environment and challenges for youth livelihood transformation

Support structures are key to enhancing youth livelihood opportunities in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas. The various elements that can assist the agro-ecological transition of the youth can be categorized as policy, physical (financial and market infrastructure, educational, transportation, etc), socio-cultural (social capital and customary institutions), organizational infrastructures (saving and credit associations, extension services, healthcare), and local actors and networks. The next section provides the basic services and facilities of Mieso woreda with implications for youth transformation.

5.1. Youth policies and proclamations

The 2004 Ethiopian National Youth Policy Document highlights the importance of creating favorable conditions to enable the youth to create new jobs for themselves based on their competence and to benefit from them (FDRE Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, 2004). The phrase "supporting condition" could mean any type of support the youth may require in realizing their aspirations. For the rural youth, the land is one of the key assets to support the successful agroecological transition. The FDRE Rural Land Administration and Land Use Proclamation (456/2005) recognizes the right of any person who is a member of a peasant farmer, semi pastoralist and pastoralist family having the right to use rural land may get rural land from his family donation, inheritance or from the competent authority. The proclamation specifically underscores the right of women and youth to acquire and use agricultural land stating that "any citizen of the country who is 18 years of age or above and wants to engage in agriculture for a living shall have the right to use rural land". The proclamation also recognizes the right of women who want to engage in agriculture to get and use rural land.

A recent study conducted by Endris and Hassan (2019) in Mieso woreda shows that as land is getting scarcer and fragmented the youth face significant barriers in acquiring land either through government channels or inheritance. As a result, the youth take alternative measures of accessing

Table 3. Livestock resource base of mieso woreda

No	Type of Livestock	Total Population
	Cattle	189,861
	Camel	41,860
	Goats	97,044
	Sheep	42,528
	Poultry	137,410
	Donkey	15,616
	Horse	No Data
	Mule	No Data
	Bee Colony	No Data
	Total	524,319

Source: Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021).

land such as clearing forest land and turning it into agricultural land (e.g., in the *Hochecha Forest*). Such measures are contrary to the main aim of the Proclamation which is to conserve and develop natural resources in rural areas by promoting sustainable land use practices. Supporting youth participation in off/non-farm activities should be taken as a strategic direction by local and federal governments.

5.2. Infrastructure facilities and institutions

5.2.1. Transportation facilities

Access to basic road networks and transportation is key to enhancing rural youth engagement in agricultural production and marketing along the value chain. However, access to roads which is a major factor for market access is very poor in Mieso woreda; and 72.6 % of households live in areas either with dirt roads that are difficult for cars or with no road at all (Woreda Disaster Risk Profiling Programme, no date). According to a report by Oromia Low-land Resilience Project (OLLRP), the roads in the zone/Woreda are classified as gravel roads, URRAP Roads, and Community roads. In general, there are about 89 all-weather roads in the district. All peasant associations have seasonal roads. In 2009, the total length of asphalt and gravel roads connecting the Woreda with the zonal capital and different kebeles was more than 90 km. However, most of the existing road services are poor (Oromia Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project (OLLRP), 2020). During the rainy season, the mobility of people and goods, and services is very limited.

5.2.2. Education

Promoting access to education in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas is viewed as an important pathway for successful youth engagement in agriculture and rural non- and off-farm businesses. Mieso Woreda has 53 schools (Figure 3). However, schools are not evenly distributed across the various kebeles. The literacy level of the woreda is also reported to be very low. According to a report by Oromia Disaster Risk Profiling (no date), of those school-age children, 64.5% of them did not go to school at all and in terms of general awareness, 87.6% of members of households cannot read and write.

In general, in terms of school enrollment, there were about 29,888 students enrolled to attend school at different levels in 2021 (Figure 4). As depicted by the above figure, the rate of gender disparity in education is significant in the Woreda at all levels of schooling. Female students account for the minimum enrollment across all levels. Such an enrollment gap even grows bigger as we go to the higher levels of schooling. Cultural factors (perception about modern education for

girls, early marriage, household chores) and distance from school are some of the major factors cited as barriers to the low enrollment of girls, among others (Endris & Hassan, 2019).

Most of the schools also lack the necessary resources and materials to support proper teaching-learning activities. According to Mieso Woreda education Bureau (2021), there is a critical shortage of classrooms, reference materials, laboratory facilities, tables, and chairs across all schools in the district. Most of the schools also do not have an adequate water supply. For instance, out of 53 schools found in the Woreda, more than 68% of them do not have access to water supply in their compounds. There is also a critical shortage of teachers at all levels of schooling. This can be demonstrated by the student-teacher ratio (Table 4). The student-teacher ratio at pre-primary and primary levels is 216:1, 56:1, respectively.

All these are evidence suggesting that the education infrastructure in the woreda requires significant improvement. Cultural barriers and perceptions against girls' education are also equally important loopholes that should be addressed.

5.2.3. Human and livestock healthcare services

Access to adequate and quality human and livestock health care services is one of the core elements to promote sustainable investment by the male and female youth in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas. Mieso woreda has very limited healthcare facilities. Official reports show that there are only 26 healthcare facilities currently providing healthcare services for human and animal health for the entire Mieso (1 hospital, 3 health centers, 12 private clinics for humans and 11 animal health clinics). This is way too small compared to the population size and prevalence of human and livestock diseases in the woreda. It is thus important to improve the provision of healthcare services in the woreda. The availability of such infrastructures is associated with the improved willingness of the youth to stay and work in rural areas.

5.2.4. Agricultural extension services

The youth play a very important role in agriculture in Mieso woreda. The inclusion of young male and female farmers in agricultural extension programs is considered key to achieving sustainable food and nutrition security. Ethiopia's strategy for the agricultural extension system also recognizes the mainstreaming of gender and youth as one of the 9 pillar strategies to achieve food and nutrition security and poverty reduction goals of the country. However, similar to other parts of the country, agricultural extension service provision in Mieso woreda suffers from organizational, structural, and capacity-related problems affecting proper service delivery. Studies show that agricultural extension services are poorly organized and staffed in the Woreda (Endris and Hassan, 2019). According to Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021), there are only 121 development agents (Figure 5) and 16 FTCs for the entire Mieso district.

Figure 4. Students' school enrollment in 2021 in Mieso Woreda disaggregated by sex
 (Source: Mieso Woreda Education Office (2021).

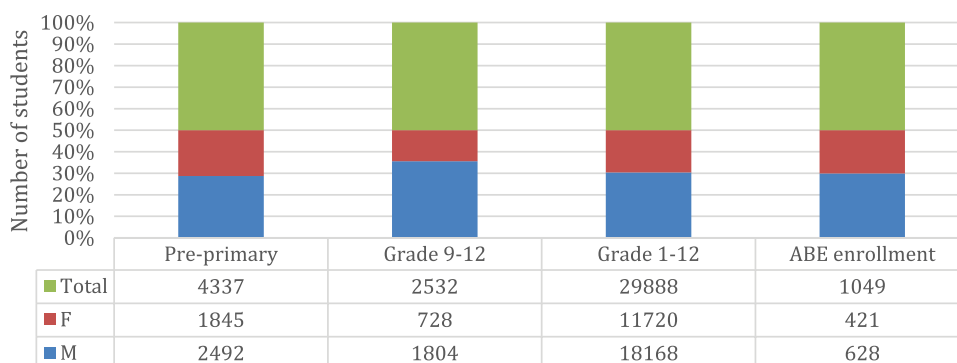


Table 4. Student-teacher ratio of Mieso Woreda by the year 2021											
Pre-Primary				Primary school				Secondary school			
M	F	T	Student: Teacher Ratio	M	F	T	Student: Teacher Ratio	M	F	T	Student: Teacher Ratio
16	4	20	216:1	319	180	499	56:1	70	14	84	30:1

Source: Mieso Woreda education Bureau (2021)

A related problem with the extension service in Miesso Woreda is low motivation and high mobility/turnover of DAs. Several Subject Matter Specialists (SMSs) and DAs in the Woreda quit the extension service and joined better-paying NGOs or other government offices (Gebremedhin et al., 2006). This is due to the poor incentive packages and remoteness of most of the kebeles from urban centers.

5.2.5. Water services

River or stream water sources are the most important sources of water for the majority of households in Miesso woreda (Woreda Disaster Risk-profiling Programme, no date). About 53,854 people are currently facing critical water shortages in the woreda (Multi-agency need assessment report, 2021). Studies show that the lack of clean water supply in lowland areas such as Miesso is one of the push factors triggering youth migration to urban centers. The problem affects the daily life of male and female youth and how basic public services can be provided in multiple pathways. For instance, quite a large number of schools in the Zone and woreda are without access to water. Reports show that nearly 34 schools in the woreda have no access to water causing 14,693 young girls and boys to drop out of school (multi-agency need assessment report, 2021). The same report has indicated that the operation of school feeding programs is interrupted in most of the schools due to a shortage of water for preparing food. Similarly, most health facilities based in the woreda are not functioning efficiently due to recurring water shortages. The lack and/or unavailability of piped-water supply within the target areas often forces households to march longer distances and spend a long time looking for water. A recent study in Miesso woreda shows that the impact of such events is gendered and affects male and female youth differently (Endris & Hassan, 2020). As women and younger girls are traditionally responsible for fetching water for the entire household, younger girls may likely drop out of school for fetching water. For instance, the average time taken to fetch water in Miesso woreda is reported to be 203.18 minutes/day (Woreda Disaster Risk-profiling Programme, no date). Such problems are also reported as push factors, facilitating youth migration to urban areas.

In terms of household access to water for irrigation, small-scale irrigation is one of the least developed infrastructures in Miesso Woreda. There were 11 small-scale irrigation schemes in the entire Woreda (11 kebeles) in 2018 (Miesso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource, 2021). The irrigations rely on a surface (on *Laga Chiro* and *Kora River*) and groundwater (Table 5).

All these scenarios show the severity of water-related problems in the locality. Such environmental stressors can reinforce male and female youth to migrate to urban areas and give up on their dreams. As youth-focused interventions depend on the development of improved infrastructure such as water (both for drinking and irrigation), the problem requires coordinated action by the concerned organizations.

Figure 5. Number of DAs in Miesso Woreda (Miesso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource, 2021).

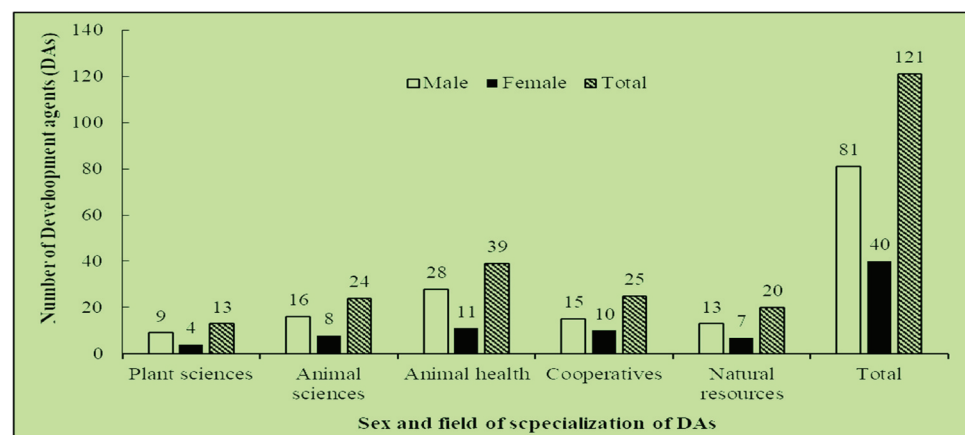


Table 5. Small-scale irrigation schemes and estimated beneficiaries

Kebeles with Irrigation	No of Schemes	Irrigated area in hectare	Potential area in hectares	Water Sources	Estimated Beneficiary HHs		
					M	F	Total
11	11	520	855	Surface (Laga Chiro and Kora River) and Groundwater	598	117	715

Source: (Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021)).

5.3. Market context

Studies show that Mieso Woreda provides access to a strategic livestock market for traders (Beyene, 2009) from different locations. However, the production and marketing of livestock products are hampered by limited access to the modern livestock and product market infrastructure. According to Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource (2021), there are only two marketplaces in the entire Woreda (Mieso and Asebot towns). Asebot town serves as the only livestock marketplace concerning cattle sales in the Woreda (Oromia Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project (OLLRP), 2020). The main buyers of the livestock (fattened cattle) are traders from Addis Ababa and those from the surrounding areas.

Regarding marketable crop types, the common types of crops grown and sold at the local market include maize, sesame, groundnut, haricot bean, khat, sesame, mung bean, and tuber crops (sweet potato). However, there is a lack of market for agricultural products in the locality, including standard market centers, marketing cooperatives, and associations. The youth have limited engagement and participation in the marketing of agricultural produces and also lack access to real-time market information.

5.4. Financial institutions

The availability of a locally adaptable and affordable rural finance system is key to improving the agricultural productivity and food security of smallholder farmers. Such infrastructures are also important to support rural entrepreneurship by male and female youth farmers. According to reports from West Hararghe Zone Micro and Small Enterprises Development Office (2016) and empirical studies, rural financing arrangements are lacking. Farmers would also find it difficult to make use of the existing financial arrangements due to structural barriers. Long time loan process and bureaucracy, the requirement of a large amount of advance savings, the short-term loan repayment period, collateral and high-interest rate, and lack of interest-free credit were key challenges in accessing rural credit by male and female youth in Western Hararghe Zone in general and Mieso Woreda (Endris & Hassan, 2020).

5.5. Local actors and networks to enable youth transition

Some of the local actors and potential groups that can support key transformation/agroecological transition of smallholder farmers and the youth in Mieso Woreda/West Hararghe zone identified by Endris and Hassan (2020) and Oromia Low-land Resilience Project (OLLRP) includes the following:

5.5.1. Climate change actors

The youth in Mieso Woreda have limited access to information, technical support and financing for responding to climate change-induced shocks. Enhancing the capacity of women and youth to cope with and adapt to the impact of climate variability and change for improved resilience requires integration between key climate change actors and stakeholders (Gebremedhin et al., 2006). Potential climate change actors include zonal regional bureaus of agriculture, credit and saving office, zonal disaster preparedness agencies, agricultural extension workers and NGOs.

5.5.2. Market actors

The market for agricultural products and livestock is very limited in Mieso Woreda (Beyene, 2016). Key transformation agencies that can create opportunities for male and female youth along with the crop and livestock value chain may include producers, marketing cooperatives, financial service providers, rural saving and credit associations, and agricultural extension workers.

5.5.3. Agricultural extension and advisory service actors

Agricultural extension service in Mieso, the same as the rest of the country, is provided through the formal government channel. Woreda's office of Agriculture and Natural Resources is the major provider of agricultural extension services. Agricultural colleges (including universities and

research centers such as Oda Bultum University, Haramaya University), farmers' training centers and ATVETs have been identified as key stakeholders.

5.5.4. Health service actors

Proper health care (human/livestock) delivery is one of the strategic directions to improve household welfare in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas in Ethiopia. The provision of state-of-the-art human/veterinary health care services through strengthening animal/human health extension systems and building the capacity of healthcare providers is considered very important. Some of the key actors identified to facilitate such transitions in Mieso Woreda include development agents, animal/human health extension workers, veterinarians, NGOs working in the area of livestock health, and higher education institutions.

5.5.5. Organizations

Various non-government and government organizations operate in the district to address pertinent socio-economic and production-related problems of the community in Mieso woreda. A list of projects and interventions, operating under NGOs/GOs identified and examined the extent to which youth and women are represented as direct and indirect beneficiaries. Table 6 below presents the list of organizations, types, the specific project implemented, and target groups/beneficiaries.

As indicated above (Table 6), the contribution of each development intervention for youth participation has been assessed by considering gender equality and inclusion, targeting; gainful employment opportunities (in on and off-farm activities), capacity building, empowerment and decision-making. Youth and women are targeted both as indirect and direct beneficiaries across several programs and project interventions across the West Hararghe zone. Project performance reports for some of the projects assessed show that the participation of women and youth was constrained by various factors. For instance, youth membership in Savings Internal Lending Communities (SILC) under the DFSA project was lower than anticipated due to limited access to income and social capital which need continuous education by the project. Project implementations were also delayed by sporadic instability in some of the fragile locations. Busy schedules of government workers and the high turnover of HEWs caused delays in conducting various pieces of training.

5.6. Social and cultural landscape (indigenous institutions)

Cooperation and social support networks that respond to social needs and promote household and community well-being to shocks have been institutionalized and widely practiced among rural households in Ethiopia for many centuries (Endris & Hassan, 2020, 2020). The Hararghe community. Pastoral and agro-pastoral communities, similar to other communities in Ethiopia, have a system of indigenous mutual support practices (IMSPs) and social networks to support each other in times of good and bad. Socio-cultural studies in the past have underscored the role of indigenous/customary institutions in supporting the socio-economic transitions of communities in Eastern Ethiopia, including the West Hararghe zone. Studies show that customary institutions in Mieso have a role in resource-based conflict management, sustainable land management, and water resource management for sustainability. Beyene (2016) underscores that the effect of state interventions in providing training, improved seeds and land management technologies in Mieso Woreda will be unsustainable without considering the role of customary authorities. Some of the key customary institutions include; *Aba Gadaa (Daaminaa)* (creating peace between rivals, ordering and coordinating security); *Aba Malaaqaa (Father of Water)* (coordinating and facilitating equitable water resource use); *Abbaa Saalfaa/father of grazing* (coordinating and facilitating fair use and distribution of grazing land; Oromia Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project (OLLRP), 2020).

Other than the political structure that governs resource utilization at the community level, there are also other types of arrangements that facilitate resource access and reciprocities between individuals and households for coping against adverse shocks. These practices are opportunities for the youth to

Table 6. Active NGO Projects for FY in West Hararghe Zone and youth inclusion

Name of NGOs	Project title and components	Objectives	Status	Target groups
CARE	Growing Nutrition for Mothers and Children project		On-going	Mothers and children
	Emergency WASH and cash intervention for drought and conflict-affected communities of East and West Hararghe zones, Oromia region of Ethiopia	To reduce the impact of drought on affected local and conflict displaced communities through gender sensitive WASH and cash support.	2017–2018	Households IDPs
	Strengthen PSNP4 Institutions and Resilience (SPIR)	Strengthen PSNP4 Institutions and Resilience focusing on enhancing livelihoods, increasing resilience to shocks, and improving food security and nutrition for rural households vulnerable to food insecurity in Ethiopia.	2016–2021	Vulnerable rural hhs;Vulnerable women and men; Youth; Lactating and pregnant mothers; Children Under 2
CISP	Emergency Initiative for Vulnerable Populations, Refugees, Displaced Persons and Migrants to Counter the Causes of Irregular Migration in Ethiopia” (AID 10677)	Address the root causes of irregular migration by improving the living conditions of the population in areas with high migration potential, returning migrants, and host communities. The fight against irregular migration	Twelve months (2016–17)	Involved mainly women (50%); Youth ages 18 and 35 (70%); Returnees (30%)
CATCH	WASH		On-going	Male and female youth included
	International NGO working on Agriculture		On-going	
Mothers and Children Multi-sectoral Development Organization (MCMDO)	Reproductive, Maternal and Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health for Pastoralists in Hard-to-reach Environment		Ongoing	Mothers and children
LLRP	LLRP—Ethiopian Government, WB & IFAD	To Improve Livelihood Resilience of Pastoral and Agro-Pastoral Communities		Women and youth

Table 6. Active NGO Projects for FY in West Hararghe Zone and youth inclusion (continued from above)

Name of NGOs	Project title and components	Objectives	Status	Target groups
CRS	Development Food Security Activity- (DFS) With the overall target of 240,625 Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) IV beneficiaries, local Government of Ethiopia (GoE), community and HH capacity development was complemented with more community-led support to address gaps in GoE's services and capacity.	Reduce communities' and households' vulnerability to shocks and IMPROVING Sustainable Economic Well-being FOR HOUSEHOLDS Establishing women and youth-friendly on-farm and off-farm income-generating enterprises; entrepreneurship training for youth with skills to start their own businesses; Rural women and youth empowerment in decision-making; women and youth trained in and received coaching on improved leadership, negotiation and life skills)	30 September 2016- September 29, 2021	PSNP IV BENEFICIARY HOUSEHOLDS Youth and women—indirect beneficiaries through inclusion of gender and youth strategies
ECC-SDCCOH—Ethiopian Church	Emergency Response in Mieso Wereda		Ongoing	
	Resilience Through Enhanced Adaptation Action Learning and Partnership (REAAP)		Ongoing	Children and women
NDRMC	Government project working on disaster prevention			
Pastoral Community Development Project (PCDP) III	Support community sub-projects in targeted pastoral and agro-pastoral sub-districts—to build demand-driven social and economic infrastructure, to build community institutions, to develop a community-level monitoring and learning system, and to assist pastoralist/agro-pastoralist households to improve their livelihood by promoting access to financial services and supporting improved advisory services.	Build demand-driven social and economic infrastructure, and community institutions, develop a community-level monitoring and learning system and assist pastoralist/ agro-pastoralist households to improve their livelihood by promoting access to financial services and supporting improved advisory services.	2013–2019	Includes youth and women as indirect beneficiaries

Source: Oromia Regional Socio-economic profile and GIS Directorate (2018) and OCHA Ethiopia (2019)

engage in farming and other activities in the drylands. The various practices offer services, such as mutual insurance, labour sharing, savings, and credit to rural households, among other obligations (Endris et al., 2018). Some of the customary arrangements are *Hirta* (an alternative way of accessing land through sharecropping or contract farming among the youth and others); *Guza* (labor sharing); *Afosha* (women's association) (Endris et al., 2018; Endris & Hassan, 2019).

6. Challenges that hinder successful youth transition

Pastoral and agro-pastoral youth face structural and policy challenges that hinder a successful transition and find gainful employment opportunities in rural areas. According to Endris and Hassan (2020) the major challenges the youth in Mieso woreda face can be structured around eight major categories: 1) local customs and norms, 2) financial, 3) education and technical capacity, 4) infrastructure and market, 5) economic, 6) administration and policy related, 7) environmental, and 8) others (Table 7).

Some of these challenges are gendered and may affect male and female youth differently, suggesting the implementation of gender-specific interventions and programs. Addressing the underlying causes that hinder youth engagement in agriculture is key to enhancing youth employability and achieving food and nutrition security and poverty reduction in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas. Recommendations on how to facilitate youth engagement may include: adopting context-specific approaches to understanding youth, addressing gender-based discrimination in access to resources, ensuring availability of locally adapted and gender-responsive rural finance, streamlining bureaucratic rules, training the youth as value chain actors and rural service providers, create market links, provide the rural infrastructure that can support youth engagement in agriculture, promote the production of high value, early maturing, drought-resilient and disease-resistant crop varieties (Endris & Hassan, 2019).

6.0.1. Shocks, vulnerability and local coping/adaptation strategies

The risk of loss of rural livelihoods due to shocks, such as those related to ecological, political, policy, and economic adverse events—are a major concern for communities located in pastoral and agro-pastoral livelihood systems (Befikadu et al., 2019). Socio-ecologically, the areas are characterized by environmental and climatic uncertainties. Politically, they have been at the margins of state-building. The state-building processes of successive Ethiopian regimes involved imposition on pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of state-led and top-down political and economic policies that largely ignored the communities' socio-economic and environmental problems and disregarded their indigenous economic rationalities, risk-coping strategies and adaptive capabilities. The major feature of the governmentality of this historically-embedded system of structural deprivation is the fact that the center became the holder and controller of power while the pastoral and agro-pastoral peripheries became the powerless (Markakis, 2011). This power asymmetry is still a standing dilemma choking the political economy of economic empowerment and growth in agro-pastoral and pastoral areas of the country.

Lowland agro-pastoral households of the zone with moisture stress, such as Mieso Woreda are particularly more affected. Drought, flood, disease and pests are the dominant climate-induced shocks affecting livestock and crop production in Woreda (Oromia Lowlands Livelihood Resilience Project (OLLRP), 2020). Historical climate baseline statistics in the zone and Woreda showed that the livestock population has been decreasing substantially due to continuous drought, high population pressure, soil erosion and expansion of arable land in the district. Livestock diseases such as anthrax, blackleg, and internal and external parasites are major problems constraining livestock production and productivity. The impact of livestock diseases is more damaging when it occurs during the aftermath of a drought period contributing to the poor resistance of the animals to many of the diseases (Multi-agency need assessment report of West Hararghe Zone, 2021). The increasing use of chemical pesticides and herbicides and habitat loss through land-use changes have substantially reduced honey bee colonies and bee-keeping enterprises in the localities. Crop pests, mainly *Quelea* birds, *bollworm*, *stalk borer* and *armyworm* outbreaks are additional

Table 7. Major challenges affecting successful youth livelihood transformation

Category of core challenges	Description
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited startup capital to start off/none-farm businesses • Lack of collateral to access credit • Lack of Shari'a-compliant (interest free) credit service
Local customs and norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic drudgeries/workload on women and younger girls • Land inheritance that excludes women • Early marriage
Education and technical capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited skill regarding use and application of agricultural technologies • No business skill
Infrastructure and market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of tailor-made agricultural extension program for the youth and women farmers • Limited access to product and input market • Limited access to human and animal health services • Limited access to water and electricity network (a push condition for urban migration) • Limited access to junior and secondary education (a push factor for early marriage) • Untimely delivery of agricultural inputs • No recreational facilities (a push factor for urban migration) • Poor road network and transportation
Administration and Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal displacement and migration • Landlessness • Resource based conflict (with neighboring Isa tribe)
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Erratic Rainfall • Drought and hunger (food shortage) • Pest and diseases for crops and animal • Property looting and theft (during conflict) • Very limited pasture for livestock
Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addiction to Khat (source of despair and depression on the youth)

Source: Endris and Hassan (2019)

production constraints, while invasive weeds such as Striga, a parasitic weed mainly attacking maize and sorghum, rust, and white blight, are major problems causing substantial yield reduction for staple crops (Mieso Woreda Office of Agriculture and Natural Resource, 2021).

Households in Mieso woreda employ various strategies for coping with the impact of adverse shocks. Asset disposal activities (such as selling more livestock); migration to the nearest urban centers; reducing daily meals; selling charcoal and firewood; formal food aid transfer are among

the major coping strategies for coping with consumption and income reductions due to adverse shocks. Cash borrowing from informal mutual support groups and networks was another widely reported survival mechanism. Households also reported access to free labour support, seed loan, and free use of pack animals and oxen using these types of mutual support networks. Indigenous methods such as smoking by woodburning have been reported as coping mechanisms to cure livestock and crop diseases. Planting early maturing crop varieties and water harvesting are among the strategies against early onset of rain (Woreda Disaster Risk Profile, no date).

7. General conclusion and recommendations

From the literature reviewed, it is found that male and female youth have varying aspirations and dreams. The most commonly cited aspirations of rural youth include a plan to own draught animals, bicycles, or motorbikes for transporting their farm produce to stores or markets; education, and a career in urban areas. Some of the youths have also envisioned a more comfortable life with their own families, farming better and more sustainably rather than seeking a job in urban areas. These aspirations are shaped by their own personal experiences, gender, local context, access to media, and role models.

From the literature reviewed, it is found that youth aspiration and willingness to participate in farming and agriculture are on the decline. There is an increasing dissatisfaction among rural male and female youth to engage and work in agriculture and rural areas. Among others, some of the reasons that make rural youth not pursue agricultural-based careers include environmental degradation, limited access to land, and growing rural-urban inequalities.

The study showed that, in West Hararghe, the agropastoral/pastoral youth operate in a very complex and harsh environment and face multiple challenges at different levels, constraining their successful transition to adulthood. Pastoral and agro-pastoral youth face structural and policy challenges that hinder a successful transition and finding gainful employment opportunities in rural areas. The major challenges the youth face can be structured around eight major categories: 1) local customs and norms, 2) financial, 3) education and technical capacity, 4) infrastructure and market, 5) economic, 6) administration and policy related 7) environmental, and 8) others.

Some of these challenges are gendered and may affect male and female youth differently, suggesting the implementation of gender-specific interventions and programs.

The study's result from the institutional analysis shows that though the youth are included as direct and indirect beneficiaries in programs and interventions, they are not the primary targets (beneficiaries) of most interventions implemented in their localities. Besides, the participation of women and youth is often constrained by limited access to social capital, suggesting the implementation of proper beneficiary targeting by involving community members.

Not everything about the youth and rural areas is gloomy. Pastoral and agropastoral areas are also blessed with diverse natural, environmental, ecological, cultural, and economic resources. There are also opportunities to support youth agroecological transition in the study areas. Opportunities that can be mobilized and tapped to promote successful agroecological transition and ensure food security in the study locations include (1) cooperation and social support networks, (2) natural resources, (3) the potential of agroecology for livestock production, and (4) strategic market locations for livestock.

General recommendations to increase youth engagement in agriculture in pastoral and agropastoral areas may include: (1) designing infrastructural and regulatory interventions and specific training in agricultural practices targeting and engaging youth, (2) increasing the availability of youth-friendly credit and saving, (3) supporting agripreneurship training and business startups, and ensuring availability of locally adapted and gender-responsive rural finance.

In conclusion, the future of agriculture and food system in pastoral/agro-pastoral areas depends on whether the youth want to remain and work in their locations. This requires keeping pastoral areas more appealing to the youth. Based on the above findings, the following 5 key recommendations are proffered to facilitate youth livelihood transformation in pastoral and agro-pastoral areas.

Recommendation 1: Consider the vast complexities and the context in which the agro-pastoral/pastoral youth operate. Youth problems are complex. Strategies to address youth issues should consider the vast complexities and the context in which the agro-pastoral/pastoral youth operate. It is also important to consider internal dynamics between and among the youth groups. As such, the appropriate development pathway and livelihood strategies for the youth should reflect its particular characteristics and the level of transformation within the country's economy. The choice should depend on the type of constraints the youth face, and their aspirations, and targeting them should be based on the proper definition of youth.

Recommendation 2: Recognize local social capital practices and networks for youth livelihood transformation. Pastoral and agro-pastoral communities have expansive social and cultural resources such as social capital and networks that offer different services, such as mutual insurance, labour sharing, savings and credit to rural households, to facilitate a meaningful transformation of the youth in the agro-pastoral/pastoral areas. To this end, greater efforts must be undertaken by development partners (such as USAID) and policymakers to recognize the role of social capital and to improve grass-root social capital and community-based mutual support groups for rural youth livelihood transformation. Part of the efforts may include designing a tailor-made program and more socially inclusive, participatory community development projects that can cut across several clans and tribal divides within and across villages.

Recommendation 3: Stimulate and support youth agripreneurship and the development of off-farming businesses. Promoting youth employment for livelihood transformation requires investment in agripreneurship development. Some of the businesses may include livestock production and fattening; poultry, irrigated agriculture, etc. In this regard, support may include training for appropriate business selection, technical training, financial support, etc. In this regard, the development of a culturally sensitive and youth-friendly financial system such as interest-free finance is very important.

Recommendation 4: Promote an inclusive extension system for the youth livelihood transformation. The study showed that agricultural extension service is often provided at the household level by mainly targeting the male household head. Thus, it is important to design a tailor-made extension system that targets both male and female youth. This is in line with Ethiopia's strategy for the agricultural extension system which also recognizes the mainstreaming of gender and youth as one of the pillar strategies to support livelihood transformation in rural areas.

Recommendation 5: Conduct primary studies on rural youth to inform inclusive policies and strategies targeting pastoral youth in fragile and conflict-prone ecosystems. Strategies designed to promote youth inclusion and employment in Ethiopia and the study area are almost exclusively based on secondary reviews or literature on the context of urban youth. More studies, based on primary data (using a qualitative design), are required to generate an improved understanding of the situation of youth in agro-pastoral or pastoral areas, their aspirations, and opportunity structures.

8. Limitations of the study

This study was based on secondary data -published and unpublished literature (grey literature) sources primarily accessed using internet searches. As such the study cannot be exempt from methodological limitations that most systematic reviews suffer from. Our internet search was only limited to the information available on the GS and SCOPUS databases. Hence, we have not covered the vast array of other global databases (including commercial databases) due to limited access and the scope of the study. In addition, our use of predefined parameters as inclusion and

exclusion criteria for selecting important literature potentially excluded other important literature in the area. However, the study results can be carefully generalized and applied in most contexts similar to the study area and provide important information on rural youth aspirations and existing opportunity structure to design effective policy strategies and interventions for targeting and engaging youth and addressing youth-specific constraints.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the Long-term Assistance and Services for Research Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (LASER PULSE) at Purdue University for financing this study. The research team is also very grateful to those individuals and organizations, from West Hararghe zones, who provided us with secondary data used in the preparation of this review report. Finally, we are very grateful to both reviewers of cogent social sciences and those from the USAID LASER PULSE project.

Funding

This work was supported by the Long-term Assistance and Services for Research Partners for University-Led Solutions Engine (LASER PULSE) at Purdue University in supplement to agreement 7200AA18CA00009.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Citation information

Cite this article as: A review of the socio-ecological and institutional contexts for youth livelihood transformation in Mieso Woreda, Eastern Ethiopia, Getachew Shambel Endris, Muluken Gezahegn Wordofa, Chanyalew Seyoum Aweke, Jemal Yousuf Hassen, Jeylan Wolyie Hussien, Dereje Kifle Moges, Million Sileshi, Abdulmuen Mohammed Ibrahim, Kadija Kadiro & Kidesena Sebsibe, *Cogent Social Sciences* (2022), 8: 2152210.

Notes

1. This is equivalent to the English terminology—"district"

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