

Ethiopian young people's economic empowerment

Evidence from GAGE Round 3 data

Elizabeth Presler-Marshall, Nicola Jones, Sarah Baird, Workneh Yadete,
Kefyalew Endale, Joan Hamory, Saini Das and Tassew Woldehanna

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Introduction

In the first two decades of the millennium, Ethiopia made significant strides in development, with improvements across various sectors highlighting the government's dedication to improving the lives of its citizens. Between 2000 and 2020, for example, the poverty rate was nearly halved, dropping from 46% to 24% (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Ethiopia, 2018; World Bank, 2021). Despite this rapid progress, Ethiopia remains one of the world's poorest countries, ranking 176 out of 193 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index (UNDP, 2024). Moreover, since 2020 – when the Covid-19 pandemic began, when conflict broke out in Ethiopia's northern regions (leading to skyrocketing inflation), and when droughts affected many areas of the country – economic progress has not just slowed, but reversed (UNDP 2022; UNDP, 2024). UNDP estimates that since 2020, poverty rates and food insecurity have risen in all regions of the country (UNDP, 2022).

This report builds on previous research by the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence (GAGE) programme and synthesises findings from Round 3 data collection (in 2021 and 2022) to explore patterns in Ethiopian young people's economic empowerment. Paying careful attention to similarities and differences between groups of adolescents (aged 13–17 at the time of Round 3 data collection) and young adults (aged 18–21) – based on their gender, geographical location, and intersecting disadvantages, including disability and child marriage – we explore multiple indicators of economic empowerment. These include household livelihoods and access to social protection, and young people's occupational aspirations, access to education and training, opportunities to work for pay, input into decisions about spending, and opportunities to save and borrow. Given the rapid political, economic and social changes Ethiopia has experienced over the past five years, we also highlight some key changes in young people's economic outcomes, leveraging earlier rounds of data to make these comparisons. The report concludes with implications for policy and programming.



Two 13-year-old girls doing homework, South Gondar © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

Context

The economic context in which Ethiopian adolescents are coming of age is complex (Jones et al., 2019; Araya et al., 2020; Dupar and Lovell, 2021; Presler-Marshall et al., 2021; 2022). On the one hand – until very recently – they were less likely to be growing up in poverty and were more likely to be enrolled in the formal education that prepares them for productive adulthood than any cohort that preceded them (UNDP, 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2024). Progress was especially notable in urban areas, where poverty rates fell to 15% in 2016¹ (compared to 26% in rural areas) (Bundervoet et al., 2020). On the other hand, because its population has doubled since 2000 (to almost 127 million in 2024), and because non-agricultural sectors are not expanding quickly enough to meet demand, there are too few livelihood opportunities available to the country's largest – and most educated – cadre of young people (Bundervoet et al., 2020; World Bank, 2024a). Although youth unemployment is difficult to capture, because most of the population remains reliant on subsistence agriculture, the World Bank reported that in 2021, 18% of young people aged 15–24 were not in education, employment or training (NEET), with females (25%) much more likely to be so than males (10%) (World Bank, 2024a).

Events of the past few years have further complicated the world in which Ethiopian young people are entering adulthood, as well as their opportunities for acquiring the skills they need for economic independence. Widespread violence, which began in the Tigray region in late 2020 and reached the Amhara region in 2021, continues to destabilise the country and threaten people's livelihoods (Jones et al., 2022; Woldehanna et al., 2024). In addition, inflation climbed to nearly 40% in 2022 (though it has since fallen to 25%) and net enrolment in primary school, after climbing from 38% to 92% between 2000 and 2017, fell to 76% in 2022 (UNDP, 2022; International Monetary Fund (IMF), 2024a; UNESCO, 2024). A 2024 economic reform package, supported by the IMF and the World Bank, aims to address these issues by ramping up private sector growth, enhancing climate resilience and expanding social protection (IMF, 2024b; World Bank, 2024b).

Conceptual framing

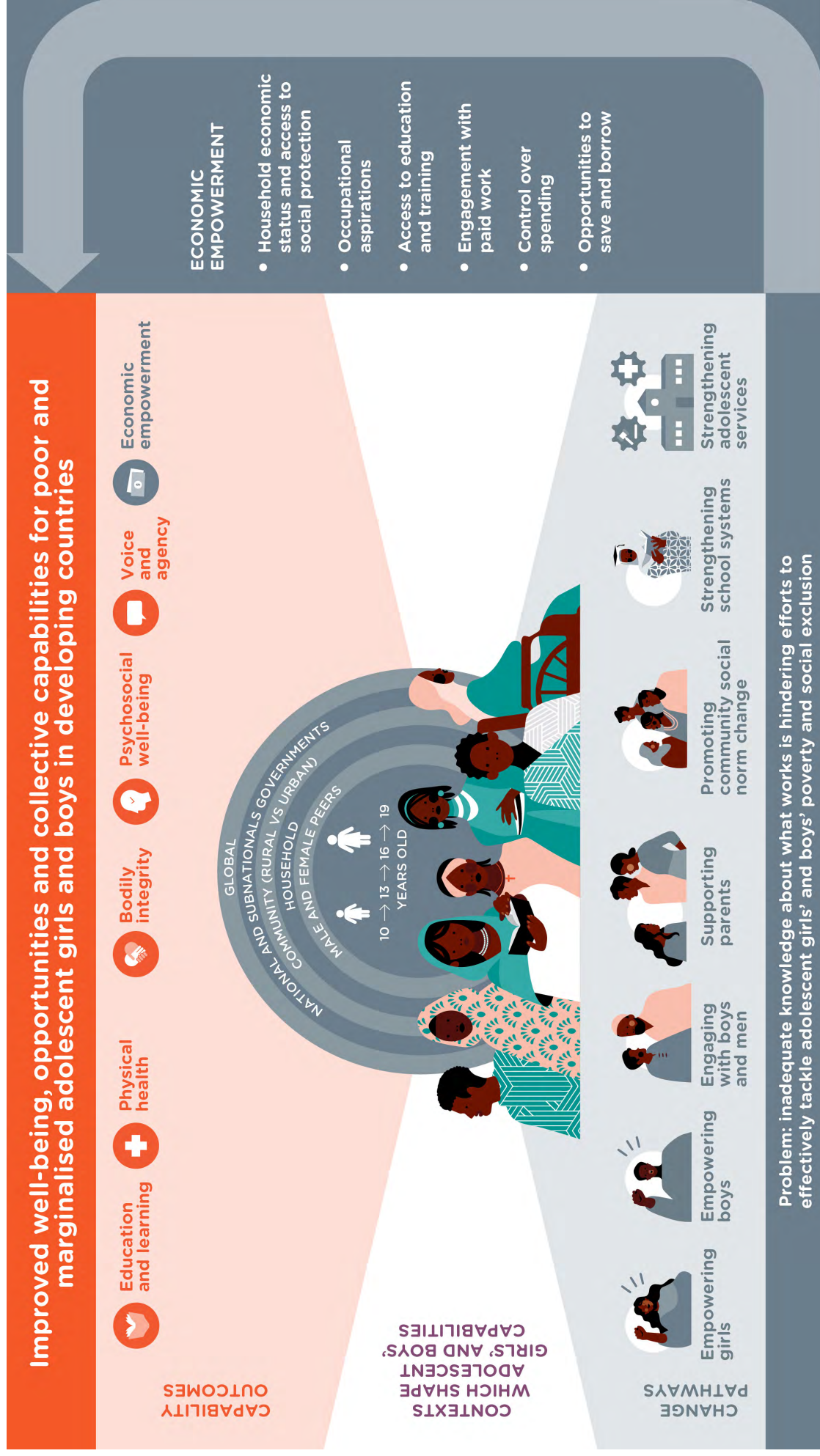
Informed by the emerging evidence base on adolescent well-being and development, GAGE's conceptual framework takes a holistic approach that pays careful attention to the interconnectedness of what we call the '3 Cs' – capabilities, change strategies and contexts – in order to understand what works to support adolescents' development and empowerment, both now and in the future (see Figure 1). This framing draws on the three components of Pawson and Tilley's (1997) approach to evaluation, which highlights the importance of outcomes, causal mechanisms and contexts, though we tailor it to the specific challenges of understanding what works in improving adolescents' capabilities.

The first building block of our conceptual framework is capability outcomes. Championed originally by Amartya Sen (1985, 2004) and nuanced by Martha Nussbaum (2011) and Naila Kabeer (2003) to better capture complex gender dynamics at intra-household and societal levels, the capabilities approach has evolved as a broad normative framework exploring the kinds of assets (economic, human, political, emotional and social) that expand the capacity of individuals to achieve valued ways of 'doing and being'. At its core is a sense of competence and purposive agency: it goes beyond a focus on a fixed bundle of external assets, instead emphasising investment in an individual's skills, knowledge and voice. Importantly, the approach can encompass relevant investments in children and young people with diverse trajectories, including the most marginalised and 'hardest to reach' such as those with disabilities or those who were married as children. Although the GAGE framework covers six core capabilities, this report focuses on economic empowerment, specifically: household economic status and access to social protection; occupational aspirations; access to education and training; engagement with paid work; control over spending; and opportunities to save and borrow.

The second building block of our conceptual framework is context dependency. Our '3 Cs' framework situates young people socio-ecologically. It recognises that not only do girls and boys at different stages of the life course have different needs and constraints, but also that these are highly dependent on their context at the family/household, community, state and global levels.

¹ The World Bank's most recent poverty assessment was completed in 2016 (see Bundervoet et al., 2020).

Figure 1: GAGE conceptual framework



The third and final building block of our conceptual framework – change strategies – acknowledges that young people's contextual realities will not only shape the pathways through which they develop their capabilities but also determine the change strategies open to them to improve their outcomes. Our socio-ecological approach emphasises that to nurture transformative change in girls' and boys' capabilities and broader well-being, potential change strategies must simultaneously invest in integrated intervention approaches at different levels, weaving together policies and programming that support young people, their families and their communities while also working to effect change at the systems level. This report concludes with our reflections on what type of package of interventions could better support Ethiopian young people's economic empowerment.

Sample and methods

This report draws on mixed-methods data collected in Ethiopia between early 2021 and late 2022. It adds to what we have learned from data collected at Baseline (2017–2018) and during Round 2 (2019–2020).

At Baseline, the quantitative sample included 6,924 adolescents from households across two cohorts (younger adolescents aged 10–12 years, and older adolescents aged 15–17 years), with purposeful oversampling of adolescents with disabilities and those who were married as children. Data was collected from three marginalised rural areas – Amhara's South Gondar, Oromia's East Hararghe, and Afar's Zone 5 – as well as urban Dire Dawa, Debre Tabor, and Batu city administrations. For this initial round, only younger cohort adolescents were sampled in rural areas, and in Batu only older adolescents were sampled.

For Round 2, an additional 1,655² young people (aged 10–20 at the time of recruitment) were added to the sample. Most were added because they were rural (to balance the older cohort in urban areas) or because they had married as children (a particularly vulnerable group of special interest to GAGE). Others were added because they were out of school, had a disability, or were internally displaced

persons (IDPs). Altogether, this brings the total sample size for Round 2 to 8,579 young people. Data was collected from the same locations, three rural and three urban.

For Round 3, budget limitations meant that GAGE researchers only surveyed people living in rural South Gondar, rural East Hararghe and the city of Debre Tabor (see Figure 2). The total eligible sample was 8,543. This included 6,194 young people who were part of the Round 2 sample from these three locations, 807 older adolescents (new to the study) in Debre Tabor, aged 14–18 at time of recruitment, and 1,533 very young adolescents (also new to the study) aged 11–13 at time of recruitment. The final Round 3 survey sample involved 7,509 young people.

To facilitate the analysis of change over time, this report focuses on the 4,810 adolescents who were surveyed in both Round 2 and Round 3. Of these, 202 had reported a functional disability,³ even if they have an assistive device available (such as glasses, hearing aids or a mobility device) (see Table 1). The sample included more females (2,802) than males (2,008). Of the females, and because GAGE oversampled those who had experienced child marriage, 734 had been married prior to age 18. At the time they were surveyed, the younger cohort had a mean age of 14.3 years; we refer to these individuals as adolescents. The older cohort had a mean age of 18.9 years. To distinguish these young people from those in the younger cohort, we refer to them as young adults, despite the fact that a small minority of them are legal minors under the age of 18.

An important point to note, for interpreting our findings, is that the younger cohort (3,857 adolescents) is much larger than the older cohort (953 young adults). The younger cohort is also more likely to be rural than the older cohort (approximately 90% versus 65%). Because of these differences, means by age cohort that do not take account of location cannot be directly compared; for this reason, most of our findings are presented by cohort. For some indicators, we present changes over time between Round 2 and Round 3.

The qualitative sample for this report was primarily purposively drawn from the larger quantitative sample, but it also includes additional research participants who were purposively selected to explore the effects of the recent

2 This total includes: (a) 1,124 older rural adolescents (aged 17–19 at recruitment) from East Hararghe, South Gondar and Afar. Of these, 680 were female (490 of whom were married) and 444 were male (117 of whom were married); (b) 387 married adolescents, including those living in the same three rural areas (aged 10–16 at recruitment) and in GAGE's urban locations (aged 14–20 at recruitment); (c) 157 adolescents with disabilities (aged 10–20 at recruitment) – but only 64 new individuals who were not part of (a) and (b) already detailed; and (d) 140 adolescents with characteristics of special interest (e.g. those who were internally displaced or out of school) – but only 80 new individuals who were not part of (a), (b) or (c) already detailed.

3 Determined by using the Washington Group on Disability Statistics Short Set on Functioning (WG-SS): <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/question-sets/wg-short-set-on-functioning-wg-ss/>.

Figure 2: GAGE Round 3 research locations

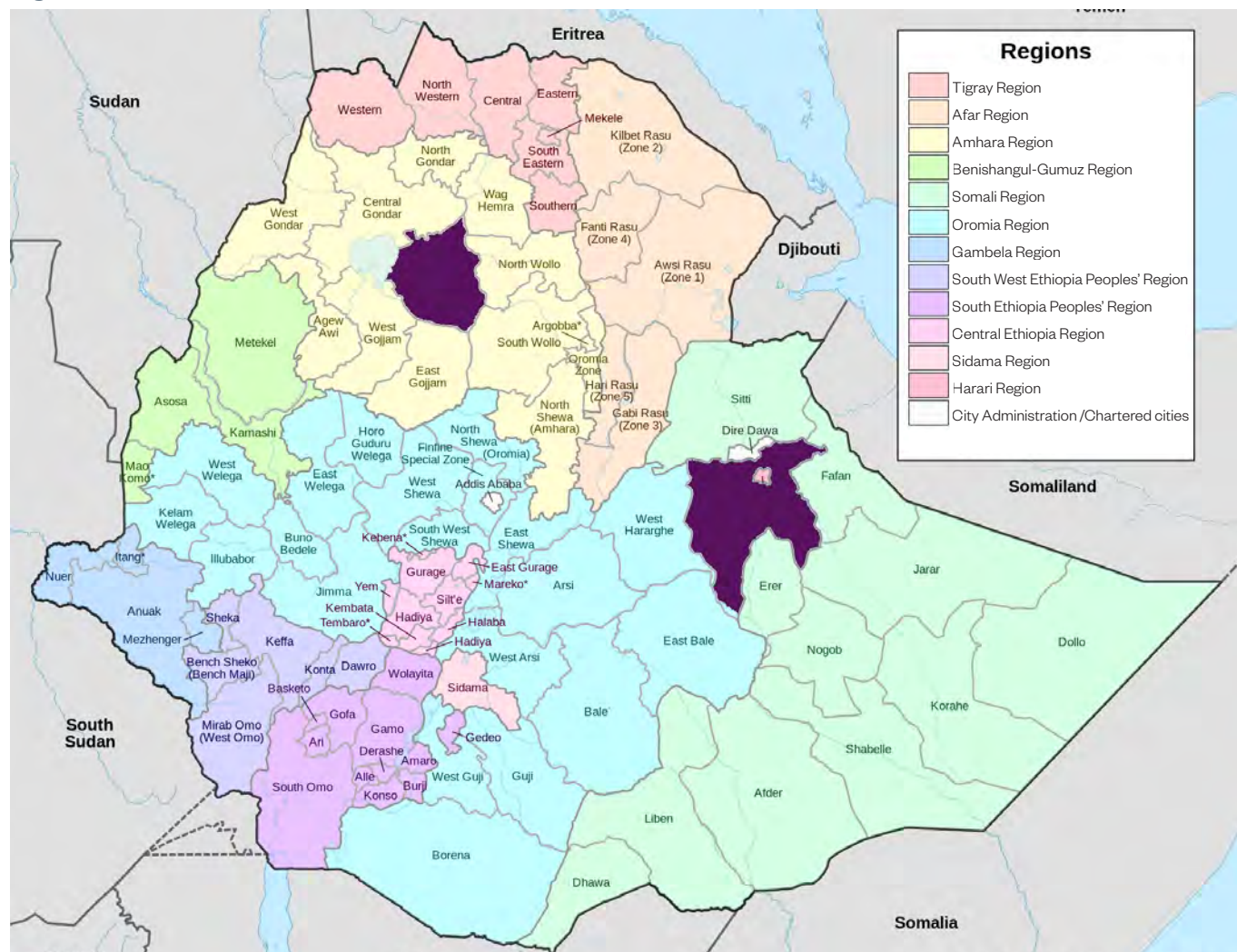


Table 1: Quantitative panel sample

	Locations			Sub-sample of those with disability	Sub-sample of girls married <18	Total
	Rural South Gondar	Rural East Hararghe	Urban Debre Tabor			
Females	1260	1164	378	107	734	2802
Males	852	816	340	95	na	2008
Younger Cohort	1777	1704	376	157	377	3857
Older cohort	335	276	342	45	357	953
Total	2112	1980	718	202	734	4810

conflict in South Gondar – given that this represented a major shock to young people, their households, and their communities. Because of the security situation and the timeline of the 2021 national election, the Round 3 qualitative data was not collected in a single window. It instead represents an amalgamation of six rounds of data collected in Debre Tabor, and rural South Gondar and East

Hararghe, during the same time period in which surveys were fielded. In total, the qualitative sample includes 203 interviews⁴ with 336 young people, as well as 37 interviews with 219 caregivers and 141 interviews with 198 key informants (see Table 2).

Prior to commencing research, GAGE secured approval from ethios committees at ODI and George

4 Both individual and group interviews were conducted with young people and adults.

Table 2: Qualitative sample

Respondent Type	Sex	Location			Total
		Rural		Urban	
		South Gondar	East Hararghe	Debre Tabor	
Adolescents	Girls	56 (90)	11 (27)	9	76 (126)
	Boys	50 (81)	12 (29)	6	68 (116)
Total		106 (171)	23 (56)	15	144 (242)
Young adults	Females	13 (22)	8 (16)	8	29 (46)
	Males	13 (25)	6 (12)	11	30 (48)
Total		26 (47)	14 (28)	19	59 (94)
Sub-sample of those with disability		5 (11)	-	3	8 (14)
Sub-sample of girls married <18		5 (8)	2	2	9 (12)
Sub-sample of IDP		4 (16)	-		4 (16)
Parents / Caregivers	Mothers	10 (58)	6 (35)	3 (18)	19 (111)
	Fathers	10 (56)	5 (34)	3 (18)	18 (108)
Total		20 (114)	11 (69)	6 (36)	37 (219)
Key informants		99 (125)	32 (63)	10	14 (198)
TOTAL		265 (492)	82 (218)	55 (85)	402 (795)

The table presents the number of interviews and then in brackets indicates the total number of participants as some interviews were with pairs or groups of people.

Washington University, the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists, and the research ethics boards from the relevant regional Bureaus of Health of Ethiopia. We also secured informed assent from adolescents aged 17 and under, and informed

consent from their caregivers, and from adolescents aged 18 or over. There was also a robust protocol for referral to services, tailored to the different realities of the diverse research sites (Baird et al., 2020).



An 18-year-old young man herding cattle, South Gondar © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

Findings

Household assets and access to social protection

Survey findings for adolescents

Adolescents' households own very few assets. At Round 3, respondents reported a mean of only 3.7/16 assets on an index⁵ (see Figure 3). In line with existent evidence, location differences were highly significant, with households in urban Debre Tabor (6/16) owning nearly twice as many assets as those in rural areas of East Hararghe (3.3/16) and South Gondar (3.2/16). Between Round 2 and Round 3, adolescents in all locations saw a small but significant improvement (0.5/16) in ownership of household assets.

A large minority of rural adolescents' households were receiving benefits from Ethiopia's flagship social protection programme, the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), at the time Round 3 data was collected: 29% in South Gondar and 28% in East Hararghe (see Figure 4). However, very few adolescents in Debre Tabor reported

benefiting from the PSNP (1%), because the roll-out of the Urban Safety Net Programme has stalled in recent years. In the 18 months between Round 2 and Round 3, adolescents in South Gondar were slightly (but significantly) less likely to be benefiting from the PSNP (by 3 percentage points). Current levels of receipt of the PSNP in East Hararghe were unchanged between the two rounds.

Survey findings for young adults

Young adults' households also own very few assets – only 4/16 in aggregate (see Figure 5). Location differences were again highly significant. Young adults in urban Debre Tabor (6.2/16) had nearly twice as many household assets as their peers in rural East Hararghe (3.3/16) and South Gondar (3/16). In the 18 months between Round 2 and Round 3, rural young adults' household assets did not change; those in Debre Tabor, however, climbed significantly (by 1/16).

Young adults' access to the PSNP depends on where they live. Those living in South Gondar (24%), which is more chronically food insecure, were more likely to be currently benefiting from the programme than those living

Figure 3: Household assets, adolescents

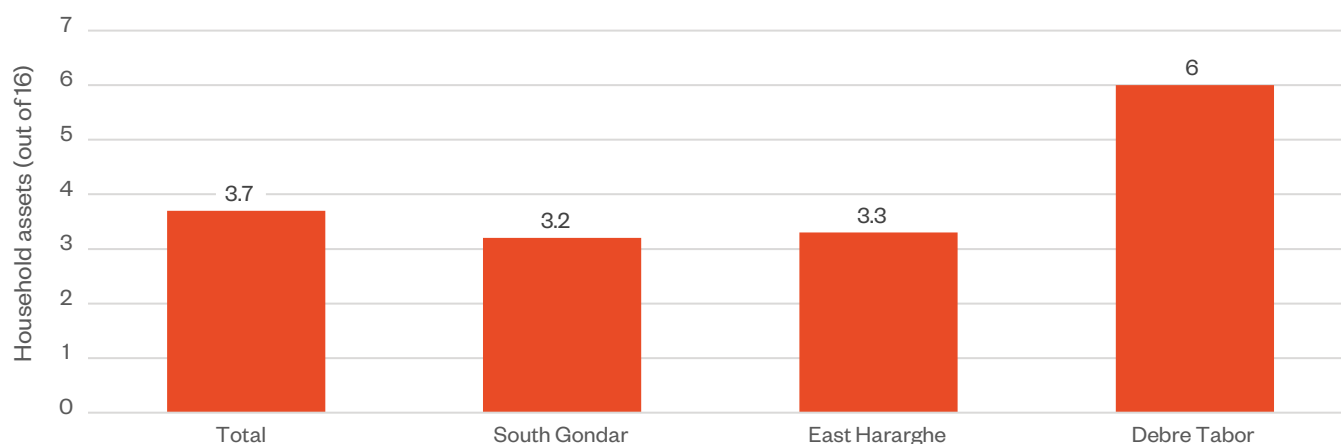
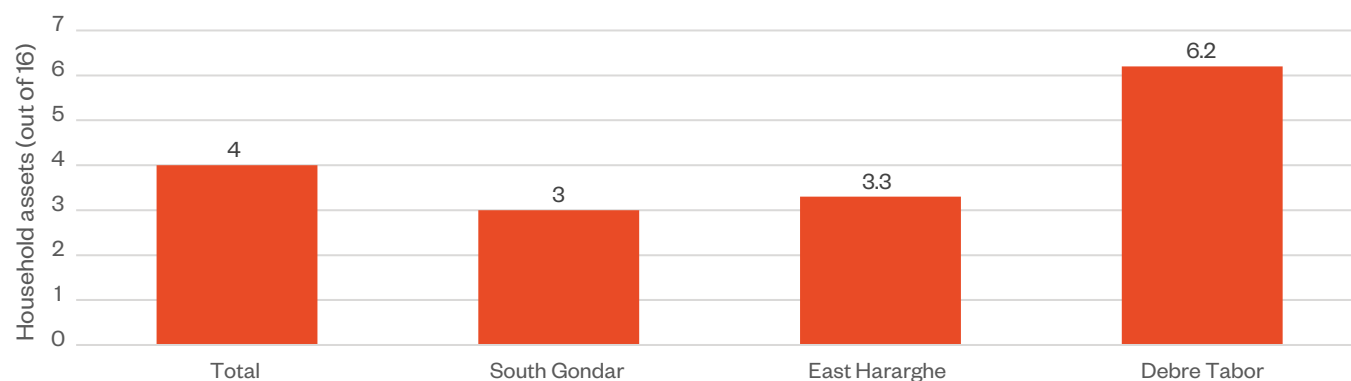


Figure 4: Currently receiving PSNP, adolescents



⁵ The index included items ranging from a working radio or mobile phone to a table or mattress.

Figure 5: Household assets, young adults



in East Hararghe (16%) (see Figure 6). As was the case with adolescents, it was rare for young adults living in Debre Tabor to be benefiting from the PSNP (2%). For young adults, there was no change between Round 2 and Round 3 in terms of current access to the PSNP.

Qualitative findings

With exceptions, rural young people and their caregivers reported that household livelihoods primarily depend on agriculture. There were, however, location differences in terms of the type of agriculture and the extent to which that agriculture is or is not supporting household economies. In East Hararghe, the story was mixed. Respondents in some communities reported producing cash crops, especially khat,⁶ and longer-term improvement in household incomes. A 16-year-old boy observed that households in his community have thrived in recent years, due to new irrigation wells and new roads to reach khat markets:

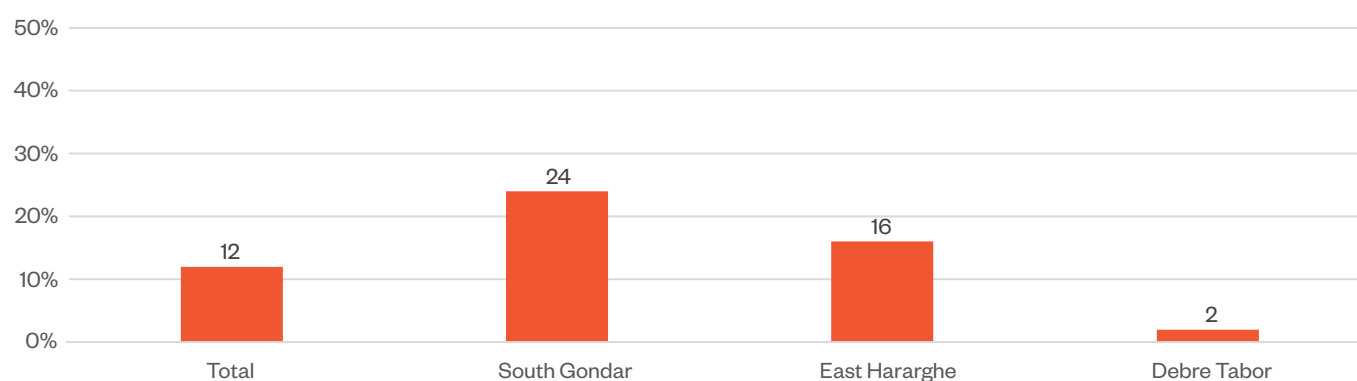
People have generators to bring the water from the deep wells and to improve the production of the khat. So, people are becoming rich from time to time. The local market is expanding and becoming a daily market

because traders are coming every day to buy the khat. Production of khat is incredible, and many people are busy with the khat farming activities every day, and this has been changing the local economy.

Respondents in other East Hararghe communities reported that agriculture is no longer able to sustain the household. A 15-year-old girl, when asked about her diet, replied that while she and her family used to eat well, 'Now we become poor.' In South Gondar, the story was more uniform: respondents mostly reported subsistence agriculture – and declining household incomes. A mother from that zone noted that the land is so over-worked that it no longer produces without fertiliser, which has become very expensive: 'The harvest decreased because we are unable to afford the cost of fertiliser... the land depends on it. It doesn't give good harvest without it. Now we harvest little.' A 22-year-old young woman from the same community observed that youth migration is the only pathway through which local families can improve their standard of living:

The community here produce mainly wheat and potato. We do not have cash crops. The good houses you see

Figure 6: Currently receiving PSNP, young adults



⁶ Khat is a shrub grown in the Horn of Africa. Its leaves are chewed for a stimulant effect.

here are built by young people that drop out of school and migrate to Arab countries or Addis Ababa to get money.

In urban Debre Tabor, household livelihoods were more mixed. Quite a few young people reported that their caregivers had salaried work as teachers or working for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), or ran their own small shops. Others reported that they (primarily boys and young men) or their fathers engaged in daily labour or that their mothers sold foodstuffs at the local market. Although young people living in Debre Tabor are, on average, much better off than their peers in rural areas, many live hand-to-mouth and are constantly worried about having enough given the higher cost of living in an urban area. A 20-year-old young man, who had scored well enough on the school-leaving exam to be offered a place at university, reported that he was unable to enrol because his mother's income was not sufficient to afford food: *'Let alone to pay for a university for me, it cannot very well cover our home consumption.'* A young woman the same age similarly stated, *'We have a low income and it is usually not enough.'*

In rural areas in both East Hararghe and South Gondar, drought in the months immediately preceding data collection had impacted the livelihoods and food security of many households. A 16-year-old girl from East Hararghe explained, *'This year there was a drought in our area, and we were exposed to food shortage. Our sorghum, khat and plants dried.'* A key informant from South Gondar similarly noted, *'The drought has a direct negative impact on parents. They can't harvest well, and they can't feed the family.'*

In South Gondar, the impacts of drought were amplified by the impacts of conflict. Rural respondents reported that due to ongoing violence, they could not take their livestock to pasture or market or weed their crops. A 17-year-old girl reported, *'The war affected my father's farming... he couldn't work on the field properly, fearing the war situation, and... couldn't weed the field, and this reduced the product.'* A 14-year-old boy agreed, noting that food insecurity was likely to ensue:

Weeding work was not properly done. Now we are producing only 8 on a land we have been producing 20 quintals in the previous time... We will face shortage food. The problem will come around August and September.

In both rural areas and Debre Tabor, conflict-related inflation added to families' economic stress. A 15-year-old girl from a rural area explained, *'The price for everything*

was increased a lot... For example, berbere [chili pepper] were very expensive during the war.' A boy the same age from urban Debre Tabor noted that inflation has been so high that he worries about his family's food security:

I am worried about my parents because they are not able to manage increasing living costs if it continues like this for the foreseeable future. If the situation will continue like this, we may not afford to buy food for us.

In East Hararghe, young people and caregivers agreed that social protection reaches too few families, and that benefit levels are inadequate, given family size. A 14-year-old boy explained that few families in his community are supported by the PSNP: *'They provide support to about 7 people in a village... It does not reach all the people in the kebele.'* A father agreed, noting that especially during the drought, benefits were too meagre:

It does not reach all people... They used to give 300 birr for a family member. The maximum family size is five. They don't give for more than that even if there are 10 family members... It is terminated now. They haven't given it for more than 6 months.

Another father stated that not only are households in East Hararghe not well supported by the PSNP and other forms of social protection, but that they have been further stressed by government requests that households make extra contributions to support the government's military efforts:

There is no support for the community. Rather, the government asks us to contribute for different reasons. We have been contributing money. The least we give is 1,000 birr [approximately US\$8.00] for defence forces, and other reasons. We are happy to contribute for our military. But we are also contributing money for things that we do not believe are important.

In South Gondar, where households have also had some access to emergency aid designed to offset the economic impacts of the recent conflict, respondents were similarly underwhelmed by social protection programming. A key informant noted that his community has never had access to the PSNP:

People living around Qualisa area are getting the PSNP support for consecutive years, but our village is not getting the support. Perhaps the government might have shortage of finance. But people are living in poverty. They haven't supported us for about four years... We complained about it. But they give us a deaf ear.

One father stated that this is because only people that have political connections can access benefits:

When the government sent food or other support for the people, they are only those who have relatives or friends of the government official who can get the support. The poor can't get the support unless they have relatives or friends of the government officials.

Another father, in the same focus group discussion, added that health insurance has also failed to protect community members from unexpected expenses, because it is too costly and covers too few conditions:

Another problem we have faced since the last year is the increase in annual health insurance premium... The government pressurised us to buy health insurance. I bought it. Last time, I went to the health station to get treatment for my skin rash. They looked at my insurance papers, and they told me that they don't have the medicine. I went to another health station, they gave me the same response. I went to a private clinic and got treated and cured for around 430 birr. [approximately US\$4.30] What I want to say is, the money I paid to buy insurance is equivalent to burning the notes in a fire. It is a crisis. I won't buy again.

Respondents also reported that emergency aid provided during the conflict was too limited. It prevented starvation during the months of active conflict, but ended too soon to support people to recover and rebuild their livelihoods. One mother explained that, *'They provided wheat because the area was affected by the war. We were provided three times. Then it was terminated after three months.'*

Although an Urban Safety Net Programme has been established in multiple urban localities across the country, in Debre Tabor one father noted that access to social protection is not only limited, but non-existent: *'There is no safety net in Debre Tabor.'*

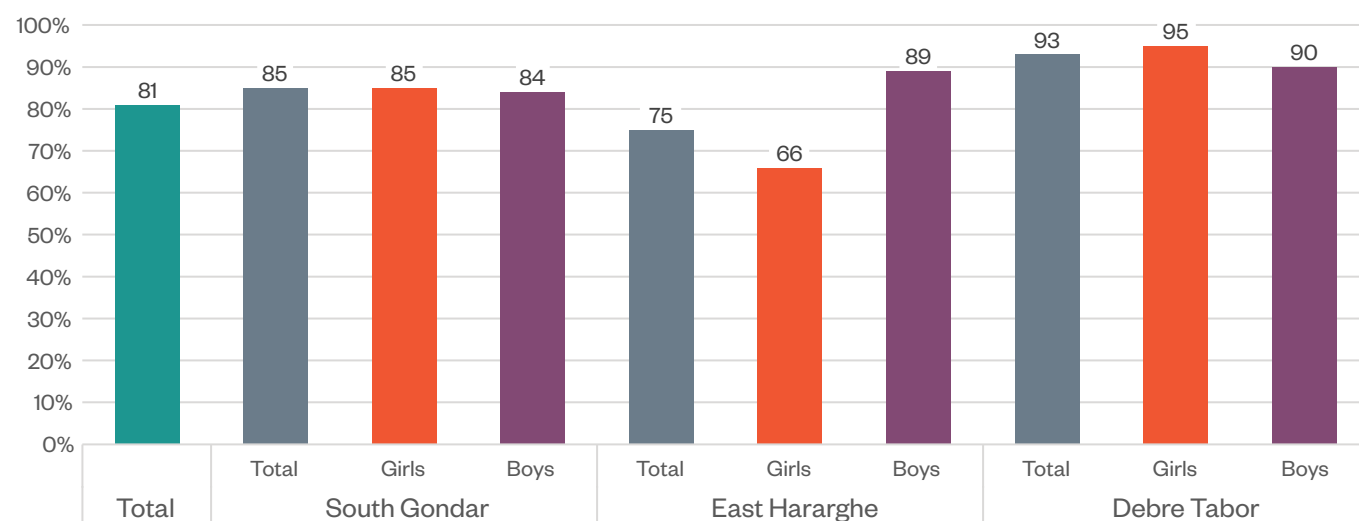
Occupational aspirations

Survey findings for adolescents

Across locations, most adolescents (81%) – including those with disabilities (see Box 1) – reported aspiring to skilled or professional work (see Figure 7). Location differences were highly significant, with those in urban Debre Tabor (93%) (where most adolescents were enrolled in school, see below) more likely to report aspiring to such work than those in rural South Gondar (85%) and East Hararghe (75%). In East Hararghe, gender differences were also highly significant, with boys (89%) (who were again more likely to be enrolled in school) far more likely to aspire to skilled or professional work than girls (66%). Since Round 2, there has been a small but significant (3 percentage points) decline in the proportion of adolescents who aspire to skilled or professional work. The largest decline, by 8 percentage points, was for girls in East Hararghe – most likely due to their higher chance of having recently experienced child marriage (see Presler-Marshall et al., 2024a).

In aggregate, 41% of adolescents reported that they face at least one barrier to realising their occupational aspirations. Those living in urban Debre Tabor (62%) and rural South Gondar (45%) were more likely to report barriers than those living in East Hararghe (32%), presumably

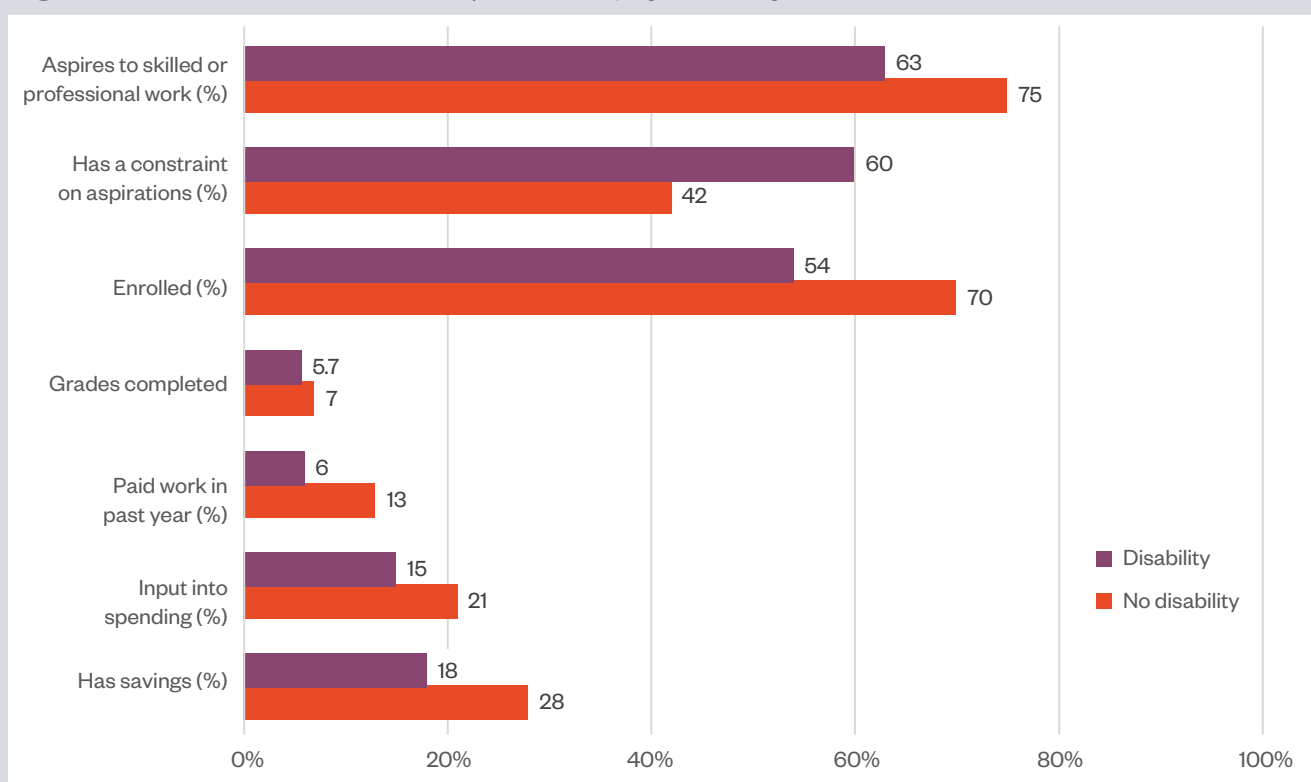
Figure 7: Aspires to skilled or professional work, adolescents



Box 1: Disability limits young people's economic empowerment

The Round 3 survey found that due to pervasive disability-related stigma and Ethiopia's limited efforts to build inclusive infrastructure and services (including for education), young people with disabilities fare significantly worse than their peers without disabilities on myriad indicators of economic empowerment, including occupational aspirations (see Figure 8). They were less likely to aspire to skilled or professional work (63% versus 75%) and more likely to report having a constraint on their aspirations (60% versus 42%). They were also less likely to be enrolled in formal education (54% versus 70%) and had completed fewer grades of schooling (5.7 versus 7). Compared with their peers without disabilities, young people with disabilities were also less likely to have had paid work in the past year (6% versus 13%), to have had input into spending decisions (15% versus 21%), and to have any savings (18% versus 28%).

Figure 8: Indicators of economic empowerment, by disability status



In qualitative interviews, many young people with disabilities living in rural areas reported that they had never attended school, because most rural schools are not equipped to educate students with special needs. Others reported that although they had accessed the special needs classrooms that the government has been rolling out in urban areas, they had had to drop out of school early because those classrooms are only for students through to the end of grade 4, or because they lacked the financial support to continue. A 22-year-old young man with a hearing impairment explained,

'I was eager to continue my education but because there is no one to support us to continue my education, the fate will be to quit. I don't have anyone who can support me with money for house rent, for food and clothes.'

Young people with disabilities were well aware of the fact that with only limited formal education, access to skilled or professional work was unlikely. Indeed, most young people agreed that many forms of work – even those that do not require training or education – are largely unavailable to people with disabilities because of assumptions about what they can and cannot do. An 18-year-old young woman, who later added that her employer has come to see that many people with disabilities are capable employees, stated:

'In my job of selling bread, people with disabilities cannot do this job because how can he/she manage customers if he/she has hearing impairment? It is impossible. Bakery business mostly needs active individuals who manage customers' orders quickly, otherwise they will be angry. Initially the owner does not employee the disabled person from the beginning.'

because those living in East Hararghe were less likely to aspire to skilled or professional work. In Debre Tabor (56%) and South Gondar (38%), adolescents were more likely to report that they lack the education and skills to achieve their goals than they were to report other barriers (see Figure 9). In East Hararghe, adolescents were more likely to report economic barriers (18%) to their aspirations.

At Round 3, more than a third of adolescents (38%) reported that they will need to migrate to realise their aspirations (see Figure 10). Location differences were highly significant, with those in rural South Gondar (45%) most likely to report needing to migrate, and those in urban Debre Tabor least likely (23%). Gender differences were significant only in East Hararghe, where 44% of boys but only 27% of girls reported that they will need to migrate to realise their aspirations.

Of rural adolescents who have considered migrating, the Round 3 survey found that most (83%) have considered migrating to one of Ethiopia's urban centres (see Figure 11). Another 10% have considered migrating to another rural area. The remainder, disproportionately

from East Hararghe, have considered migrating abroad. In South Gondar, but not East Hararghe, there are gender differences in adolescents' preferred destinations, with boys preferring to migrate to another rural area and girls preferring to migrate to an urban area.

Survey findings for young adults

At Round 3, fewer than half of young adults (48%) reported aspiring to skilled or professional work (see Figure 12). Location differences were highly significant, with those in urban Debre Tabor (77%) more likely to aspire to skilled or professional work than their peers in rural South Gondar (35%) and East Hararghe (26%). Gender differences were also significant in all locations. In aggregate, young men (57%) were more likely to aspire to skilled or professional work than young women (41%). The gender gap was largest in East Hararghe, where 37% of young men but only 19% of young women aspired to skilled or professional work. Since Round 2, aspirations for skilled or professional work fell in rural East Hararghe (by 7 percentage points) and South

Figure 9: Barriers to aspirations, adolescents

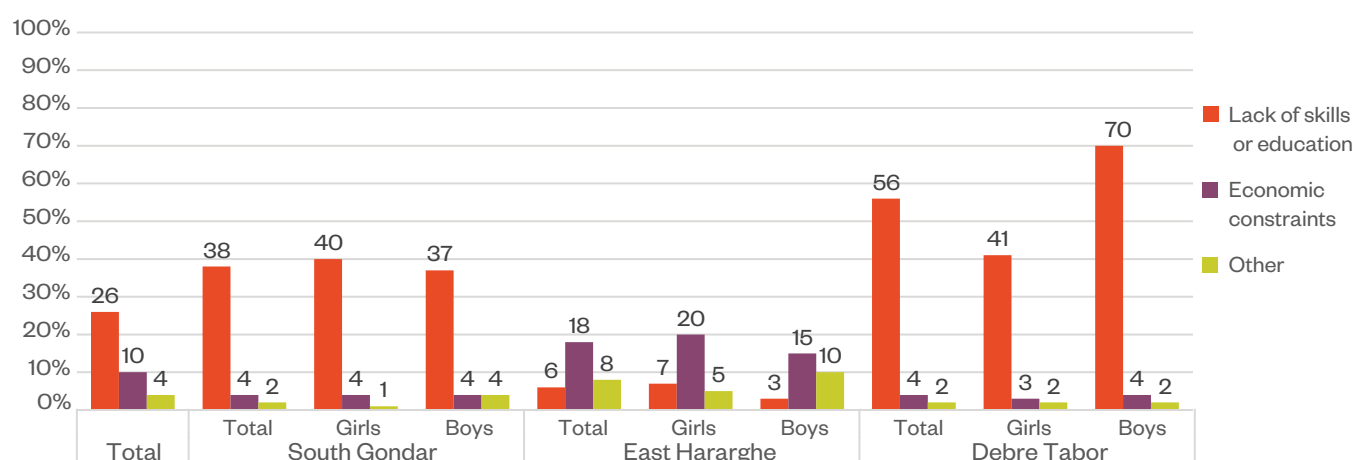


Figure 10: Need to migrate to realise aspirations, adolescents

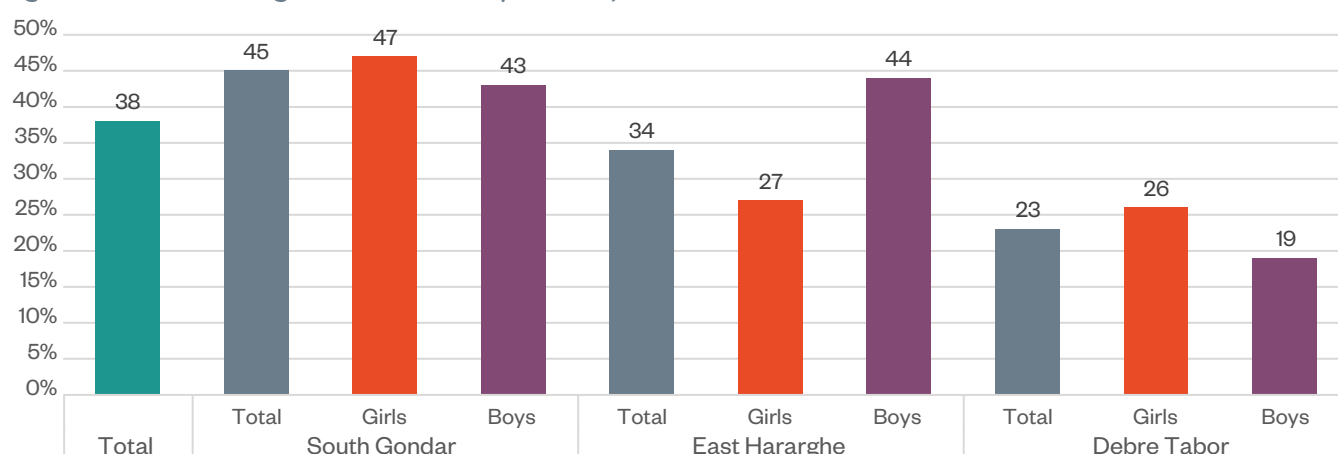


Figure 11: Preferred destination, of rural adolescents who have considered migrating

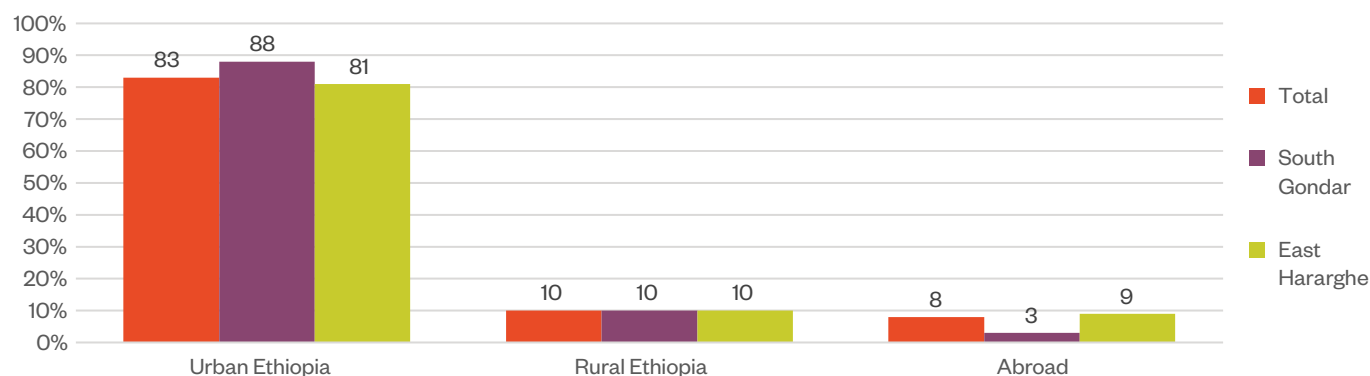
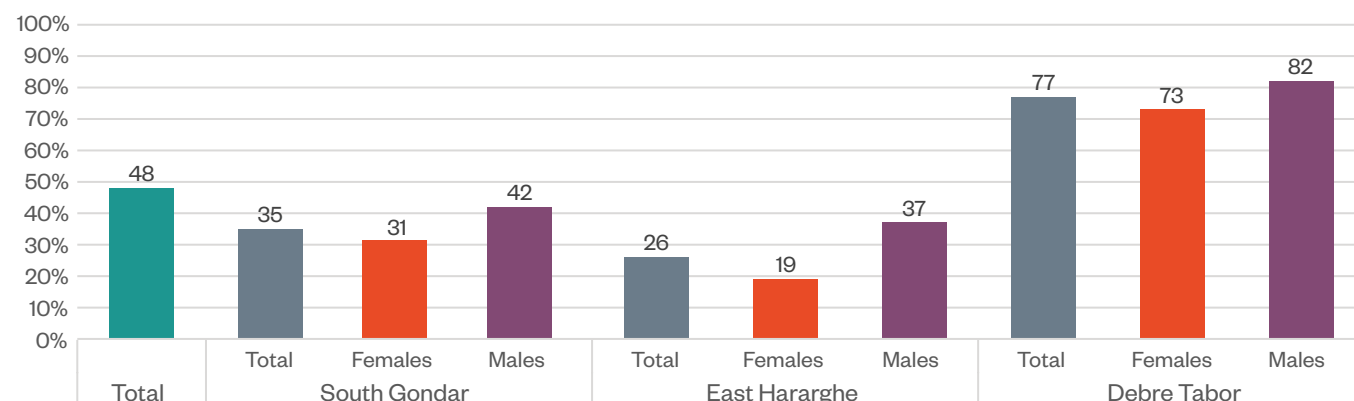


Figure 12: Aspires to skilled or professional work, young adults



Gondar (3 percentage points) but rose in urban Debre Tabor (by 9 percentage points).

More than half (51%) of young adults reported facing at least one barrier to realising their occupational aspirations. Those in urban Debre Tabor (68%) were more likely to report barriers than those in rural East Hararghe (46%) or South Gondar (29%). In Debre Tabor (48%) and South Gondar (19%), lack of education and skills was the most common barrier reported (see Figure 13). In East Hararghe, economic constraints (35%) were most often

reported. Gender differences were significant in Debre Tabor and East Hararghe, where young men were more likely than young women to report education and skills barriers (64% versus 35%) and economic barriers (52% versus 23%) respectively.

Just over a fifth (21%) of young adults reported at Round 3 that they will need to migrate to realise their aspirations (see Figure 14). Young adults in rural South Gondar (27%) were significantly more likely to report this than their peers in urban Debre Tabor (18%) and rural East

Figure 13: Barriers to aspirations, young adults

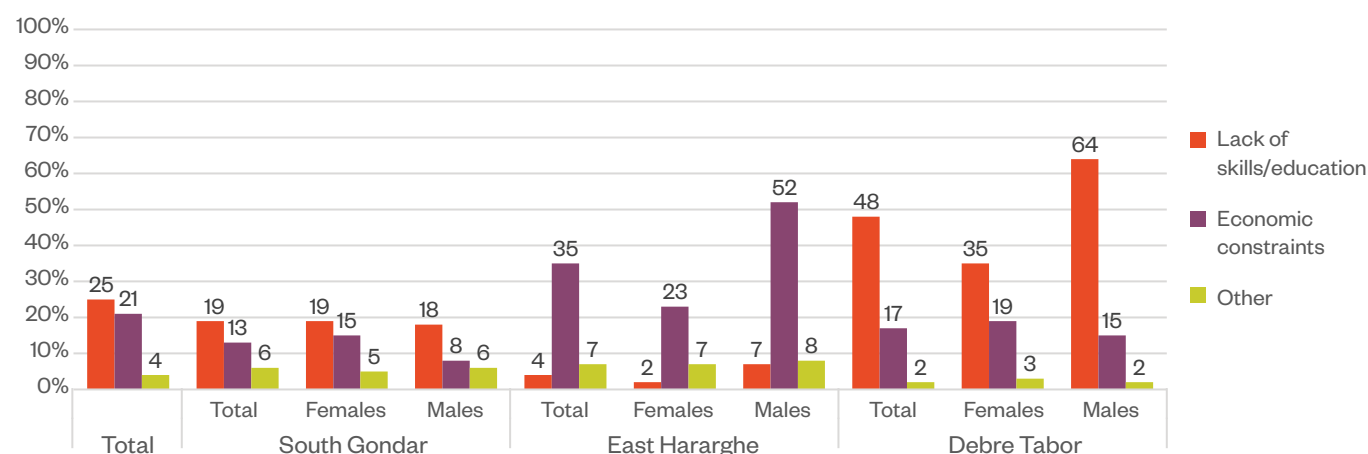
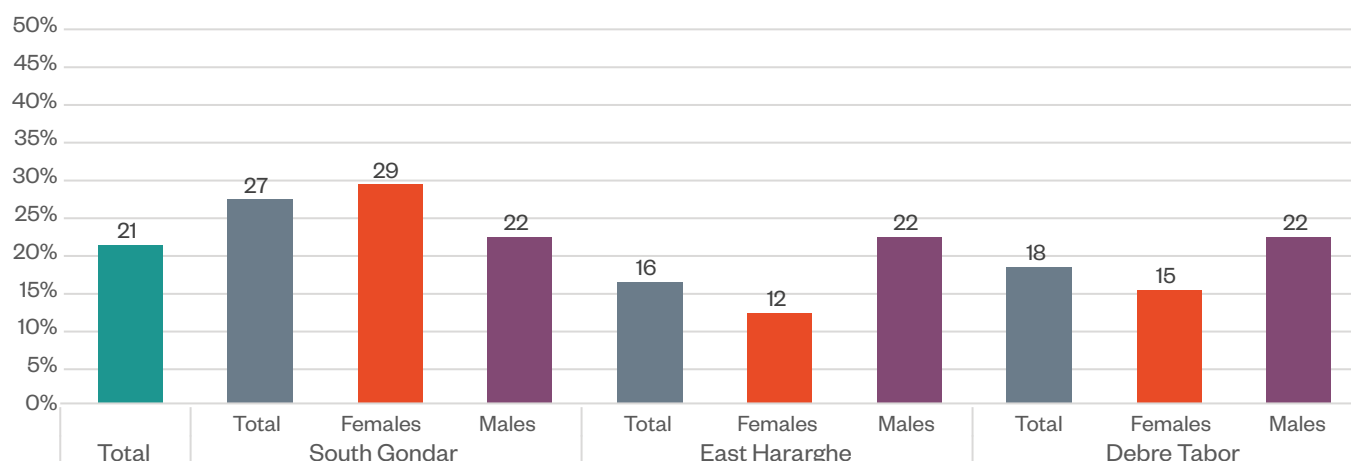


Figure 14: Need to migrate to realise aspirations, young adults



Hararghe (16%). Gender differences were significant only in East Hararghe, where 22% of young men but only 12% of young women reported that they will need to migrate to realise their aspirations.

Of rural young adults who have considered migrating, the Round 3 survey found that most (84%) have considered migrating to one of Ethiopia's urban centres (see Figure 15). Another 13%, disproportionately from East Hararghe (18%), have considered migrating abroad. Fewer than 3% (almost all young men from South Gondar) have considered migrating to another rural area.

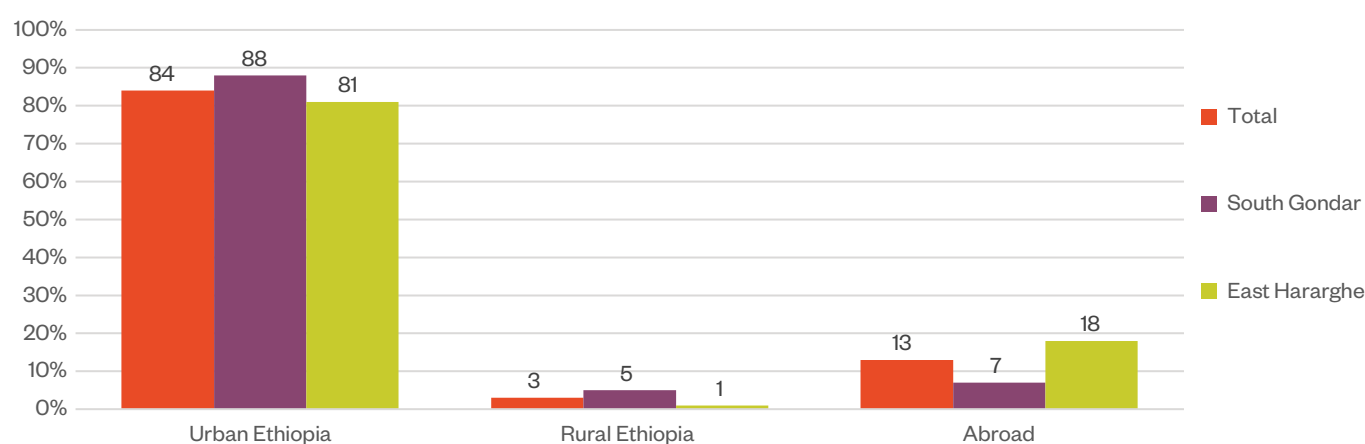
Qualitative findings

Young people detailed a wide variety of occupational aspirations. This is partly because many of the young people taking part in Round 3 research had also participated in an adolescent-focused NGO programme called Act With Her, which included lessons on setting short-term and long-term personal goals. Many of these were somewhat lofty. For example, a 12-year-old girl

from South Gondar stated that she eventually wants to pursue a career in medicine: *'I want to become a doctor. I want to treat and cure people that have died because of diseases.'* A 16-year-old girl from East Hararghe, who was unusual in that she was attending secondary school, explained that her short-term goal was to do well in 9th grade, saying that in the longer term, *'I may become an engineer.'* A 17-year-old boy from Debre Tabor reported his aspiration to become a pilot: *'It is my interest starting from my childhood. Even if my parents are not happy with my choice, it is my favourite choice.'* Other young people reported more practical aspirations. For example, a 16-year-old boy from Debre Tabor stated that he wishes to become a driver: *'I want to work hard and buy a car and be successful.'* Similarly, a 13-year-old girl from South Gondar reported that her longer-term goal is to become a bank teller: *'I will go to secondary school in Ebenat then after I complete that, I want to work in a bank.'*

Although a minority of young people, disproportionately from Debre Tabor, expressed longstanding interest in

Figure 15: Preferred destination, of rural young adults who have considered migrating



a particular occupational pathway, most young people were clear that their aspirations were centred less on any given career, and more on achieving economic success. A 16-year-old boy from East Hararghe stated that his priority was earning a lot of money, so that he could support his family: *'I want to be rich and construct a house in an urban area and to support my family'* A girl the same age but from South Gondar similarly reported, *'I want to complete my education, secure a good job and support my parents financially.'* A 20-year-old young man from Debre Tabor reported that he prioritised economic stability over a high salary: *'I want to be a government worker... The government is a permanent job. The private job may not be permanent.'*

With the important caveat that many of the youngest adolescents – including a 13-year-old boy from East Hararghe who insisted that he wanted to simultaneously pursue careers in teaching, medicine and engineering – were often unable to identify the barriers that might prevent them from realising their aspirations, most young people were highly aware of how fragile their aspirations are. Across locations, but especially in rural areas, many young people (and their caregivers) cited the costs of secondary and post-secondary education as a significant barrier to realising educational and occupational goals. A 15-year-old boy from South Gondar explained: *'... the major reason for adolescent boys' loss of interest to learn is problems they have at home, mainly parents' inability to afford school material.'*

Respondents noted that poverty limits occupational aspirations in other ways as well, because without start-up capital it is not possible to launch a small business. A 20-year-old young man from Debre Tabor reported, *'Private business requires start-up finance. I don't have it.'* Many young people, and their caregivers, also observed that persistently high youth unemployment, especially among the most educated, is lowering educational aspirations and shifting occupational aspirations. A 16-year-old girl from Debre Tabor stated that, *'Previously I wanted to be an engineer but I have changed my mind because as you know, getting a job after graduating with engineering is becoming impossible in the country.'* A mother, also from Debre Tabor, echoed this view and added that pandemic-related school closures and continued conflict have contributed to growing hopelessness and lower aspirations:

I know a family of four brothers... The eldest graduated from university but was jobless for a long time. Because of this, his brothers lost hope and all dropped out

of school... After Covid-19, students have stopped reading because they do not have hope. No one was sure schools would reopen. The conflict is also making it worse. No parent is willing to send his child to the university.

Although youth migration – both inside Ethiopia and to the Middle East – has become common in recent years, migration was rarely integral to young people's narratives about their occupational aspirations. When it was, and in line with the GAGE survey findings, the largest group of young people discussed moving to urban areas to pursue post-secondary education or to find paid work. A 14-year-old girl stated, *'I want to attend Addis Ababa University because Addis Ababa is civilised.'* A smaller group of young people reported aspiring to move to the United States or the European Union.

Access to education and training

Survey findings for adolescents

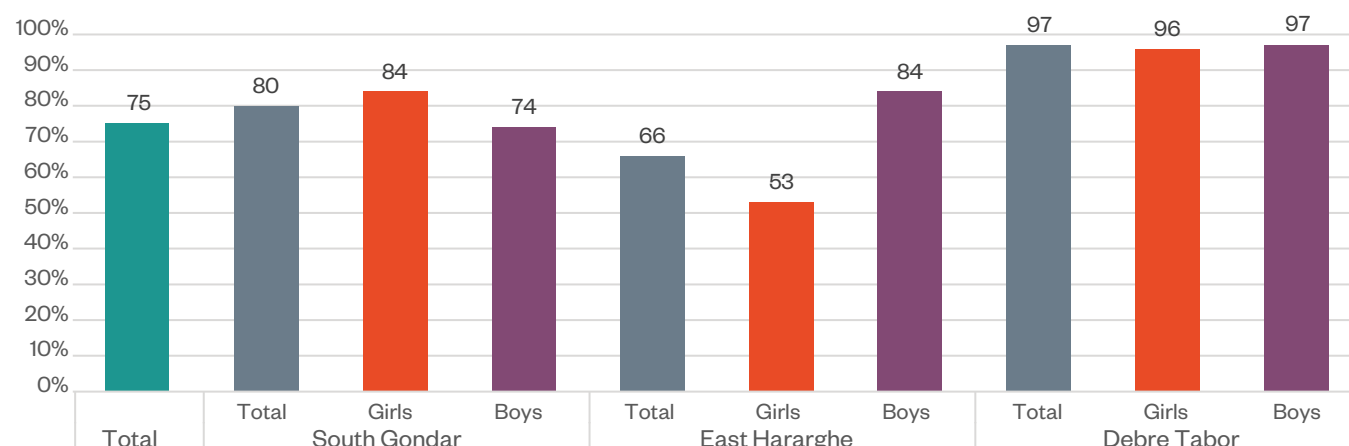
As noted in the companion report on education, the Round 3 survey found that 75% of adolescents were still enrolled in formal education (see Figure 16) (see also Presler-Marshall et al., 2024b). Despite conflict in Amhara region, enrolment was significantly higher in Debre Tabor (97%) and South Gondar (80%) than in East Hararghe (Oromia region) (66%). Gender differences matched figures from the Ministry of Education (2023), and were significant in rural areas. In South Gondar, girls were more likely to be enrolled than boys (84% versus 74%). In East Hararghe, the gender gap was much larger and favoured boys (84% versus 53%).

Between Round 2 and Round 3, adolescents' enrolment fell by a significant 6 percentage points. Declines were driven by adolescents living in rural areas, and were much larger in South Gondar (10 percentage points), which was impacted by recent violence, than in East Hararghe (3 percentage points). In South Gondar, boys' enrolment fell by 14 percentage points between the two survey rounds, and girls' enrolment fell by 8 percentage points. In East Hararghe, girls' enrolment fell by 4 percentage points, and boys' enrolment fell by 2 percentage points.

Survey findings for young adults

At Round 3, 43% of young adults were still enrolled in formal education (see Figure 17). Enrolment was significantly higher – approximately three times higher –

Figure 16: Adolescents' enrolment at Round 3



in urban Debre Tabor (73%) than in rural South Gondar (28%) and East Hararghe (22%). Gender differences were statistically significant and large, and favoured young men in all locations, most likely due to the high proportion of young women in the GAGE sample who had already married (see Box 2). The gender gap was largest in East Hararghe, where 36% of young men but only 12% of young women were enrolled at Round 3.

Between Round 2 and Round 3, as with adolescents, enrolment among young adults fell – by an average of 6%, ranging from 2 to 10 percentage points. There was a more marked fall in South Gondar (7%) and Debre Tabor (8%) than in East Hararghe (4%), with slight gender differences in all locations.

Qualitative findings

Qualitative findings extend and nuance the Round 3 survey findings. Due to stark differences between locations, including conflict in Amhara and reversed

gender patterns between South Gondar and East Hararghe, we present these by location – disaggregating by gender where relevant.

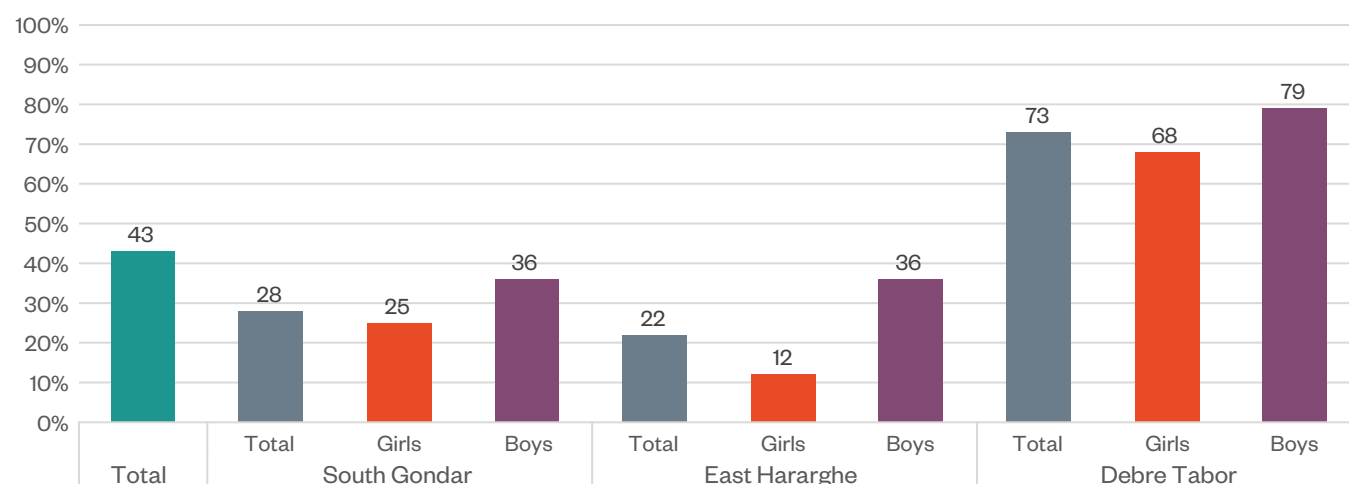
South Gondar

In South Gondar, respondents identified myriad barriers to girls' and boys' educational uptake. Many mentioned the continued impact of poverty. In some cases, there are real costs to education. A father reported that in his kebele, parents are asked to pay to send their children to school:

This year the school asked parents to pay 300 birr for each child. You can see, how can a parent who has 3 or 4 children pay the school fee? A parent who has 3 children has to pay 900 birr, which is impossible for parents in this kebele since people in this kebele live under severe poverty.

In other cases, there are opportunity costs to education, which can be high given that the labour market is not

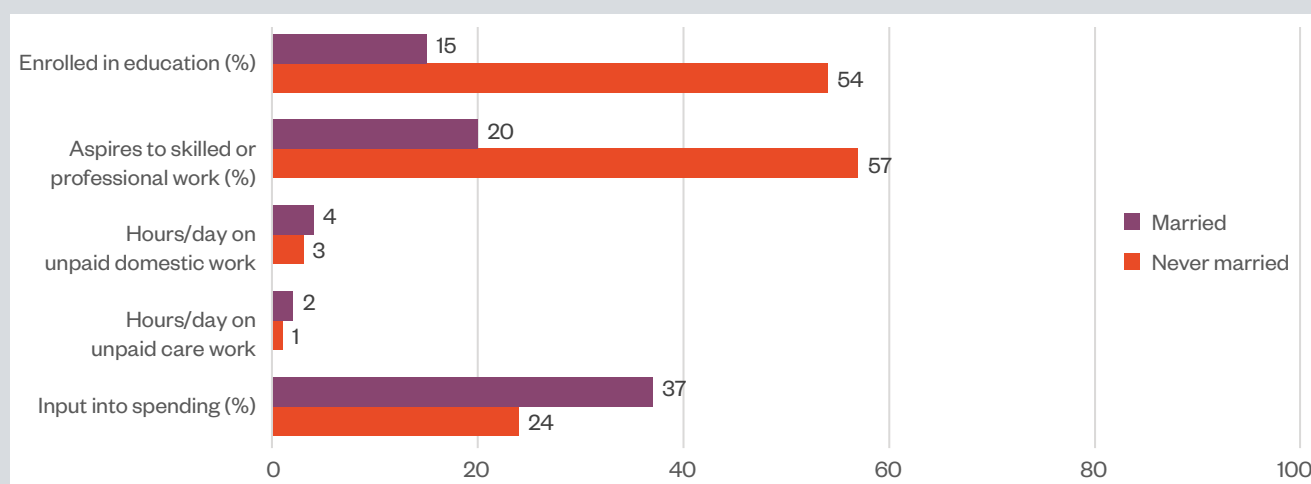
Figure 17: Young adults' enrolment at Round 3



Box 2: Marriage shapes young women's economic empowerment

The Round 3 survey found that of rural young women*, those who had married were significantly less likely to be enrolled in education than those who had not (15% versus 54%) (see Figure 18). They were also less likely to aspire to skilled or professional work (20% versus 57%) and spent far more of their time engaged in unpaid domestic work (4 hours/day versus 3 hours/day) and care work (2 hours/day versus 1 hour/day). On the other hand, because young brides have assumed adult roles, they were more likely than their unmarried peers to have decided how money is spent in the past year (37% versus 24%).

Figure 18: Economic empowerment indicators by marital status, rural young women



During qualitative interviews, respondents reported that child marriage and education are broadly considered incompatible. A 17-year-old boy from East Hararghe stated, *'Once married, girls cannot continue with their education. Marriage leads to the end of girls' education.'* In East Hararghe, where interest in formal education—especially for girls—is overall lower, married girls' access to education is often limited by their husband's refusal to allow them to attend school. A 17-year-old girl stated: *'He does not want me to go to school.'* In South Gondar, where demand for formal education is high and husbands often do support their young wife's education, many young brides reported that they had dropped out of school due to time poverty. A 17-year-old girl summarised it by saying, *'We need to work tirelessly after we get married.'*

Young brides (especially those from East Hararghe, who were more likely to have worked for pay prior to marriage) noted that although they may spend money on household needs, marriage limits not only their access to personal income but their input into decision-making over how household income is spent. An 18-year-old young woman from East Hararghe explained, *'I cannot seek wage work... I used to have my own source of income in the past. I am totally dependent on my husband's pocket currently... I do nothing without his permission.'*

* In urban areas, child and early marriage is far less common.

generating enough jobs for well-educated young people. A key informant – pointing out the newer, better constructed homes in his community – explained to the interviewer that: *'Those young people drop out of school, put their future at risk and help their family financially.'*

Conflict has also contributed to young people's school-leaving, because schools were closed, looted and destroyed during fighting. A woreda-level key informant with the Bureau of Education explained that:

During the war time, they destroyed learning materials in many schools including the desk, the blackboards, the desktops, and also other materials, so we had a difficulty

to restart education immediately after the war, and we still had shortage of the learning materials.

Finally, efforts to improve educational quality have come at the cost of limiting some girls' and boys' access. The Amhara regional government recently closed the satellite schools that served remote communities, and has instead been encouraging parents to send their children to formal schools in more central communities. However, because schools are located around kebele centres, and are too far away to be accessed by many young adolescents and adolescent girls (given safety concerns), a significant



A young woman selling vegetables, South Gondar, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE

number of young people have now lost access to education. A community leader explained:

The government ordered to close the satellite schools because there was a problem in the quality of the education. So we closed the schools, which caused many children to discontinue their education because the place is far from here and the children couldn't come here.

Other barriers to education in South Gondar primarily impact boys (and young men). Many of the young males in the South Gondar GAGE sample started school some years later than they should have – sometimes beginning first grade at age 10 or 11⁷ – because they were required to herd cattle until their next oldest brother could take over. Boys' agricultural responsibilities also prevent them attending school regularly. A 16-year-old boy explained:

I was busy all day long. My father wanted me to look after the cattle all day and he wanted me to help him in keeping an eye on the grass because at that time he was guarding someone's grass as a job. Because of that, I couldn't follow my education attentively. I was absent from school many days.

By mid-adolescence, often before boys in South Gondar have completed primary school (due to late enrolment), work-related migration also pulls them out of school. A 15-year-old girl reported that out of her class of 40

students, only 10 are boys: *'When they [boys] get to the age of puberty, they prefer to go to arid areas like Metema to look for a job, than to continue their education.'* A teacher commented that adolescent boys' disadvantage vis-à-vis girls is also related to a woreda-level policy decision to only pay for girls' boarding expenses at secondary school level:

Since four years ago, the woreda has sent only girls to boarding schools, since the government and NGOs give emphasis for girls' education.

Recent conflict has also disadvantaged boys and young men, because they were more likely than their female peers to take up weapons and join the military. A community leader explained:

The situation was forcing them to join the military because it seems the country was collapsing and they didn't see any future for them in the school, so they went to the war.

Although in South Gondar girls' enrolment is higher than boys', girls still face multiple gendered barriers to accessing education. For example, respondents noted that girls are rarely given enough time to study. A mother stated that:

Girls are busy with housework, they cook food, do cleaning and take care of animals, and they are busy. Because of workload, girls do not get enough time to study.

⁷ The official age of entrance to kindergarten is age 5; first grade begins at age 7.

Concerns about girls' sexual purity and safety also prevent girls in South Gondar from accessing education. Although this primarily impacts those transitioning to secondary school (see below), girls are at risk as soon as they reach puberty. A father from South Gondar stated: *'I observed boys violating girls while they were on their way to and from school... I observed boys harassing girls.'* Girls in South Gondar, like their peers in East Hararghe, also see their access to education limited by menarche (the onset of menstruation), due to schools' limited provisioning of water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities.

East Hararghe

Respondents in East Hararghe also identified multiple barriers to adolescent girls' and boys' access to education. Most commonly, they reported that parents do not understand the value of formal education beyond basic literacy and numeracy. A 14-year-old boy explained:

They do not expect their children to be employed in the future. Rather, they send their children to school until they know counting numbers only. Once they become able to count numbers, it is enough for them to attend school. All that they need is that – becoming able to count money and to do simple mathematics that will help them do business.

Other respondents reported that poverty limits young people's access to education, especially at secondary school level and given the recent drought that has affected the country. A father noted that the cost of school supplies is more than many households can bear: *'This year a dozen exercise books costs 780 birr... a single father is schooling 5, 6 or 7 children. You can multiply by 780.'* A woreda-level key informant with the Bureau of Education stated that:

There are kebeles that are 10 km from the area that the secondary school is located. It is difficult to walk 10 km one way daily to attend secondary school. This is the season of drought and the community does not have enough food to send children to secondary school. The households that have money send children to secondary school in the town and educate them. Those who do not have resources are unable to educate their children in secondary schools.

Several respondents reported that economic opportunity is also pulling adolescents out of school in East Hararghe. A 17-year-old boy explained at length:

Last year, many children from the community were enrolled in school but this year, this has been declining... Young people and adolescents are more focusing on producing khat farming and trading business... Last year, the community constructed the local road. The local town had been expanding and the trading business expanded. The electricity was also installed for many households in the community... The local people also dug deep wells at household level... The deep wells completely resolved the water shortage of the community and contributed to the expansion of the khat plantation because farmers have been irrigating the khat plantation.

With the caveat that several respondents reported that kebele officials are now fining the parents of girls who are absent from school – and that the recently installed wells with electric pumps have reduced the time that girls must spend collecting water – young people and adults in East Hararghe overwhelmingly focused on the gendered barriers to education faced by adolescent girls. Most respondents first reported that girls' school-leaving is their own fault, and that they are leaving due to child marriage. A mother stated that:

Girls quit education and get married, they did not continue attending school till the end. You may try to help her to attend school. She will get married when you did not plan for that as a parent.

With only a few exceptions, respondents reported that girls' disengagement from school is driven by parental demands. A 17-year-old boy explained:

Girls have lots of work to do. They do household chores in the morning and in the evenings here. They have work overload. It is not like towns here.

A mother admitted:

We order girls to cook food for her brother and send him to school and order her to stay at home and work. We say education of girls is useless.

Girls noted that even in cases where a mother supports her daughter's education, social norms and community pressure generally work to limit it. A 16-year-old girl explained:

Adults in the community discourage mothers, saying 'Why do you bother educating girls, by spending money

on expensive educational materials?' The community does not trust girls to become attentive and follow school well.

Girls explained that after years of poor attendance (for which they are often punished by teachers), dropping out of school seems a rational response – especially given very limited local opportunities for paid work (primarily khat farming). A 17-year-old girl who left school after grade 4 explained:

We have lots of work... We are supposed to be at school early in the morning. At the same time we are supposed to do household chores, we have to prepare breakfast. After all this, when we arrive at school, we are late and our teachers are disappointed with us, they beat us for being late. So we drop out of school.

Debre Tabor

In urban Debre Tabor, although the average household is better off than those in rural areas, poverty limits some girls' and boys' access to education. Other barriers to education are gendered. An 18-year-old young man in

Debre Tabor reported that girls' attendance is better than boys', because boys are inclined to skip school to hang out, while 'parents control their female children'. A 13-year-old girl, however, added that parents' control over girls' mobility and time can also impact girls' attendance:

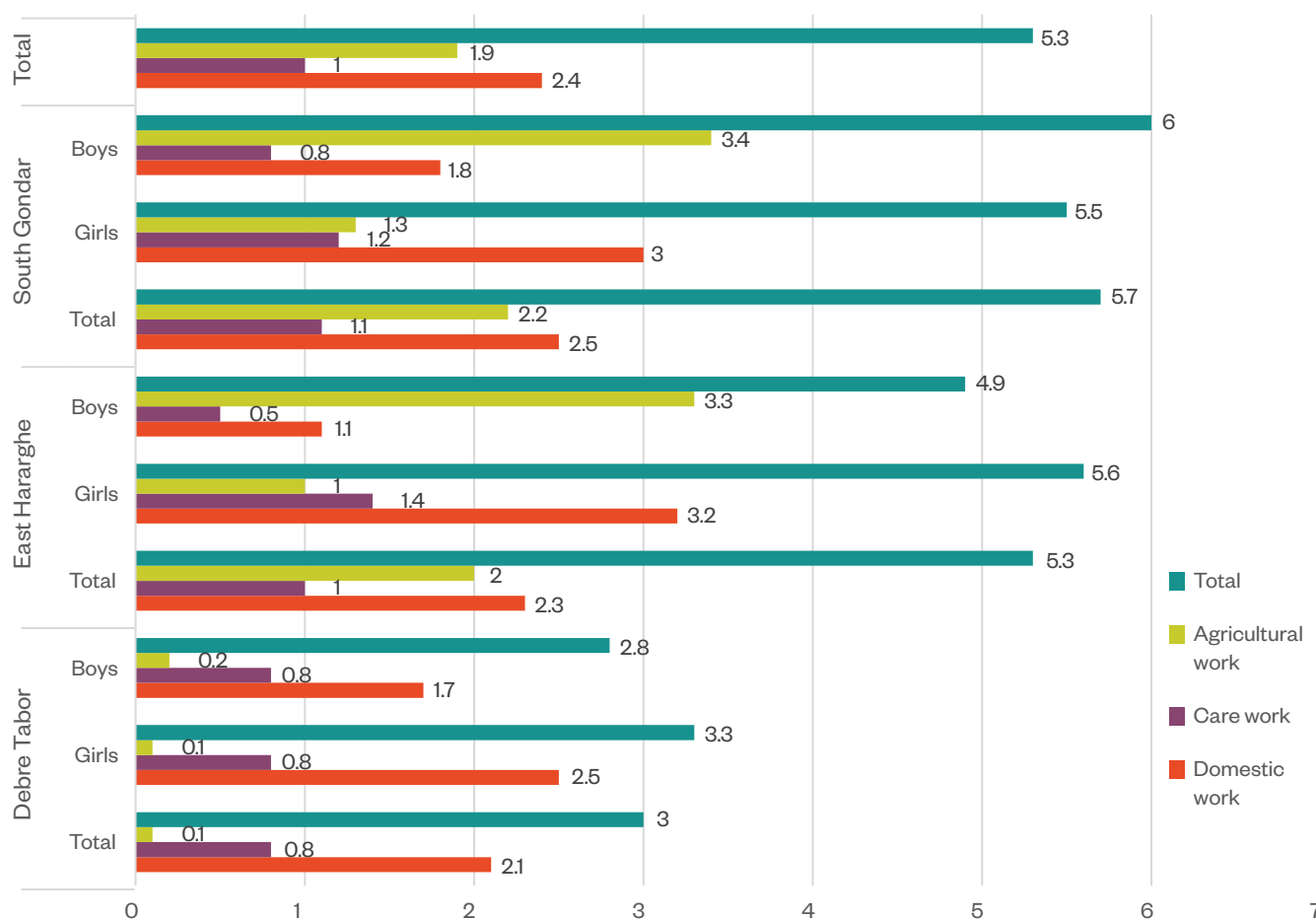
I had to look after my baby brother. My mom was at work and my other siblings were at school. So, I had to stay behind and take care of the baby. I have missed 14 days of the school year. My mom told me that he will grow up and I no longer have to take care of him. So I need to hang in there until he does.

Access to income

Survey findings for adolescents

The Round 3 survey found that the average adolescent did 5.3 hours of unpaid work each day (see Figure 19). Adolescents in rural South Gondar (5.7 hours) allocated more of their daily time to household labour than their peers in East Hararghe (5.3 hours) and Debre Tabor (3 hours). Unsurprisingly, girls in all locations spent more time on domestic work than boys (e.g. 2.5 hours a day versus

Figure 19: Adolescents' daily unpaid work



1.7 hours a day in Debre Tabor). In rural areas too, girls spent more time each day doing care work than boys (e.g. 1.2 hours a day versus 0.8 hours a day in South Gondar). In rural areas, boys spent more time than girls doing agricultural work (e.g. 3.3 hours a day versus 1 hour a day in East Hararghe).

The gender gap in terms of total number of daily hours spent on household labour varies by location. In South Gondar, boys work 30 minutes more each day than girls (6 hours versus 5.5 hours). In East Hararghe and Debre Tabor, girls work for longer each day than boys. The largest gender gap is in East Hararghe, where girls work (on average) 42 minutes more than boys each day. In the 18 months between Round 2 and Round 3, rural adolescents were contributing an average of 30 extra minutes of unpaid work each day to their household.

Few adolescents (9%) reported on the Round 3 survey that they had worked for pay in the past 12 months (see Figure 20). Location differences were significant, with

adolescents in East Hararghe (12%) (where khat production is booming) more likely to have worked for pay than their peers in rural South Gondar (7%) and Debre Tabor (5%). Gender differences were also significant, with girls in all locations (7%) less likely to have had paid work in the past year than boys (12%). The gender gap was largest in South Gondar (3% versus 11%). At Round 3, adolescents were 2 percentage points less likely to have had paid work in the past year than they were at Round 2. The largest decline, 8 percentage points, was in East Hararghe.

Of rural adolescents who reported working for pay in the past year, those in East Hararghe (400 birr) (approximately US\$3.20) reported higher earnings in the past week than those in South Gondar (245 birr) (approximately US\$2.00) (Figure 21).

Of adolescents who reported having had paid work in the past year, just over half (57%) reported that they kept any of their own wages (see Figure 22). This was more common in East Hararghe (61%) than in South Gondar (49%).

Figure 20: Has had paid work in the past year, adolescents

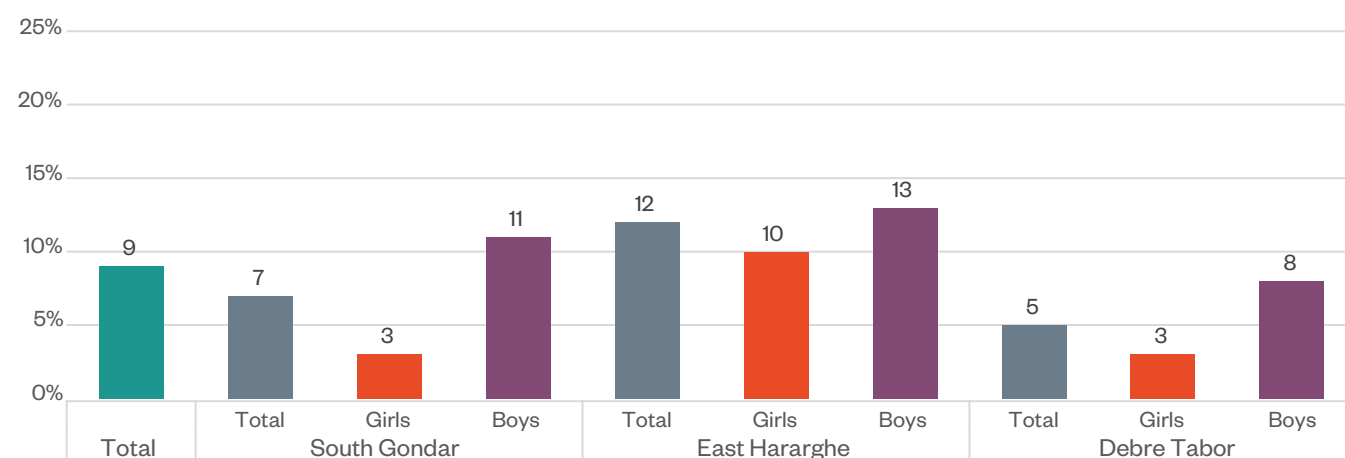
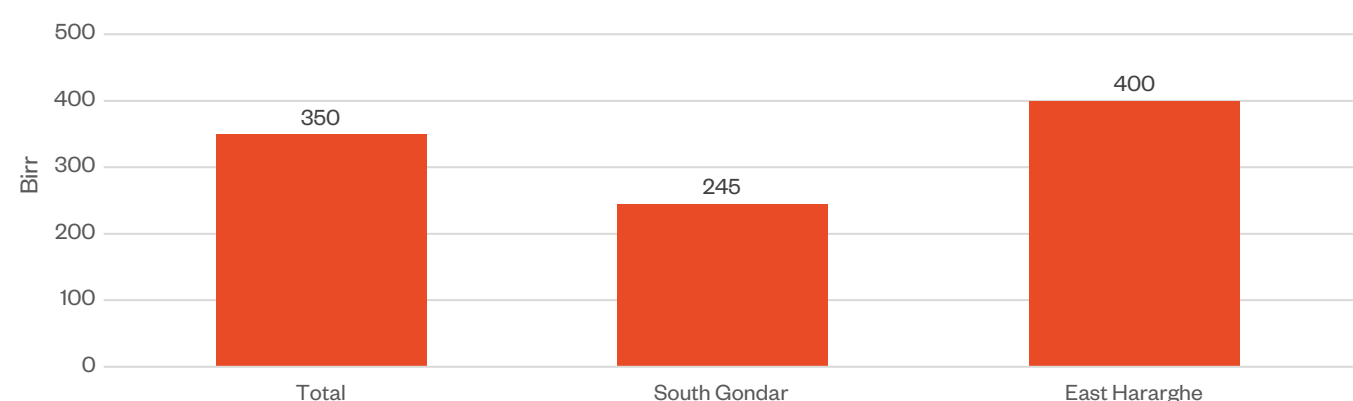
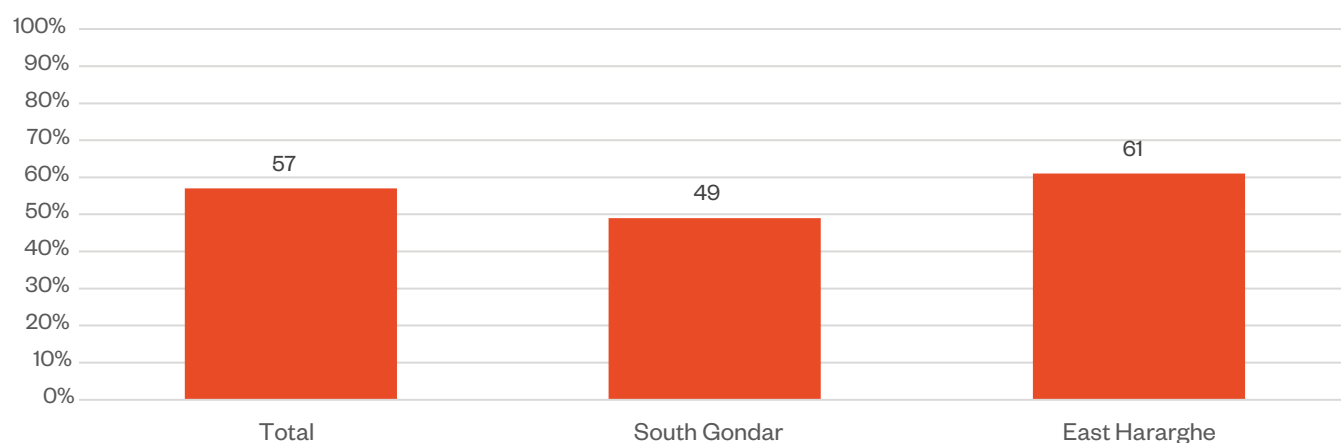


Figure 21: Median wages in the past week, of adolescents reporting paid work in the past year *



* There were too few adolescent workers in Debre Tabor to report, because most families prioritise education.

Figure 22: Kept at least some of own wages, adolescents who have had paid work in the past year

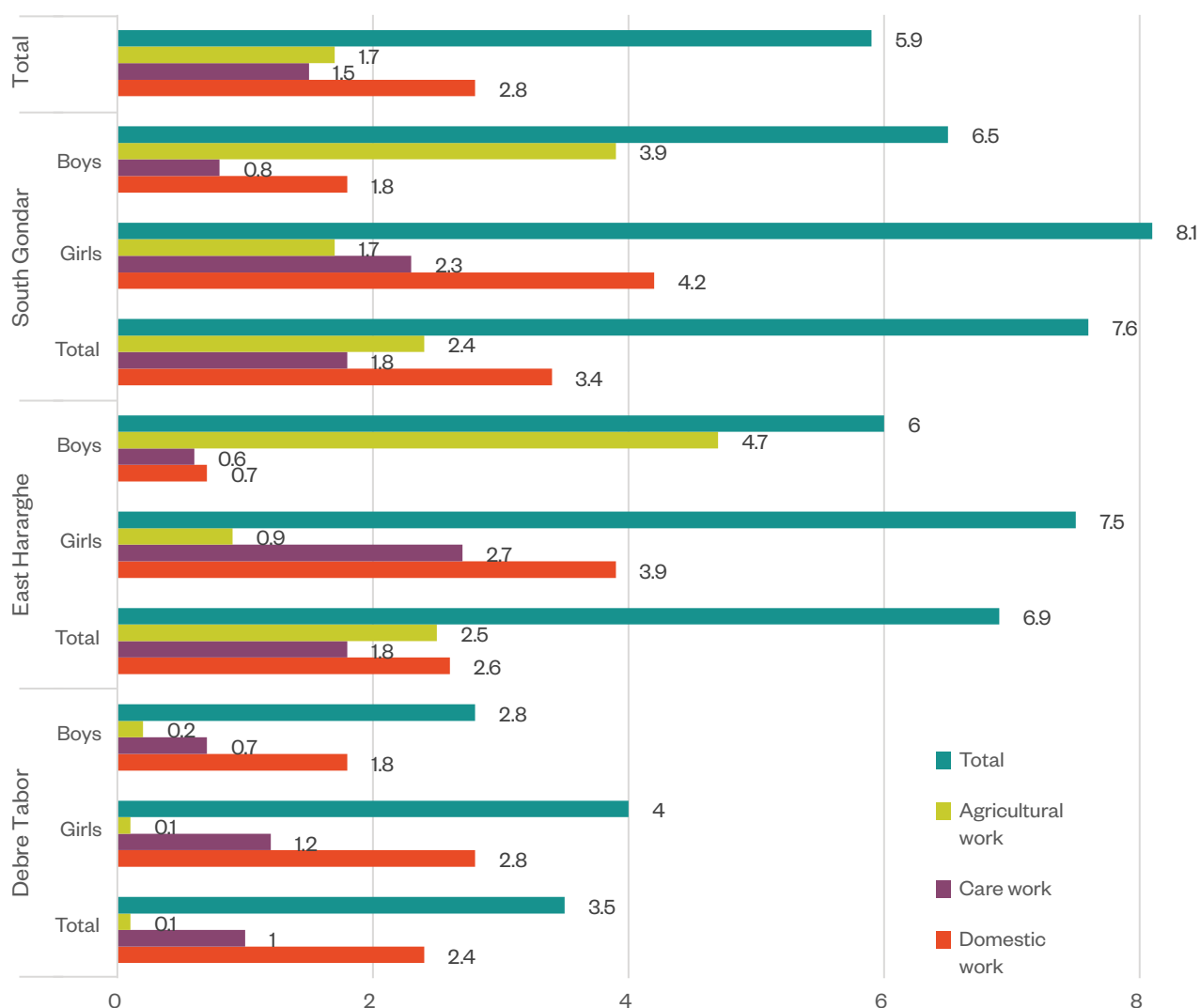


Survey findings for young adults

The Round 3 survey found that the average young adult did 5.9 hours of unpaid work for their household each day (see Figure 23). Young adults in rural South Gondar (7.6

hours) allocated more of their daily time to household labour than their peers in East Hararghe (6.9 hours) and Debre Tabor (3.5 hours). In all locations, young women (who are responsible for most household domestic and care

Figure 23: Young adults' daily unpaid work

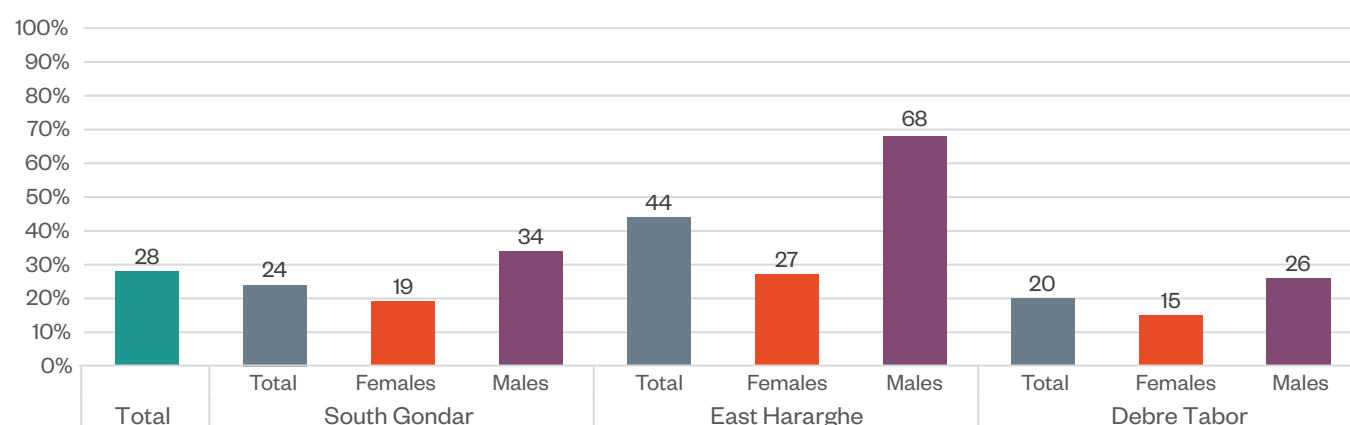


work) worked many more hours each day than young men (who are responsible for the bulk of agricultural work) (e.g. in South Gondar, girls worked 8.1 hours a day compared with 6.5 hours a day for boys). It should be noted that this gender gap is heavily shaped by our sample, because most young adult women were sampled because they were married (see Box 2 on pages 17). Time use data was not collected from young adults at Round 2, so we do not have details of any change between the two survey rounds.

Just over a quarter of young adults (28%) reported at Round 3 that they had had paid work in the past year (see Figure 24). Despite beliefs that women should have equal access to paid work (see Box 3), gender differences were

highly significant, with young women (20%) half as likely to have had paid work as young men (41%). The gender gap was largest in East Hararghe (27% versus 68%). Location differences were also significant, with young adults in East Hararghe (44%) more likely to have had paid work than their peers in rural South Gondar (24%), where jobs are scarce, and urban Debre Tabor (20%), where most young adults are still enrolled in school. In aggregate, young adults reported the same engagement with paid work at Round 3 as they did at Round 2. Young men in East Hararghe reported a 16 percentage point increase, primarily due to increased khat production.

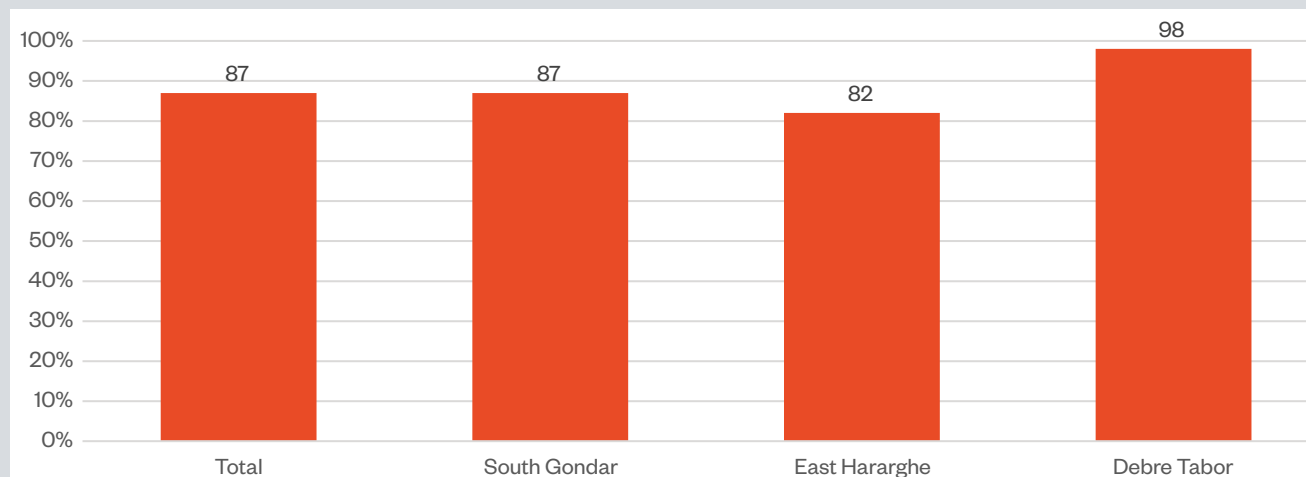
Figure 24: Has had paid work in the past year, young adults



Box 3: Beliefs about women's work

A large majority of young people in both cohorts (87%) reported on the Round 3 survey that women should have the same chance to work for pay as men. Although age and gender differences were not significant, location differences were. Young people in urban Debre Tabor (98%) were more likely to agree than those in rural South Gondar (87%) and East Hararghe (82%). In aggregate, beliefs about women's work were unchanged between Rounds 2 and 3, although young people in Debre Tabor saw a 4 percentage point increase between rounds.

Figure 25: Women should have the same chance to work for pay as men, both cohorts



Of young adults who reported working for pay in the past year (see Figure 26), those in East Hararghe, (700 birr, approximately US\$5.60), where young people work more hours per week, reported higher earnings in the past week than those in rural South Gondar (500 birr, approximately US\$4) or Debre Tabor (300 birr, approximately US\$2.40).

Of young adults who reported having had paid work in the past year, only half (51%) reported that they kept any of their own wages (see Figure 27). Gender differences were highly significant, with young men (67%) more than twice as likely to keep their wages as young women (34%). Location differences were also significant, with wage earners in East Hararghe (65%) more likely to keep at least a portion of their own wages than their peers in rural South Gondar (41%) and Debre Tabor (38%).

Qualitative findings

During Round 3 interviews, respondents reported that young people – regardless of their age and sex – contribute significant amounts of unpaid labour to their household. In line with the survey findings, the type of labour was highly dependent on sex. With exceptions, boys and young men primarily reported helping their father with agricultural work. A 15-year-old boy from South Gondar reported, 'We boys look after the cattle.' A 15-year-old boy from East Hararghe similarly commented that, 'We do farming of sorghum, maize, wheat, onion, potato.' Girls, on the other hand, are tasked with helping their mother with domestic work. A 13-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained:

Girls start to support their parents from age 7... They fetch water, go to the mill and gather firewood. They look after their younger siblings and also cook. They collect animal dung and clear the cowshed... At age 10, a girl can do every domestic activity.

Figure 26: Median wages in the past week, of young adults with paid work in the past year

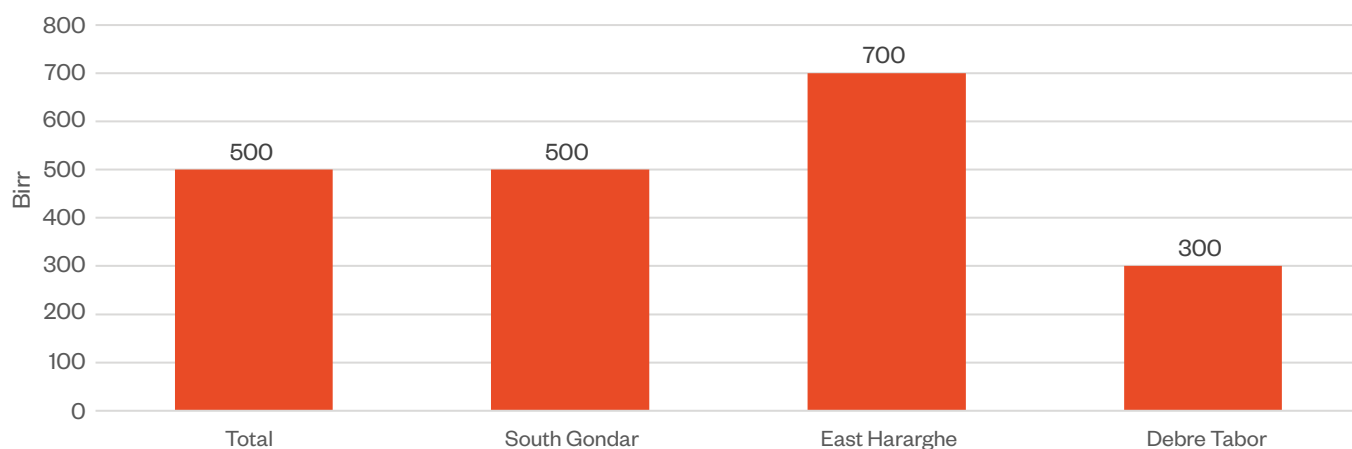
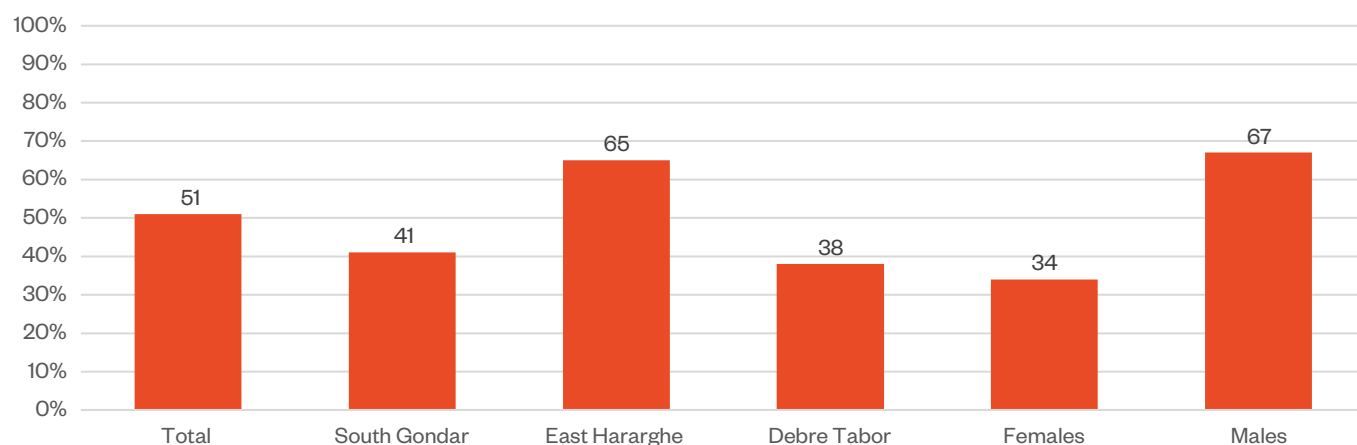


Figure 27: Kept at least some of own wages, young adults who have had paid work in the past year*



* There are too few young workers to simultaneously disaggregate by gender and location.

A 16-year-old boy from Debre Tabor noted that domestic work is simply not seen as the purview of men and boys: *'It is our culture that males do not involve [themselves] much in housework.'* Because agricultural work is seasonally limited (to daylight hours) whereas care and household work are never-ending, the result of this division of labour, according to participants in our qualitative research, is that most girls contribute far more of their time to their families than do boys. A 13-year-old girl from Debre Tabor, when asked how she spends her leisure time, replied, *'I do nothing else other than studying. I do not have that much time to spare after doing chores.'* Pressure on girls' time is most extreme in East Hararghe, where alongside their domestic responsibilities, girls are also expected to help their parents harvest and market *khat*. A community key informant explained, *'Most of the time, collecting the khat branches is the responsibility of girls.'*

In line with the survey findings, qualitative research found that young people's engagement with paid work is shaped by their age, sex, and location. During interviews, relatively few adolescents discussed working for pay; indeed, it was uncommon even for young adults (most of whom are out of school) to discuss paid work. Reports of paid work were most common in East Hararghe, where *khat* farming has rapidly expanded in recent years. A key informant explained that both males and females are involved, albeit at a different scale:

Young people from this village sell khat in the nearby town, they quit education to trade khat... Girls sell khat in the town near the village, there are boys that buy khat from those girls and sell it in another town. Boys sell big amounts of khat, taking it to another town.

A 16-year-old boy, back in school after a two-year hiatus, confirmed that boys can earn quite well trading *khat*:

Due to the expansion of the local market, I had to participate in trading business. I have bought khat from the local farmers and transferred to merchants from Jigjiga [Somali region]. The traders communicate with us using mobile phones and we send the khat to the traders using the truckers. They send us the money using other traders. We buy the khat with the money of the traders and we receive our profits.

In addition to harvesting and trading *khat*, girls and young women in East Hararghe sometimes reported running their own small business, sometimes to buy their own school supplies (which are provided to boys by their parents) and

other times to support the household. A 15-year-old girl from East Hararghe stated, *'I am buying school materials... I am buying beans and selling by roasting it... I buy beans at 60 birr and I will roast it to sell it at 120 birr.'* A key informant noted that this is common and pointed out to the interviewer, *'In your drive to this area, you may have seen a lot of females doing petty business in the street.'*

In rural South Gondar, nearly all adolescents and most young adults taking part in the qualitative research reported that they had not worked for pay, and indeed, identified unemployment as a significant source of stress in their lives (see Presler-Marshall et al., 2024c). For example, when one 18-year-old young man was asked how he earned money, he replied, *'So far I didn't engage in paid work.'* According to respondents, this was primarily because there are no local job opportunities. A key informant reported that, *'The government is not creating job opportunities for the youths.'* Respondents in South Gondar shared the view that when young people do work for pay, it necessarily involves migration – for boys and young men, primarily to undertake seasonal agricultural labour in other Ethiopian regions and nearby countries; and for girls and young women, to work as domestic workers in Ethiopia's urban areas and throughout the Middle East. A 16-year-old boy from South Gondar explained that many of his peers have left the community to find work:

I know many boys who migrated to other areas looking for a job. Adolescent boys mostly migrate to the lowland areas like to Metema, Humera... Many girls migrated to Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar and other towns to work as housemaid. Mostly they are girls who are 16, 17 and older.

Although respondents noted that boys' migration has increased in recent years, due to drought and conflict, it is growth in girls' migration that they identified as having taken off. A key informant explained:

Girls' massive migration to cities is a new trend... Now, parents are seeing other girls sending money to their family and they are now persuading their daughters to go to the cities so that they can send them money back.

Several girls even reported that girls, rather than boys, are actively pressured by their parents into migration because parents believe that girls will be more diligent about sending remittances. A 16-year-old girl from South Gondar stated, *'They think the females will send the money for their parents and the boys will save the money to start a better job and return to home.'* Respondents also acknowledged

that pressure on girls to engage in work-related migration is despite widespread understanding of how exploitative and dangerous that work can be. A 13-year-old boy from South Gondar stated that everyone in his community knows that only brokers benefit from girls' migration:

Brokers make girls' lives miserable after migration... Brokers took them to someone's house and they make money through them and they use them as a source of income. No one will help girls to avoid labour exploitation.

In Debre Tabor, reports of paid work were even more rare than in rural South Gondar. This is primarily due to higher school enrolment, even among young adults. That said, respondents agreed that it is common for boys and young men to have part-time work, sometimes to help support their families but more often to pay for their own recreational expenses. Boys shine shoes, carry goods in markets, and (if they are very enterprising) run small businesses online. Young adults, both males and females, reported working myriad small jobs, including wage labour on construction sites and trading food and handicrafts, to cover their own living expenses. Although the types of work they undertake were varied, their observations about the labour market in Debre Tabor were not; because of the constant influx of migrants from rural areas, there are never enough jobs to go around. A 20-year-old young woman explained:

Getting a job every day is difficult... because the number of daily labourers is high compared to demand... My husband I and I get 3–5 days only each month... We leave the house at 05:30 in the morning and we wait till 07:30. You will know after that you don't get a job, and you get back to home... Sometimes we even limit the food we have.

Decision-making over spending

Survey findings

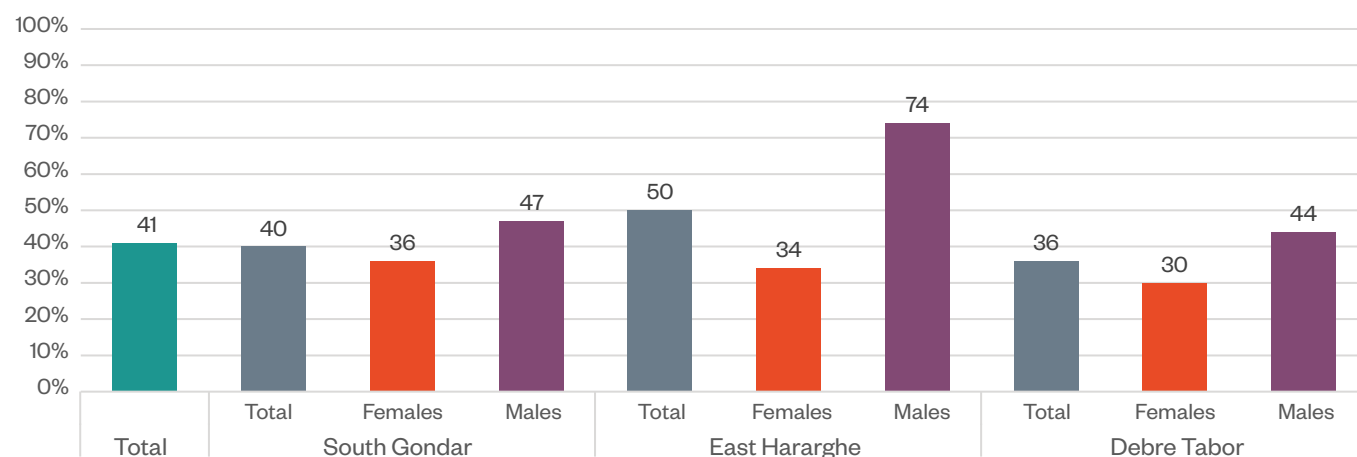
At Round 3 only 15% of adolescents – regardless of location or gender – reported that they had helped decide how to spend money in the past year. In aggregate, adolescents' input into spending was down 3 percentage points since Round 2, despite the fact that the individuals surveyed were now 18 months older. The largest differences between rounds were for girls in East Hararghe, down 7 percentage points, and girls in Debre Tabor, up 6 percentage points.

Less than half of young adults (41%) reported helping to decide how money was spent in the past year (see Figure 28). As was expected given young women's more limited access to income, gender differences were highly significant. Aggregating across locations, 33% of young women and 54% of young men reported input into spending. The gender gap was largest in East Hararghe (34% versus 74%). Location differences were also significant, with those in East Hararghe (50%) more likely to report input into spending than their peers in South Gondar (40%) and Debre Tabor (36%). Between Rounds 2 and 3, and reflecting their growing independence, young adults were 11 percentage points more likely to report input into spending, with the largest gains for young men in East Hararghe (32 percentage points).

Qualitative findings

In line with the Round 3 survey findings, young people taking part in qualitative research reported very little spending. Those that did primarily reported spending on productive assets (e.g. buying products to sell), school supplies, and household needs. A 12-year-old boy from East Hararghe explained of his spending, 'I buy rice sacks

Figure 28: Decision-making over spending, young adults



and decompose them to the fibres that I make the rope from. I sell the rope.’ Only a few boys and young men in Debre Tabor reported some discretionary spending. A 17-year-old boy from that town reported how he spends his pocket money: *‘I used it to buy reference books and to enjoy with my friends.’*

Respondents’ broader narratives underscore a stark gender divide in how young people spend their money. Boys and young men, while they do spend on their own schooling and household needs, are disproportionately likely to ‘waste’ their money in bars and cafes – often on unhealthy habits. An 18-year-old young man from South Gondar reported of many of his peers, *‘They will expend the money they make to drink alcohol and other insignificant things... They waste the money they earned working in other areas by playing gambling.’* Girls and young women, on the other hand, are disproportionately likely to see their wages entirely appropriated for household use. A father from South Gondar explained what happens with migrant girls’ earnings: *‘They send money for saving. However, in some cases, their family spend the money and they suffer economically and psychologically when they come back home.’*

Opportunities to save and borrow

Survey findings for adolescents

In aggregate, 26% of adolescents reported that they had some savings (see Figure 29). Location and gender differences were significant. Despite their lower chances of having had paid work in the past year, adolescents in South Gondar (28%) and Debre Tabor (27%) were more likely to have savings than their peers in East Hararghe

(23%). In all locations, boys (44%) were more likely to have savings than girls (23%), presumably because they are more likely to work for pay. The gender gap was largest in Debre Tabor (36% versus 18%). Between Rounds 2 and 3, the percentage of adolescents reporting having savings fell by 24 points. The largest decline was in East Hararghe (44 percentage points).

Survey findings for young adults

At Round 3, 36% of young adults reported having any savings (see Figure 30). Location differences by themselves were not significant, but gender differences were. In aggregate, 47% of young men and 29% of young women reported having any savings. The gender gap was largest in East Hararghe, where 61% of young men but only 25% of young women reported having savings. Between Rounds 2 and 3, the percentage of young adults reporting having savings fell by 12 points. The largest declines were for young women in East Hararghe (down 29 percentage points) and Debre Tabor (down 24 percentage points).

Qualitative findings

During qualitative interviews, it was common for young people to report having saved small sums, primarily to cover educational expenses. Although a few adolescents (all girls) reported that they had learned the value of saving at school (in girls’ clubs), most reported that Act With Her programming had encouraged them to begin saving. An 11-year-old girl from East Hararghe explained that she and her peers were jointly saving, at school, to support less well-off students:

*We learn at school in girls’ club about saving and loan.
We were buying chickpea, to roast and sell it at school*

Figure 29: Reported having any savings, adolescents

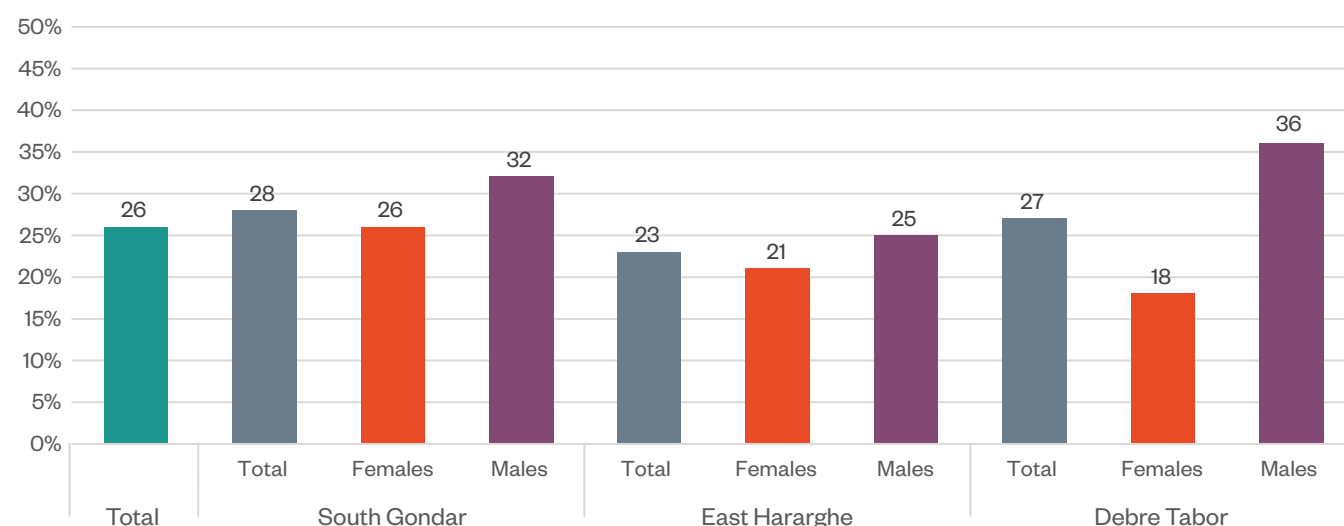
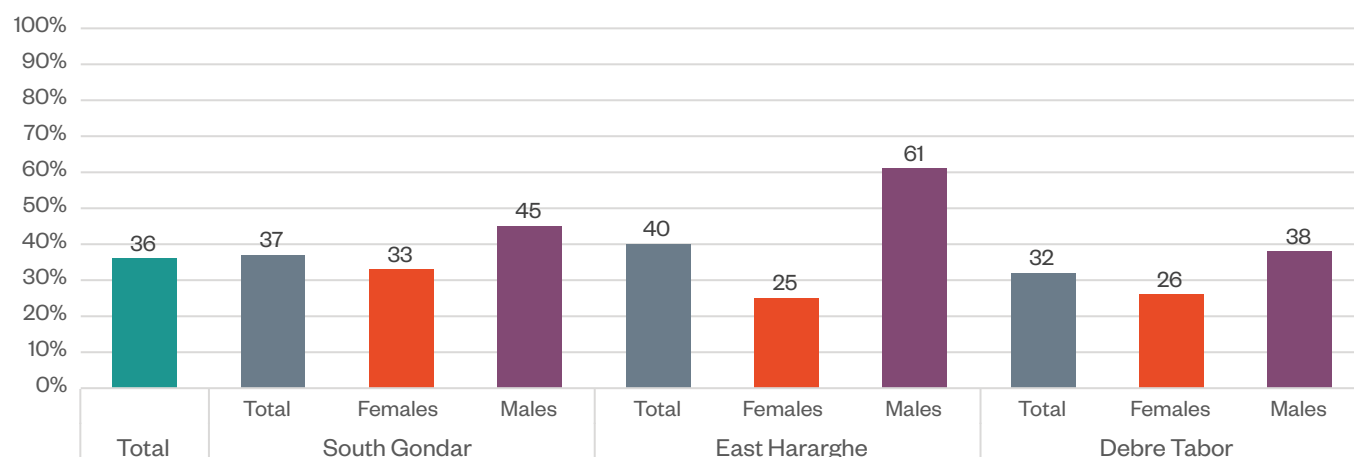


Figure 30: Reported having any savings, young adults



compound and save the money... Our saving in group is very important, we use that to support students that do not have educational materials, pen or exercise book.

Two 12-year-old boys, also from East Hararghe, noted that they were saving, in boxes kept at home, for their own future needs. One explained:

We have begun to make savings after joining this project [Act With Her]... We have a saving box at home. We save the money that we earn... We put it in the box if we earn even 1 birr... If you keep it [the money] with you, it will not stay with you. You may buy something with it.

Several young people commented that although Ethiopia has a long history of informal savings groups, these have not always worked out for members due to social customs that Act With Her has discouraged. A 14-year-old girl from South Gondar explained:

When our mothers were gathering in one place to collect the money from each member of the association each month, there was a party, so they were spending more money on the party and because of that it was difficult to say they were saving money at that time.

A small minority of young people reported saving at banks. This was most common among young adults who were attending university in Debre Tabor. A 19-year-old young woman studying at that university explained, *'Except those who have joined university, I don't think they have bank accounts.'*

Although caregivers reported a great deal of informal borrowing – of grain and cash, to meet survival needs – only two young people mentioned having ever accessed informal credit. The 11-year-old girl saving money earned through selling chickpea at school reported that she and her peers had obtained start-up capital from the teacher who runs the girls' club: *'We started the chickpea business with money that we borrowed from our teacher.'* An 18-year-old mother, also from East Hararghe, reported that she borrows from neighbours to help smooth consumption and keep her child regularly fed: *'I borrow money from people when I am short [of funds].'* Access to formal credit is rare – even for adults. A finance sector key informant from South Gondar admitted that this is because potential borrowers must provide collateral, which few have, and because government credit schemes are too poorly funded. He stated, *'We don't have that much money to lend and we can't give the loan if they don't have something... By the way it is not the problem of this woreda only, but the whole country in general.'* A father from Debre Tabor noted that not only is access to credit rare, but that credit schemes favour people who are well-connected and well-off: *'If 50 people ask for a loan, 3 or 4 persons will be successful. Corruption is highly widespread throughout Debre Tabor. Loaning is for the rich in Debre Tabor.'*

Conclusions and implications for policy and programming

GAGE Round 3 research found that few Ethiopian young people – especially those from rural areas – can be said to be either currently economically empowered or likely to be so in the near future. Although most adolescents have high occupational aspirations, most also understand how tenuous those aspirations are, given limited household resources and social protection (to afford education and productive investment), the size and shape of the Ethiopian labour market, and recent conflict. Indeed, young adults' much lower aspirations suggest that many young people are forced to abandon their dreams in late adolescence, when the majority of those living in rural areas – already years over age for grade – drop out of school. Access to paid work is limited for adolescents and young adults alike, even in the urban areas that rural residents perceive to offer more opportunities. Whenever young people do find paid work, their earnings are extremely low and tend to be spent on household consumption, rather than productively invested or saved for the future.

Regional and gender differences add texture to these broad conclusions. For example, Amhara region has been

more impacted by recent conflict than Oromia region, which has threatened the former's historical advantage in uptake of education, especially for boys. Amhara has also seen less growth in its cash economy, which is pushing more young people – girls and boys – into distress migration. East Hararghe, in Oromia region, is experiencing the opposite: as the cash *khat* economy expands, it is pulling adolescents out of school. Across nearly all metrics, girls and young women are disadvantaged compared to boys and young men. They are more likely to leave school prematurely (especially in East Hararghe), spend more time on unpaid household labour (especially as they grow up and marry), are less likely to work for pay, are more likely to have their wages appropriated for household use, and are less likely to have savings for the future.

Based on our research findings, we propose the following policy and programmatic actions to accelerate progress in improving young people's access to the skills, social protection, assets and decent work that will support them to become economically empowered adults:



A young tailor, South Gondar, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE



Increase access to social protection that is responsive to the needs of adolescents and young adults according to their age, gender and disability status, and provide adequate support to households impacted by drought and conflict to enable them not only to survive, but to recover:

- Expand access to the PSNP and cash and asset transfers so that households can afford to let their children prioritise education – ideally through to completion of secondary school. Where young people are living independently, make this support available directly to them.
- Ensure that PSNP benefit levels account for recent inflation and disability-related costs and that community lists are updated annually to ensure that young people who are living independently are eligible when in need.
- Ensure that households and communities impacted by drought and conflict receive not only adequate emergency support but also longer-term access to the PSNP as they rebuild their livelihoods and assets.
- Scale up PSNP and cash transfer programming in urban areas, especially those with high levels of chronic poverty, to ensure that adolescents in the

poorest households can take advantage of educational opportunities.

- Expand school feeding and the provision of school supplies and uniforms.
- Introduce labelled or conditional cash transfers as part of PSNP support to incentivise children's regular attendance and reduce children's engagement with child labour (paid and unpaid).
- Continue scaling up health insurance to protect households from high health expenses (including those related to transport, medication and medical testing) and pair this with improved awareness-raising about what health insurance does and does not cover. Insurance should be provided free to the poorest households (including those enrolled in the PSNP and those whose livelihoods were destroyed by recent conflict) and for those with disabilities, and at reduced cost to those whose earnings do not take them above the poverty line. Accountability mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure that this rule is correctly applied, and monitoring systems should be strengthened to ensure that the insured have access to timely, quality health care.

Support young people to develop the skills they need for economic independence:

- Enforce, in all communities, policies mandating education through the end 8th to ensure that adolescents develop the foundational skills they need to become economically empowered adults.
- Expand opportunities for out-of-school young people – including girls and young women who are (or have been) married and young people with disabilities – to return to the classroom to attain (at a minimum) basic numeracy and literacy skills, scaling up evening classes as needed and prioritising communities where access to education has been disrupted by conflict and drought.
- Expand special needs education. This should include training more teachers on inclusive pedagogies, establishing more and better-resourced self-contained classrooms in more communities, offering more grades of tailored education, and improved resourcing (including specially trained teaching assistants) to help students with disabilities continue to thrive once they have entered mainstream education.
- Beginning in early adolescence, provide students with individualised educational and occupational guidance (for instance, through school-based vocational guidance counsellors or youth empowerment programmes) to help them think about their options, set realistic goals (based on their abilities and interests and on local labour market realities), and plan how to operationalise those goals in the short term and longer term.
- Support youth employment by strengthening policy synergies between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour and Skills, modernising the school curriculum to ensure that students are acquiring the skills they need, and linking graduates with work opportunities.
- Continue scaling up financial literacy curricula in schools and community-based venues, ensuring that young people are exposed to iterative age-appropriate lessons, starting in primary school, that address budgeting, the importance of saving, how to negotiate when selling and buying, and how interest on credit/loans works.



A 17-year-old boy who has just restarted school after receiving school supplies, East Hararghe © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024



An adolescent girl in Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE 2024

- Pair numeracy and financial literacy courses with expanded peer-based opportunities for children and adolescents to save – using both formal and informal mechanisms – so that they can practise the skills they are learning. Consider involving parents in these opportunities, given research which suggests that young people save more when supported by their parents.
- Develop courses to support entrepreneurship, tailored to local contexts and inclusive of adolescents and young people with disabilities, and girls and young women who are (or have been) married.
- Provide – to young people planning to work overseas – short-term skills training courses that teach occupational and language skills and make potential migrants aware of cultural differences.
- Ensure that girls and young women, including those who are (or have been) married, are provided with the life skills and mentoring support that is likely to improve their outcomes in the longer term.

Strengthen measures to protect young people from exploitative work:

- Ensure that young workers receive equal pay for equal work, regardless of gender and disability status.
- Pair efforts to raise awareness about the risks of migration with concrete actions that young people and their families can take to make migration safer.
- Strengthen awareness among young people (and especially among girls engaged in domestic work) of what constitutes exploitation and abuse, and how to report it.
- Improve enforcement of the policies designed to make migration safer, including better regulation of brokers, and preventing adolescents under the age of 18 from undertaking international migration.
- Include domestic work in labour laws and sign the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 189 on Domestic Workers to improve wages and working conditions, and to give workers recourse for abuse and non-payment of wages.
- Strengthen relationships with destination countries, as well as with international organisations such as the IOM, to ensure that international migration is safe and that the rights of migrants are protected in accordance with international laws and conventions.

Expand young people's access to employment and credit:

- Step up efforts to support young people's livelihoods (including by offering them tailored agricultural extension services, given that they are likely to be more open to new crops and new methods) by expanding government jobs programmes in both rural and urban areas, and by encouraging the foreign investment that will lead to job growth.
- Work to reduce corruption and nepotism so that young people have equitable access to government training, employment, and credit services.
- Expand access to credit for young people, ensuring that loans are paired with financial and business training – and, ideally, mentoring – to build young borrowers' skill sets. Ensure that repayment terms flexibly account for not only youth and inexperience, but also broader events or shocks (especially those that are weather-related) that might derail even solid business plans.
- Provide extra support to girls and young women to grow their confidence and voice, and improve their control over their earnings, loans and investments.
- Support the livelihoods of young people with disabilities, making sure that they are included in youth-focused programming, tailoring assistance as needed, and simultaneously addressing the disability-related stigma that effectively shuts them out of the labour market.
- Monitor and take action to address the inclusivity of these opportunities in terms of recipients' gender, disability and marital status.

Invest in girls' and young women's economic empowerment by encouraging shifts in the laws and gender norms that continue to disadvantage them:

- Expand access to girls' clubs in both school and community settings so that girls have role models, mentors, and opportunities to develop the soft skills that will allow them to resist child marriage, advocate for continued access to education and training, and strive for economic independence.
- Work with parents, young people (including young husbands) and communities to shift the gender norms that leave adolescent girls and young women with a disproportionate share of household labour, and less access to education, decision-making, mobility, employment opportunities, assets (including those they earned) and credit than their male counterparts.

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GAGE Programme Office
Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
United Kingdom
Email: gage@odi.org
Web: www.gage.odi.org

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Front cover: A girl with a bundle of khat, East Hararghe, Ethiopia © Nathalie Bertrams/GAGE

