Exploring Youth Development in Ethiopia:
An Alternative Strength-Based Perspective

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Abstract

Ethiopia is a country where young people account for the larger proportion compared to those in the other cohorts. Enhancing the capacity of the youth would, therefore, entail nurturing for this nation. The approach followed in this nurturing process is obviously as important as the act of nurturing itself. Traditionally, youth have been seen as problems to be managed. Studies have also concentrated on documenting their liabilities. Recently, however, youth are conceived as resources to be cultivated and upgraded, and the focus is on promoting competencies. This study examined Ethiopian youth from a strength- based perspective with triple objectives: 1) portrayal of young people in scientific literature, 2) youth participation over historical periods, and 3) youths' developmental assets profile. Methods and approaches of the study involved review of literature on Ethiopian youth, analysis of youth-related documents (by governmental and non-government organisations) to explore youth participation, and primary data to examine developmental assets profile of the youth. The primary data were collected from a sample of 461 youths in Addis Ababa through the Developmental Assets Profile questionnaire. Findings from critical reviews of literature indicated that young people in Ethiopia are understood only from a deficit perspective. Studies have attempted to describe the vulnerabilities, problems, and concerns of young people rather than their

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strengths. However, a cursory inspection of other reports yielded that the youth were not only the pioneer of change in Ethiopia but have actively involved in the socio-economic and political transformations of the nation above and beyond their vulnerabilities. The data obtained through the Developmental Assets Profile measure have also suggested that the youth are indeed endowed with a number of developmental assets and these assets are significantly better for females than they are for males.

Key-words: *Ethiopian youth, Ethiopian adolescents, developmental assets, positive youth development, youth participation.*

Introduction

Examination of the history of adolescent and youth studies (e.g., Arnett & Cravens, 2006; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009), theoretical perspectives (e.g., Benson Scales, Hamiton, & Sesma, 2006), and services rendered to them (e.g., Catalano, Bergland, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004) indicated that young people have been characterised unfavourably from a deficit or pathological point of view. Interventions on youth programmes have been also focusing on reducing deficits and fixing problems than promoting competencies (Catalano, *et al.* 2004).

This characterisation of youth took prominence primarily in ancient philosophical views that considered young people as problem-children of society (Arnett, 2007). It was also promulgated in the biological-based reductionist conceptions that describe hormonal and physical changes of adolescence as overwhelming (Steinberg & Lerner, 2004). The characterization has been also emphasized in the Darwinian evolutionary theory and Haeckel's controversial idea of recapitulation (Lerner & Steinberg, 2009; Steinberg & Lerner, 2004) that implicated on the developmental stage of adolescence with a phylogenetic period wherein human ancestors move from a wild and beast-like character to a modern and civilised

being. Rooted in these assumptions, the first known adolescent psychologist, Professor G. S. Hall, formulated a theory of youth development in which its principal conceptual as well as research paradigm has been that of 'storm and stress' (Brown, 2005; Lerner, 2005; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). This early formulation about youth has in turn influenced subsequent understanding of the youth as well as its research practice for almost the whole of the twentieth century (Lerner 2005; Lerner & Steinberg, 2009). Dominant theorists of human development (e.g. Erikson, 1968; Freud, 1969) have adopted Hall's negative view in their scientific activities and propagated it in developmental literature.

Such deficit-based way of researching and conceptualising youths and their development was not only restricted to the socio-cultural context in which adolescence was first thought to occur. The period of adolescence, which is now evident in most societies of the world (Schelegel, 2000; Nsamenang & Sharma, 2013), even in nonindustrial societies (Schelegel & Barry, 1991) have been viewed for long as a problem period. For example, Nsamenang (2004) has noted that scholars in the non-Western cultures like Africa have "tended to create, or more accurately to recast, the African or other non-Western images of adolescence in the shadow of Euro-American perspective" (Nsamenang, 2004: p.61). This recasting would unfold itself in the conception of young people in Ethiopia, too.

Paralleling these dominant negative views, there gradually began some piecemeal views and studies in the West to challenge the problem-oriented conception of adolescence as early as the 1960s (e.g., Bandura, 1964; Offer, 1969; Offer & Schonert-Reichl, 1992). Bandura (1964), for example, has challenged the view of stormy decade as "fiction" by examining important dimensions (parent-adolescent relationship, autonomy development, peer influence, and sexuality) of adolescent development. Offer (1969) and Offer and Schonert-Reichl (1992)

have also debunked the myth of adolescence exposing as the majority (80%) of adolescents in their studies did not experience storm and stress, instead managed their transition quite well.

Gathering momentum across time, such piecemeal efforts eventually developed into a new but optimistic and strength-based paradigm of thinking called "The positive youth development (PYD) perspective" beginning in the closing decade of the 20th century in the United States of America (Damon, 2004; Lerner, Almerji, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005). The PYD perspective, though still lacking an all-encompassing definition due to its relative newness and interdisciplinary nature (Benson, *et al.*, 2006; Catalano *et al.*, 2004), represents a theoretical, research and practice paradigm change from the long-held deficit and pathology-oriented model to an affirmative and strength-based view of youth development.

The PYD approach, predicated on developmental systems models, define youth development as deliberate efforts by other youth, adults, communities, government, agencies, and schools to provide opportunities for youth to enhance their interests, skills, abilities, and potentials (Benson, *et al.*, 2006; Damon, 2004; Lerner, 2005). Thus, the PYD perspective differs from other models of youth development in that it conceptualises youth as resources to be valued and cultivated instead of problems to be treated and managed (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

In general, the PYD perspective has been developed based on the major premise that all youth have the potential for plasticity in their developmental processes provided that they are experiencing growth promoting resources or nutrients. These growth promoting nutrients are now widely known as developmental assets (Benson, 1998; Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain, 1999; Leffert, Benson, Scales, Sharma, Darke, & Blyth, 1998; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyrh, 2000).

Developmental assets are experiences, relationships, supports, opportunities, values, skills and self-perceptions that are important to conceptualise youth from a strength point of view (Search Institute, 2005; Scales, Roehlkepartain, & Fraher, 2012). They are "building blocks" of healthy development that are essential for all youth regardless of their background (Benson, 1998: 8). Scales and Leffert (2004) have defined assets, in a more comprehensive way, as fundamental developmental processes of positive relationships, opportunities, skills, values, and self-perceptions that all young people need to succeed. The framework integrates two types (external and internal) of asset categories for nurturing PYD. External assets refer to positive developmental experiences of relationship and opportunity that adults offer to young people and these assets are further categorised into four asset levels: 1) support, 2) empowerment, 3) boundaries and expectations, and 4) the constructive use of time. The internal assets, on the other hand, are intrapersonal competencies, skills, and self-perceptions that young people develop gradually over time. The internal domain also comprises four asset categories: 1) commitment to learning, 2) positive values, 3) social competencies, and 4) positive identity.

According to Sesma, Mannes and Scales (2013), the assets framework is generally the most favoured and influential framework for understanding youth from a strength-based point of view. However, there has never been an attempt put in place in Ethiopia so far to examine the situation of youth, employing this PYD framework. In fact, research in the field has not only been active as of the 1960s (e.g. see Levine, 1965), but has also taken relative stance of prominence in the Ethiopian developmental literature (Belay, 2008). Yet, the extent to which these investigations tapped data on the Ethiopian young people's endowment of the

developmental assets is not known. Hence, the profile of the PYD of Ethiopian youth has not been identified despite the fact that young people have been the cornerstone of the socio-economic and political set up of this Country. This calls for the need to examine existing research, practices, and profiles of young people along this changed PYD paradigm.

The Present Study

Youth in Ethiopia constitute a large segment of the nation, such that about 40 per cent of its population is within the age range of 10 to 29 years (Central statistical Agency, CSA, 2007). Having such a huge number of youth, we have to do a better job of promoting the positive attributes of our youth. Cultivating developmental competencies is critical, not only for youth, but also for the future of the wider community as a whole. Hence, supporting youth and easing their transitioning into adulthood needs exploring and understanding them from strength-based point of view. As Naudeau, Cuaningham, Lundberg, and McGinnis, (2008) noted, it is more advantageous for the youth and less expensive for society to focus on strength-based approach rather than post hoc interventions. Lerner (2005) has also underlined the same arguing that the best way to prevent problem behaviours is to focus on youth strengths than liabilities. Thus, this study is designed to examine Ethiopian youth from a strength-based perspective. The study has three objectives, which are to:

- scrutinise how Ethiopian youth have been portrayed in research literature;
- describe the contributions of Ethiopian youth across historical time, and
- examine the developmental assets profile of the youth.

Methods and Procedures

The methods and procedures employed in this research were different for each of the three objectives above and, hence, need to be discussed separately.

To begin with the research literature on the Ethiopian youth, attempts were made to collect available published and unpublished research reports on Ethiopian young persons from 1965 (first recorded research report on adolescence in Ethiopia by Donald Levine) to 2013/14 mainly from NGOs working on young persons, AAU thesis archives and libraries, and Ethiopian journals, mainly the Ethiopian Journal of Education. Postgraduate students were involved to assist in the search process. Once the collection was completed to the satisfaction of the authors of this paper, attempts were made to summarise the articles, critically reflect on them, and then learn about the general messages they portray regarding the developmental profile of the youth. Attempts were made to conduct an intellectual analysis of assumptions, purposes, and research findings of these secondary sources to ultimately grasp the salient orientations pursued in portraying young persons. The salient features of each investigation were noted in the present report in order to earmark the research orientations.

As regards the second objective of youth participation, attempts were made to examine youth participation in three historical periods: before, during, and after the socialist revolution. These historical periods were taken as basis for analysis because it is assumed that the situation and participation of the youth could considerably vary across these contexts. The approach was such that, first, a sample of 29 adults aged 37 to 55 years were drawn on availability basis (female only one) from 10 purposefully selected secondary schools in Addis Ababa. Three participants were identified in each of these schools in a manner that the three generations (pre-socialist, socialist, and post-socialist) of youth

were represented. School records were consulted to secure the respective list of teachers and their ages that guided the selection of individuals representing the three age groups. The final decision of participation in the research was entirely based on the consent of individuals. In fact, all consented to participate after briefing of the purpose of the research, which helped clear their doubts and increase their motivations.

The participants were invited to talk about their participation in different youth clubs, associations, campaigns, and activities during their youthful years in retrospect. They were asked to list the clubs, associations, and campaigns (CAC) which were popular during their youth age. Then, they were asked to provide further information: if they were a member of CAC, the objectives of CAC, requirements to become a member, activities carried out, achievements secured, and problems observed. Second, CAC that were visible nationally and were commonly mentioned by many participants were identified. Third, the selection of CAC was followed by preparation of the first synthesis report based on the descriptions given by participants only for the selected ones. Fourth, three social scientists (university lecturers in Addis Ababa University) who had been in the stage of youth in each historical period were asked to check for a missing CAC and include, if any, along with the descriptions of what it was. Only, one campaign was mentioned missing from the list in the 'period after the revolution' while the entire remaining list was approved. They were also asked to comment on the first synthesis report. Fifth, the second (or revised) synthesis report was prepared based on the comments secured. Six, this report was enriched with available secondary data and literature, which was but scanty, and the final version of the synthesis report was prepared and presented in this paper. Thus, the information presented in this report is mainly from the research participants and is specified when otherwise.

The third research objective of examining the developmental assets profile (DAP) of the youth requires a little more extended description of the methods and procedures employed and are, therefore, presented as follows.

Study Site: The study was conducted in Addis Ababa, which was selected for various reasons. First and foremost, Addis Ababa appears to be a meeting ground, if not 'melting pot' of diversities (Belay, 2008)— thus representing the Ethiopian youth profile and culture in many parts of the country. Second, youngsters who are in their second decade of life (10 to 19) constitute almost a quarter of the total population of the city while those in the age brackets of 10 to 24 comprise about 38 per cent of the total population (CSA, 2007), implying that Addis Ababa is characteristically a city of youngsters and can therefore meaningfully represent the general Ethiopian case. Third, youth in Addis Ababa seem to have similar economic, social-psychological and political concerns (MoYSC, 2006a) as young people in many other parts of the country have, and hence, identifying developmental assets in this context would give at least a conservative estimate of the profile in the country. Finally, choosing Addis Ababa, without missing representativeness, enables to meet one important requirement of an effective scientific research; i.e. being cost-effective (in terms of time, material, and financial resources).

Participants: The target population of the study was General Secondary and Preparatory School (grades nine through twelve) students enrolled in government schools of Addis Ababa. According to the 2010/11 Annual Abstract of the City Government of Addis Ababa Education Bureau, there were about 101, 288 students enrolled in 52 General Secondary and Preparatory government schools.

In order to determine adequate sample size for this study, a formula suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) was used. According to them, to decide needed

sample size for cross-sectional studies when population size is known, the following formula is valid to be used.

$$s = X^2 \, NP \, (1\text{-}P)$$

$$d^2 \, (N\text{-}1) + X^2 \, P \, (1\text{-}P)$$

Where:

s = the required sample size

X^2 = the table value of chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at the desired confidence level (at +1.96 = 3.841)

N = the population size

P = the population proportion (assumed to be 0.50 in most cases since it provides the maximum sample size)

d = precision or degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion of 0.05

Thus, substituting the numbers in the formula, the obtained sample size was the following.

$$s = \frac{X^2 \, NP \, (1-P)}{d^2 \, (N-1) + X^2 \, P \, (1-P)} = \frac{3.841 \, (101,\,288) \, (.50) \, (1-.50)}{(.05)^2 \, (101,\,288-1) + 3.841(.5) \, (1-.5)} = 384$$

Furthermore, by considering non-responses both to specific items and to the questionnaire as a whole by some participants, an oversample of 20 per cent of the computed number, 384 i.e., 77 participants were taken, as Naing, Winn, and Rusli (2006) recommend. Therefore, the final sample size for this study encompassed 461 General Secondary and Preparatory school adolescent students in the 10 schools in Addis Ababa.

The procedure of sampling the 461 participants was such that primarily four General Secondary and Preparatory government schools were randomly chosen. Next, a total of 32 sections (2sections X from 4gradelevels X from 4schools) were randomly chosen employing lottery technique. Then, approximately 14 to 15 students from each section of the four grade levels were randomly selected.

In fact, those randomly selected samples were also stratified based on their sex. Thus, based on this procedure 120 (65 female and 55 male) students from grade nine, 121 (65 female and 56 male) students from grade ten, 115 (67 female and 48 male) students from grade eleven, and 105 (60 female and 45 male) students from grade twelve were included as study participants.

Instruments: Developmental assets are measured by the Developmental Assets Profile (DAP) scale (Search Institute, 2005; Scales *et al.* 2012). The DAP is a 58 item survey developed by the Search Institute in 2005 to measure adolescents' external (support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time) and internal (commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity) experiences of developmental assets. While twenty six of the 58 items are designed to measure external asset categories, the remaining 32 items are used to measure the internal assets (Search Institute, 2005; Scales *et al.* 2012). The response format for all DAP items is: Not at All = 0, Sometimes =1, Often =2, Almost Always =3 (Search Institute, 2005; Scales *et al.* 2012). The DAP score for the eight individual assets categories and the five context areas are given on a sum of scale points of 0–30 and interpreted in four asset levels as: poor = 0–14, fair =15–20, good=21–25, and excellent=26–30. The total DAP asset score combines the internal asset score (maximum 30 points) and the external asset score (Maximum 30 points) and provides a global index of reported developmental assets. The total DAP asset score ranges from 0 to 60 and is interpreted in four levels as: 52–60 = Excellent; 41–51= Good; 30–40 =Fair; and 0–29 = Poor.

An attempt was made to validate the measure through different testing procedures. The preliminary activity done was translation and contextualisation of the study instruments from the source language (English) to the target language (Amharic)

to achieve equivalence. Two doctoral students were used to make the translation; one of them for forward translation and the other was used for backward translation. Discrepancies between the original and the translated versions (the two Amharic translations and the back translated version) were managed through discussion among the researchers and the translators. There were no fundamental conceptual differences particularly between the two Amharic translations. Some minor differences were corrected through discussion. Second, a "committee approach" (Swerissen and Belfrage, 2007) containing three lecturers in a related field was used to obtain more comments on wordings, clarity, and appropriateness of the items in the measure. Then, a panel was organised and experts provided their comments on the semantic equivalence, cultural relevance, content validity and clarity of each item in the two measures. Thus, the experts' comments were considered and the instrument was amended accordingly and made ready for tryout. Third, the measures were then tried out with 200 Secondary and Preparatory school students (grades nine through twelve, ages 13 to 21, mean age 16.33) in Addis Ababa to check and improve clarity of items, understandability, and administration procedures. The reliability coefficient of the DAP scale (Cronbach's alpha) in this study was found to be (0.91) excellent; although the sub-scales naturally retain lesser because of length of items. While almost all the sub-scales showed promising coefficients (0.65 to 0.69) to good (0.85 to 0.87), only two had lower but acceptable indices (0.49 to 0.51) as per the suggestions of experts of these scales as this problem is mainly because of less number of items.

The DAP has been internationally adapted in five countries: 1) Albania, 2) Bangladesh, 3) Japan, 4) Lebanon, and 5) the Philippines and all the alphas were found to be 0.80 or above and all the test-retest coefficients were 0.60 or above with the great majority being above 0.70 (Scales, 2011). In addition, it has been tried in some selected developing countries, such as Bangladesh, Honduras,

Jordan, and Rwanda and revealed a minimum internal consistency coefficients of 0.75 (Scales *et al.* 2012). Therefore, considering its psychometric properties, Scales (2011) and Scales *et al.* (2012) have recommended the DAP as an effective tool that could be adapted and used to study positive developmental changes of youth in diverse cultural contexts of the world.

Findings

Portrayal of the Ethiopian Youth in Research Literature

Adolescents and the youth are relatively more researched than children and adults (Belay, 2008). The beginning of research on Ethiopian adolescents could be linked to Levine's (1965) "Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture." In his foundational work investigating the cultures in the rural Amhara, Levine indicated the absence of the concept of adolescence in the Amhara culture. He pointed out that "In Amhara culture, adolescence scarcely exists as a concept, let alone as a problem, while there are Amharic words which signify 'young person', there is no word in Amharic that specifically denotes a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood" (P. 96).

Levine (1965), however, noted the beginning of the emergence of adolescence due to expansion of secondary schools in the country. Today, nearly five long decades of social, cultural and technological transformations since the days of Levin's observation, we are not only witnessing an adolescence that is clearly evident in the Ethiopian culture, but also an emergence of a separate "youth culture" particularly in urban areas of Ethiopia due, in part, to expansion of higher education that required individuals to stay for an extended period in institutions before committing themselves to any adult responsibilities. Introduction of women into the world of work and then the emergence of dual earning families, the decrease in neighbourhood cohesion, and introduction of technologies, such

as TV, cell phone, DSTV, and the internet seem to intensify the expansion of youth as a distinct developmental stage across the country.

Following Levin's (1965) foundational work, some studies were conducted by other expatriate university faculty (e.g. Cox, 1967; Renner, 1976). For example, Cox studied his own developmental and adolescent psychology students focusing exclusively on their problems—problems related to home and family relationships, physical development, social development, emotional development, and beliefs and standards of behaviour. Ringness and Gander (1974) implicated the problems of adolescence in Ethiopia by studying child rearing in rural Ethiopia.

Studies conducted in the subsequent years either in academic settings for scholarly activities or by government and NGOs for assessment and intervention purposes were focusing on the deficits of the youth. Belay (2008) has reviewed studies on Ethiopian adolescents starting from the earliest time (Levine, 1965; Cox, 1967; Renner, 1976) through the socialist and post-socialist eras (after 1990) and eloquently described the research tradition as a way of validating the already taken-for-granted adolescent views and the researchers effort as a matter of "ritualising the ritual", or "problematising the problem" or "storming the stress" (Belay, 2008). He further argued that, as a result of subscription either to Western theoretical models or to the widely held stereotypes that described youth as problematic, available studies on Ethiopian youngsters portrayed young people as "problem children of the society" (Belay, 2008: 21). As to him, the unbalanced focus on the negatives of Ethiopian young people might be due to the researchers' interest either to fit into Western theoretical models or to validate some taken-for-granted stereotypes about them.

The persistence of researching and describing youth from a deficit point of view is still continuing. This deficit bias is reflected either in the choice of the research

theme or the context of the research. A brief summary of these research reports is presented below under the seven topics.

General Problems: Psychosocial and social adjustment of adolescent students (Kasahun, 2005; Abebe, 2001) with a chronic health condition (Mignot, 2009), delinquency (Feven, 2013), school dropouts (Tilaye, 1999), academic achievement (Assefa, 1998). Some focused on body image and its effect on heterosexual engagement (Tilaye, 2005). Parent–adolescent conflict (Alemusa, 2011; Meskerem, 2013; Mezgebu, 2013; Wuhabie, 2007) was another area of concern that was explored from different perspectives: issues and determinants (Wuhabie, 2007), resolution mechanisms (Alemusa, 2011; Meskerem, 2013), and communication about sexuality and sexual-risk-taking behaviour (Mezgebu, 2013). As regards risky sexual behaviours, attempts were made to explore general factors promoting (risky) sexual behaviours (Abdulhakim, 2008) and determinants of sexual initiation (Fekadu, 2008), including living arrangement (Anemaw, 2009).

Disciplinary Problems: Youth disciplinary problems were explored in different parts of the country: Shashemane (Alemayehu, 2012), Bahir Dar (Asnakew, 2005), Merty and Wonji (Ayele, 2006), East Shoa (Deme, 1997), and Addis Ababa (Alembante, 2013; Hannah, 2013; Fekadu, 2000; Addis Ababa Police Commission or AAPC and FSCE, 2004).

Drug Use and Abuse: Substance abuse was also widely recorded: Drug use and abuse (Teklu, 2008; Eshetu, 1998; Kassaye *et al.*, 1999), substance use (Ayresam, 2013; Measho, Amsalu, and Tesfahun, 2013; Wegayehu, 2009), psychoactive substance abuse (Tariku, 2013; Andualem, 2011), chat chewing and alcohol (Abdu, 2003), tobacco (Rudatsikira, Abdo, and Muula, 2007) and

cigarette smoking (Ayalu, *et al.*, 2012a), and alcohol drinking patterns (Ayalu *et al.*, 2012b).

Abuse and Neglect: Child prostitution (Ayalew and Brhane, 2000; Habtamu, 1996; Konjit, 1996; RaddaBarnen, 1999), sex work (Esayas, 2013), commercial sex (Messeret, 2013), and sexual abuse and exploitation (Belay, 2008; Gebre, 2009).

Orphans: Psychological wellbeing (Afework, 2013; Tewodros, T. 2013) and academic achievement (Tewodros, B. 2013), psychological distress (Hiwot, *et al.*, 2011), psychosocial problems (Kedija, 2006), needs, problems, and responses (Elshaday, Ermias, and Mulugeta, 2005; Kassa, 2006; Teshome, 2006), resilience and support (Kassa, 2006), psychosocial and educational problems (Abebe, 2004), psychosocial, educational, nutritional and training needs in orphanhood contexts (Tatek, 2008, 2009), and sexuality and AIDS (Getenet, 2006).

Street Children: nature, magnitude, and problems (Tadesse, 2006; MoLSA, 1982; Veal, 1993;), challenges and prospects (Almaz, 2008), psychosocial problems and coping strategies (Habtamu, 2013; Tilahun, 2009), services (UNICEF, 1984).

College maladjustment: stress and academic performance of students in Bonga College of Teacher Education (Tewodros, B. 2013), substance use and risky sexual behaviour among Haromaya University Students (Andualem, 2011), psychological and mental distress among college students (Alemayehu, 2009; Atalay, 2005), prevalence of 'chat' chewing habit and its incidental inter-dependence with alcohol drinking among college students (Abdu, 2003), adjustment problems among first year students (Almaz, 2013; Jemal, 2006).

In general, review of research literature on Ethiopian youth, hints a tradition of measuring and documenting risks and problem behaviours than youth strengths

and competencies. Furthermore, youth in most of the studies examined have been depicted as vulnerable and portrayed as liabilities of the society. If young people in Ethiopia are viewed only from this perspective, then how do we expect Ethiopia to stand as a nation over through the years? There must be an unspoken strength that needs to be brought to light. We need to begin with the collective venture and then also examine the individual level assets.

Young Persons beyond Vulnerabilities: Youth Participation in Ethiopia

It may be doing injustice to the whole thing to see Ethiopian youth only in terms of vulnerabilities. This section makes a special focus on and tries to see the participation and contribution of the youth across the three historical periods—before, during, and after the socialist regime. Since Ethiopian youth participation in historical contexts was not properly documented, the discussion would generate questions for more rigorous historical research than answering questions. Attempts we made to put up the pieces and bites of information available about youth participation, at individual and association levels, in different events and activities of social, economic, political, etc importance to themselves, themselves, communities, and societies in the three historical periods. Data obtained from all the sources are integrated and briefly presented chronologically as follows.

Before the Socialist Regime

Major events identified in this period were "Young Persons' Christian Association Ethiopia," "Early Student Movements," and the "Ethiopian University Service."

Young Persons' Christian Association Ethiopia: The Ethiopian young persons have participated in different voluntary services in different historical periods. More popular of these, particularly among schoolboys and girls, was the voluntary service rendered under a well-organised youth club named "Young

Persons' Christian Association Ethiopia." Originating firstly in London in 1855 with a call to prayer and to service on behalf of young persons who were felt vulnerable to the growing effects of urbanisation in those years, this Association then grew with a Christian purpose into a larger international organisation such that by the year 1967 it became active in over 80 countries (of which 22 were African countries). The headquarters of the Association was based in Geneva Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA Ethiopia, 1969).

The Association had different names for different groups in Ethiopia: YMCA for males, YWCA for women, and Y-Teen Club for teenagers (ages 12 –17 years). Moreover, to address the needs of the then over 3,000 street boys in Addis Ababa (16% of whom were from ages 9 to 12; 34.7% were from 12 to 15, and 49.3% were from 15 to 18 and a little above), it also had a detached Youth Work Project titled "Operation better Boys" (YMCA Ethiopia, 1969). This Association had clearly defined goals. For example, the goal of the Y-Teen Club (YWCA Ethiopia, 1967) was to help adolescent boys and girls to develop values for daily life; build healthy personalities; grow in understanding of different racial, religious, and cultural groups;, understand vocation–the various types of jobs opening up for them; learn how to be a helpful group member; and learn to be a responsible citizen-of one's own town, of Ethiopia, of the whole world.

It still had clearly defined procedures as to how to organise the clubs, and a symbol representing these goals (a "Triangle" to represent the girl/boy as a growing person in terms of the goals and the "Globe" representing the worldwide fellowship of the Association). Wearing of the Y-Teen Emblem says to the world: "I belong, I have friends, and I am joined with others in common interest and in achieving the Y-Teen Goals" (YWCA Ethiopia, 1967). On the occasion of admission, new members were formally admitted in the Club, given a membership

card, the Y-Teen Goals were interpreted to them, and the old members USED TO welcome and rededicate them.

Although the naming appears to exclude the non-Christians, such denomination was, however, rarely practiced during subscription for membership. Membership was based on informed decision and absolutely voluntary; services were participatory, and enjoyable. Many former members, now adults, still remember it as the single most satisfying and incredibly shaping experience. As a result of their popularity, these youth associations had about 3 million registered members in 25 branches throughout the Country until abolished during the Socialist Regime.

Early Student Movements: While upper primary and secondary school students were active in the above clubs, university students (of the former Haile Sellasie University) were rather active in political affairs. Trying to readdress issues like unfair land distribution, bad governance, oppression of the masses, and the backwardness of their Country, they were observed staging different movements that in some cases were bitter enough to toll their own life and that of many other sympathisers. The year 1965 was particularly marked as a year for the birth of the Ethiopian student movement; for this was a time when students came out onto the streets with the popular slogan ("Land to the tiller") and revolutionary (Marxist-Leninist ideological) transformation of society as a political agenda (Bahru, 2002).

The Ethiopian University Service (EUS): Notable participation in the years before 1974 was the Ethiopian University Service (EUS). This was the first formal voluntary service before the revolution. What happened was that in the

1960s, the national university initiated a programme in which students would engage during their vacation time in literacy campaigns and related activities to supporting the Ethiopian rural people in development endeavours. Learning the benefits of such services, the University felt that implementing the programme at a larger scale and with wider goals would serve in responding to the acute shortage of trained persons for the Country in the different offices and sectoral ministries. Accordingly, it was decided to establish a Steering Committee to examine the situation and deliberate on how to launch it. As per the Committee's recommendation, the originally voluntary service was then transformed into a requirement for graduation and included in the Academic Policy in April 17, 1964. The students were assigned to assume responsibilities educationally relevant to their specialisation for about one academic year. But, keeping in view the fact that shortage of teachers was rather more serious, most of the participants were assigned to join the teaching profession. This programme provided a total of 3,216 (73.9% teachers) new professional young persons to join the labour force and serve the Country from 1964–1973 (Teshome, 1976).

Many participants felt the situation to be unfair and resisted the programmes, thereby engaging in activities that were not welcomed by the Government. Many were inpatient, lacked experience, and started to engage in preaching and taking actions on political problems found at the local levels. This led to serious conflicts with local governors, police officers, and other authorities. As a result, lot of the participants were sent to prisons, transferred to other posts, or punished in one way or another. On the other hand, although the local people and younger students were suspicious about the revolutionary actions of the campaigners at the beginning, they changed their attitudes and begun to provide support. Eventually,

the influence of these young people led to the political and social revolution in February 1974. Leaving aside the contribution of this revolution, it can be said that this was an opportunity to learn that the Ethiopian young persons were indeed endowed with genuine concern, sense of responsibility, strong potential, and zeal to transform their nation (Teshome, 1976).

The Youth, the Fall of the Monarchy and the Scenario Thereafter

Gradually extended towards and gathering momentum from people in different walks of life, the political movement initiated by university students eventually resulted in an overthrow of the monarchy and its substitution by the Provisional National Military Council. The political scenario thereafter was in fact saddening. Discontented with the fall of political power in the hand of the military, many young persons and students begun organising themselves along different political parties and launched struggle for power (among themselves and with the military). That eventually claimed the life of many and yet signalled the need to consolidate the military.

These experiences indicate that young people would possess potentials to transform their society, but, in some cases, they end up worsening the problem due, in part, to lack of negotiation skills for political discourse. The notorious "Red Terror" of the Socialist Regime that tolled the lives of too many Ethiopian young elites was a typical case conspicuously showing the price a society would pay for failing to properly nurture the immense developmental potentials of its young people.

Development through Cooperation Campaign: Following the revolution in February 1974, and the ensuing change of government, the new Provisional Military Administrative Council initiated a programme in which university,

senior secondary, and vocational students were to go out along with their teachers to the rural regions to serve as agents of change and serving for about two years. Approximately some 60,000 persons participated in this programme, which came to be known as Development through Cooperation Campaign. The overall goals of the campaign consisted of teaching people how to participate in the life of the new Ethiopia. According to Teshome (1976), the need for rural awakening and regeneration was clear and, as envisioned, this programme was comprehensive and far-reaching. But, it lacked a well-conceived and well-thought-out philosophical framework to guide its actions and riddled with many other problems.

Moreover, in hearing the announcement, the young people were apprehensive of the real intent of this campaign feeling that the campaign was a political ploy primarily designed to minimise organised student confrontation against military rule. No matter apprehensive at the beginning, most of the eligible youth eventually ended up, however, cooperating with the requirements. And, once in the field, they seized the opportunity to teach the essence of the revolution and how the peasants and people in towns should organise themselves to cherish and improve it, confiscate and distribute rural lands from land lords to the landless majority, distribute other means of farm production among the traditionally disposed, and stand against injustice, serve as a source of inspiration and hope to the poor peasants. This campaign was in fact terminated few years latter despite the Government's initial position, which indicated that it shall remain in place as long as there are development needs in the countryside.

Sharing the views of Teshome (1976), we would generally say that although the changes that were wrought in the hearts and minds of the people in the process of this campaign could be hard to tell, suffice it to say that the thinking of the peasants regarding their views and roles vis-à-vis the political leadership and

social development wouldn't be the same again. For the first time in their long history, the people were being told openly that it is in their power to begin to be the authors of their own destiny.

In a way, this is a proof once again that the Ethiopian young people are indeed very serious on issues pertaining to development of their nation; that they are able to realise the responsibilities vested on them to effect this development; that they are determined to foreclose their personal goals and interests in pursuit of their country, and that they are endowed with the willpower, zeal, and commitment to avail themselves for hardship if this would stand in the interest of development of their Country.

Subsequent Youth Associations: Having crashed the emerging opposition political parties and fully monopolised the political power, the Socialist Regime was then engaged in a continuous process of self-consolidation by fabricating different public associations that help promote its own interest. The Revolutionary Ethiopia Youth Association (REYA), the Ethiopian version of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Russian KOMSOMOL), was one such association that was established for organising, guiding, nurturing and controlling young person along the socialist ideology. This association had an organisational set up paralleling the country's administrative scheme. There were REYA Executive Committees and offices at all levels of governance; i.e. at national, regional, *aweraja*, *woreda*, and *kebele* levels. Neither election into executive committee nor ordinary membership in REYA was based on the will of the person. In fact, refusal may even bear such bad consequences that would jeopardise the future life of the youth, including

their employability, admission to higher education, and getting scholarship to pursue education abroad. This is mainly because, for all these and related other opportunities, young persons were expected to produce certificate from their kebele REYA describing how actively they were participating in the association and the contributions made there-in.

The National Literacy Campaign launched between 1975 and 1981: Perhaps substituting this nation-wide campaign, other lower-scale campaigns were subsequently conducted by mobilising literate local youth to teach literacy skills to illiterate adults in respective communities. According to Tekeste (1996), the government managed to mobilise thousands of school leavers to spend several months in the countryside in a nationwide campaign against illiteracy, and by the middle of the 1980s, the government announced that it had reduced the "scourge of illiteracy from 90 to 37 per cent" (cited in Belay, 2008, P.16).

The 1985 Resettlement Programme: Ethiopia is a country that has been repeatedly stricken by drought and famine. The Ethiopian governments have successively taken different measures to alleviate the problem. During the Socialist Regime, the common practice was to resettle people from drought-affected regions to less densely populated and fertile areas of the Country. One such resettlement programme that involved a massive influx of young people was the resettlement project that was designed to rehabilitate persons affected by the popular famine of the 1985. Because this project aimed to resettle a huge number of drought-affected persons just in a period of few months, the government decided to mobilise all students and teachers in higher learning institutes of the Country to

construct hut houses for the re-settlers. As in other campaigns, this one, too, had problems of design and implementation and was full of hardships. Above all, the participating students and teachers were used to urban life, and really had little or no skill required for constructing a hut. However, they managed to construct tens of thousands of houses only in two months and enabled the re-settlers to get at least a temporary residence and relief from their problems.

The National Military Service: the Socialist Government announced a National Military Service in which young persons were made to serve in the military for about two years. As a result, tens of thousands of young Ethiopians were recruited into and joined the army to fight in the civil war between the Ethiopian government led by the military junta called the Derge and a coalition of rebel groups from 1974 to 1991. Particularly saddening were happenings towards the end of the period of this Regime. Consistently losing many battles in the war with the then rebels, the Government once again resorted back as usual to university students, perhaps as a last chance to cope with the mounting threats of the loss. It happened, however, that the rebels were so swift that they managed to overthrow the Government and seized power while the students were as yet under military training. It is easy to imagine what happened to these students thereafter. At least to escape from anticipated revenge from those whom they were preparing to fight against, they had to travel long distances on foot with the hardships all the way through. Some even crossed to the neighbouring Kenya seeking refuge.

The Youth in the Post-Socialist Regime Scenarios

Participation in improving environmental sanitation as in Gashe Abera Molla

(GAM) campaigns, HIV/AIDS clubs, and youth leagues are commonly mentioned events.

Participation in Improving Environmental Sanitation: Concerns over the growing degradation of environmental health in the cities have recently become a source of concern among individuals, associations, and young people as well. GAM was an association founded, sharing this concern, to enhance improvement of urban environmental health and sanitation through awareness raising and implementation of pilot environmental activities with job creation opportunities for the jobless, especially for street youth of both sexes in Addis Ababa and regional towns (cited in Tekahun, 2004, P. 37). GAM applied artistic approach (making use of music, drama, literature, poems) as a strategy in awareness creation campaigns; which in fact was best for winning the heart of young people and to allow them demonstrate their interests and abilities. That was possibly the reason why it was able to mobilise more than 13,000 students from various schools in Addis Ababa. This same campaign, firstly observed in Addis Ababa, was instantaneously extended to other regional cities thereafter.

Many more young persons, particularly those in the streets, were awakened with the environment management ideas, with which they went to their communities and begun implementing the objectives of GAMA in their villages in groups and in collaboration with their communities. They played decisive role not only by disseminating but also by creating clean and green project ideas. The achievements were so remarkable that they stunned not only the residents but also the international media. For example, on 8th May 2001, BBC News reported that hundreds of Ethiopian schoolchildren have been helping transform Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, turning litter filled public places into beautiful spaces full

of art in a project called Gashe Abera Molla (cited in Tekahun, 2004: 36). In fact, some of the artistic paintings in the streets, corners and villages of Addis Ababa and other cities are still living witnesses of this venture. This project was not sustainable and short-lived but has many important implications to offer for other projects targeting young persons in Ethiopia. First, not only that the Ethiopian young persons have far more serious concerns for the well-being and development of their Country than other groups but also that they possess the capacity and commitment to unleash their will. Second, hence, young persons in Ethiopia are huge resources to transform the Country if their engagements are voluntary rather than imposed. Third, they need to be empowered with necessary skills to effectively discharge their energies not only for personal living and development but also for assuming societal responsibilities at large. Fourth, the methods to be used for empowering them with these skills need to be interesting, participatory, and related and applicable to daily living. Last, and yet more important, the coordinator, mobiliser, campaigner, or trainer himself/ herself must have personal stake and genuine concern in the issue so that he/she can persist with the goals in the face of hardships. This concern still needs to be demonstrated in action so that others would identify themselves with the actor. Moreover, he/she needs to identify, build, and capitalise on the strengths of the target group and exploit those strengths for materialising one's goal. In this connection, the founder of GAMA was a prominent musician who, upon his return from 23 years of living in the USA, felt seriously saddened with the environmental and social crisis of the city and wept over the issue during a live TV interview held with him sometime before the commencement of his campaign. Feeling restless about the problem, he then decided to do something about it with all the determination to sacrifice whatever is needed to achieve his objective.

HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control and Participation of the Youth: Young persons with AIDS-orphaned siblings are still observed becoming heads of households. Substituting their deceased parents, they assume all the responsibilities of caring for and supporting their siblings, managing the household chores, and generating income to cover material needs. With a deep sense of concern and responsibility, they usually prioritise the needs of their siblings over that of their own the way parents do. Many dropped out of school and went for paid work mainly to cover the material and financial expenses necessary to keep their siblings in school. Many envision that they will rejoin school only when their siblings graduate. Although these responsibilities are costly and challenging to them in many ways, evidence indicates that orphaned children living under the headship of older siblings are less exposed to abuses, are more resilient, and better adjusted than those staying with such other forms of guardians as relatives, grandparents, adopting parents.

Many young persons have also been participating in different anti-AIDS clubs in the different towns of the Country to offer voluntary services in awareness raising campaigns, peer education activities, and caring for persons with HIV/AIDS. These clubs were formed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Health in high schools throughout Ethiopia to raise awareness of HIV/ AIDS, and little is known about their coverage and effectiveness (Damen and Kloos, 2000). Anti-AIDS clubs have been working to encourage young people to learn about HIV and STDs, but most importantly, to change their behaviour (SNNPR- RHAPCO, n.d.).

Developmental Asset Profile of Youth

In an attempt to supplement data drawn from critical analysis of literature and data about Ethiopian youth, empirical data were sought from 461 urban youths in Addis Ababa to examine their level of experience (i.e. poor, fair, good, very

good, and excellent) of developmental assets. But 23 of the questionnaire were dropped because of missing data. All the participant youth were secondary school students (grades nine through twelve, aged 13 to 21 years (mean=17.00, SD = 1.43). The majority of the participants (72.15%) were 16 –18 years of age.

Asset Profiles of Youth in Addis Ababa

Scores of the participants place them in the four DAP quartiles, labelled poor, fair, good, and excellent (Table 1). As shown in this table, great majority of the participants reported fair (43.2%) or good (45.5%) level of total developmental assets. However, the proportion of youth that reported excellent level developmental assets was 3.2%, indicating that they have abundant or frequent experiences of developmental assets. Very small proportion (8%) of the respondents reported having poor level developmental assets.

With regard to asset categories, almost a quarter (23.5%) of the participants reported "poor" level of external assets. The number of youth experiencing external assets at the "excellent" level was very small (3%). On the other hand, about 15% of the participants indicated "excellent" level of internal assets. The number of youth experiencing internal assets at the poor level was very small (2.5%). In terms of individual asset types, commitment to learning was reported as the most frequently experienced asset at the excellent level (by 42.0% of the participants). The proportion of youth who experienced this asset at the poor level was very small (3%). In addition, social competencies, positive identity and boundaries and expectations assets were among the frequently experienced asset types at the good or excellent level (see Table 1). However, the constructive

use of time asset was indicated as the poorly experienced asset at the good or excellent level. Eighty-seven per cent of the participants had the constructive use of the time asset either at the fair (44.7%) or poor (42.9%) levels. Only 2.1 per cent of the participants reported experiencing the constructive use of the asset plentifully. More than three fourth (76.7%) of the respondents also indicated experiencing the empowerment asset at the fair (46.1%) or poor (30.6%) level. Only 2.7 per cent of the youth possessed the empowerment asset at the excellent level.

With regard to asset contexts, family was reported as the most experienced asset context at the excellent level (by 33.6% of the participants) followed by personal (24.4%) and school (18.3%) contexts. However, community was showed as the least experienced asset at the abundant level (less than 1% of the participants). More than one-third of the participants (34.7%) possessed community assets at the poor level.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of DAP Scores and Percentage of Adolescents by Levels of Developmental Assets (N = 438)

Developmental assets	Descriptive statistics				Level of assets (%)			
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent
Total assets	39.30	7.04	21	57	8.0	43.2	45.7	3.2
External	17.80	4.67	3.46	27.69	23.5	40.3	33.3	3.0
Support	18.81	5.93	.000	30	20.8	37.4	26.7	15.0
Empowerment	16.82	5.16	1.67	30	30.6	46.1	20.5	2.7
Boundaries and expectations	19.09	5.85	3.33	30	21.2	32.6	31.1	15.1
Constructive use of time	14.61	5.55	.000	30	42.9	44.7	10.3	2.1
Internal	21.50	3.43	9.69	29.06	2.5	29.4	53.8	14.4
Commitment to learning	23.24	4.50	4.29	30	3.0	23.7	31.3	42.0
Positive values	20.41	3.90	8.18	30	6.2	44.5	36.5	12.8
Social competencies	21.61	4.17	8.75	30	4.3	35.4	42.9	17.4

Positive identity		21.29	5.35	3.33	30	9.1	34.7	34.9	21.2
Asset	Personal	22.15	3.90	6.15	30	2.7	26.3	46.6	24.4
contexts	Social	20.02	4.03	7.69	30	8.4	43.6	35.8	12.1
	Family	21.07	6.84	.000	30	17.4	22.1	26.9	33.6
	School	20.68	5.07	4.00	30	13.0	32.0	36.8	18.3
		15.42	4.32	3.33	25.83	34.7	52.3	12.1	0.9
	Community								

Gender Difference in the Experience of Developmental Assets

Another purpose of this study was examining gender differences in the experience developmental assets. In doing so, an independent samples t-test was computed to compare DAP means for male and female youth. The test reveals a significant difference in total DAP scores between females ($M = 40.31$, $SD = 6.75$) and males ($M= 38.08$, $SD= 7.18$); $t(433) = 3.31$, $p= 0.001$ (see Table 2).

Table 2. Gender difference in the experience of developmental assets

Developmental assets	*Mean DAP scores and SDs*		*t at df (433)*	*p*
	Females (N = 251)	Males (N = 184)		
Total DAP	40.31 (6.75)	38.08 (7.18)	3.31	.001
External	18.44 (4.52)	17.01 (4.75)	3.18	.002
Support	19.52 (5.75)	17.97 (6.02)	2.74	.006
Empowerment	17.51 (4.98)	15.87 (5.30)	3.31	.001
Boundaries and expectations	19.98 (5.50)	18.00 (6.08)	3.55	.000
Constructive use of time	14.46 (5.83)	14.84 (5.20)	-0.69	.489
Internal	21.87 (3.18)	21.07 (3.66)	2.43	.015
Commitment to learning	24.03 (4.09)	22.30 (4.74)	4.08	.000
Positive values	20.73 (3.57)	20.01 (4.29)	1.90	.058
Social competencies	21.98 (3.94)	21.22 (4.39)	1.90	.059

Positive identity	21.30 (5.37)	21.39 (5.31)	-1.63	.870
Asset contexts				
Personal	22.43 (3.86)	21.81 (3.93)	1.63	.103
Social	20.34 (3.87)	19.72 (4.10)	1.62	.106
Family	22.53 (6.92)	20.49 (6.73)	2.15	.021
School	21.83 (4.51)	19.23 (5.34)	5.49	.000
Community	15.81 (4.28)	14.96 (4.29)	2.05	.041

Note: Standard deviations are in parentheses

A further inspection of the data in Table 2 shows that females scored higher means in all of the asset categories except in the constructive use of time asset in which females scored a mean of ($M = 14.46$, $SD = 5.83$) and males scored a mean of ($M = 14.84$, $SD = 5.20$), but the difference was not statistically significant $t(433) = -0.69$, $p = 4.89$. Females also scored significantly higher means in all the asset context views. These results suggest that female youth have a better Developmental Asset Profile than the male youth surveyed.

Discussions

Youth constitute a significant proportion of the Ethiopian population. According to CSA (2007), over 28 per cent of the total population is youth between 15 and 29 years old. Close examination of the demographic transition of the country also implies that the share of the youth population will continue to rise in the near future. Besides constituting the significant share of the country's population, Ethiopian youth have been the vanguards of its economic, social, cultural and political transformations (MoYSCC, 2004; MoYSCC, 2006a and b). Regrettably, however, a significant number of young persons in Ethiopia are exposed to numerous economic, psychosocial, and political challenges and are vulnerable to

several risky behaviours that would seriously obstruct their potential for positive growth. That exposure to challenges and the vulnerability to risky behaviours ultimately impede young persons' role in nation building. Enhancing youth's capacity to become productive and contributing members of a country is especially significant to a youthful nation like Ethiopia. This will require focusing on strengths than dwelling on their vulnerabilities. This study was mainly initiated to study this missing task; youths' positive developmental experiences. The positive youth development (PYD) approach is strength-based developmental perspective that focuses on competencies and potentials of individuals in the second decade of life. According to Damon (2004), the PYD perspective underscores the identification and cultivation of youth potentials rather than remediation of the supposed incapacities. Informed by the developmental systems ideas, the PYD perspective considers adolescents as resources to be promoted and upgraded instead of as problems to be solved.

The first objective of this research was then to examine how Ethiopian youth were portrayed in research literature to understand if the environment shows positive images of young people from all backgrounds. However, critical reviews of these literature showed a disproportionate focus on the problems of young person's as it was also noted in studies prior to the year 2000 (e.g. see Belay, 2008). This disproportionate focus on problems was noted in approaches and methods (mainly in the studies before the revolution), choice of settings, and the themes selected for the research (in most recent studies). It is as if that Ethiopian youth were without any strength and contributions. This stereotypic understanding of young person's also sends an implicit message that the young persons themselves were the ones responsible for the problems. There was a tendency to individualise the problems

as if it is only the making of adolescents; no research on cultural, social, support systems. However, the findings of the present study indicate that although the total DAPS was lower, this was because of the problems associated with external support and asset contexts rather than the internal assets. The internal assets were either good or excellent. Furthermore, experience of assets at a 'fair' level doesn't need to be exaggerated because that is the experience in most developing nations. Other studies have solidly reported that although developmental assets have been indicated consistently across several studies as important nutrients for healthy and positive youth growth, most youth possess a minority of the developmental assets (Benson *et al.* 1999; Scales, 2011; Scales *et al.*, 2012). For instance, youth studied in developing countries, such as Bangladesh, Honduras, Jordan, and Rwanda (Scales *et al.*, 2012) and Albania, Bangladesh, Japan, Lebanon and the Philippines (Scales, 2011) have reported experiencing developmental assets at the fair level except the Bangladesh sample who reported assets at the good level. Ethiopian young persons' experience of positive developmental assets can be evidently noted in practice as well. Examination of the Ethiopian youth across historical time informs that the Ethiopian youth were indeed the pioneers of change, sources of inspiration, and protagonists of development in Ethiopia (Bahru, 2002), especially since the 1960s. In some occasions with their own initiatives, at other occasions with the initiative of others (government, NGOs, individuals), the Ethiopian young persons (students, workers and farmers) have assumed a uniquely important role in shaping the Country's political, economic, social, and cultural changes. They have participated in different voluntary services at different historical periods. Although there was no comprehensive assessment about the impacts of participation on the growing young persons,

some research evidence indicates that even participation in school (Helen, 2013) and out of school (Belay, 2006) clubs tends to make a number of contributions to the development of the youth; not to talk of national youth programmes. For instance, in a research that attempted to investigate the contribution of three school clubs (Red Cross, Civics and Gender clubs) in building desirable behaviours (responsible behaviour, self-esteem, social skill, leadership skill, and teamwork skill) among adolescent students in four selected school of Addis Ababa, Helen (2013) compared a sample of 240 members and another 240 non-members and found out school club members showing significantly higher level of desirable behaviour than non-members, except for academic achievement and teamwork skills. School club members also showed better perception regarding the roles of school clubs than non-members. Furthermore, in a study of the activities of the Pilot Roots and Shoots Clubs at Bonga and Shimelba Refugee Camps of Ethiopia, the pilot clubs were found to carry out activities with positive and sustainable impacts (Belay, 2006). Studying the Anti-AIDS clubs, Meseret (2003) has also found out that sexually active club members were able to limit their sexual partners to one and use condom consistently compared to the non-club members. The difference between the sexually non-active club member and non-club member youth in practicing healthy behaviour was also significant. However, if school clubs are not actively functioning, they may not produce any meaningful impact on the members as in the case of the Anti-AIDS clubs in Tilahun Yigzaw Secondary School and Maichew Preparatory School, where members' participation in organising, planning and implementing Anti-AIDS club programme was low and, hence, these clubs were not serving as primary sources of information about HIV/AIDS and sexuality, and there was

no significant difference between Anti-AIDS club members and non-members (Wosenu, 2011).

On top of making contributions to the development of young persons, the participation of youth in the different clubs and endeavours discussed under the findings section earlier has made a number of contributions to the nation in the fight against illiteracy (Tekeste, 1996), HIV/AIDS (Meseret, 2003), improving environmental protection and awareness raising (Tekest 1996, cited in Belay, 2008), rural community awakening and mobilisation (Teshome, 1976), filling in the acute shortage of teachers in the country (Teshome, 1976), et cetera.

Despite the contributions young persons' participation in the various clubs and development endeavours had made in the life of young persons themselves, it doesn't mean that the various associations, and campaigns (CAC) were all success stories. A number of problems characterise their design and functioning, eventually limiting the potential they have in scaffolding youth development. First and foremost, the participation in many CACs was not all-encompassing. For example, the findings of the present study indicate that the constructive use of time asset, which is related to adolescents' participation in development-oriented activities, such as creative activities, youth centres, youth programmes, school clubs, and religious community, was found to be the least achieved developmental asset. The second major limitation was that many, if not all, of the CACs generally appeared less youth-friendly: not participatory, imposed, externally initiated, not well coordinated, not well planned, and not well organised. Many were designed not to advance the cause of youth development, but to accomplish a certain national agenda. Lack of planning and youth-centeredness also meant sustainability problem; many were short-lived, aborted. Furthermore, there was

interference from adults (external agents) which tended to create resentment among the participating youth. This interference was so negative in some cases that lead to political incrimination and imprisonment for participating in certain CACs. The notorious 'Red Terror' was a case in point.

A related problem with the CAC was then lack of mentoring, support, and empowerment services to the young persons. There was, in some cases, a mistrusting attitude between the youth and those adults who were supposed to provide mentoring services. The environment was not empowering and supporting in many cases. The findings of the present study also indicated in this regard that adolescents have experienced external assets (support, empowerment, and boundaries and expectations) and asset contexts (social, familial, school, and community) only minimally. They are not sufficiently experienced by most youth. This implies that he developmental infrastructure of the young people is founded on a fragile foundation. Particularly, empowerment assets were displayed as the least attained assets. The empowerment asset which focuses on community perceptions of the youth as resources and contributing members as well as adolescents' feeling of safety at home, school, and neighbourhood (Scales and Leffert, 1999) was also indicated as the least experienced external asset among adolescents in the current study. Congruent with this, Scales and Leffert (1999) reported that the empowerment assets, particularly the community values of youth and youth as resources have been reported as the least experienced assets by American adolescents. In addition, Drescher *et al.* (2012) reported that the empowerment asset was the least experienced asset among the Ugandan participants.

There has been a stereotypic understanding of youth even among scholars who tended to individualise adolescent problems, ignored addressing social, cultural, and external factors from their research in adolescence, and thereby implicitly justified exclusion of youth services. In more recent years, however, some positive youth development initiatives were taken beginning from different policy formulations. Cases in point include the following:

- formulation of the Social Welfare Policy for creating social conditions that are conducive to healthy life and a sustainable development (MoLSA, 1996),

- National Plan of Action for Children (2003–2010 and beyond) (MoLSA, 2004) aiming to promote healthy lives (one of the main strategies was by promoting adolescent health service through school health programmes) and combat HIV/AIDS (one strategy was by providing good quality youth-friendly information and sexual health education and counselling services);

- health Policy (1993) to address the special health issues associated with sexuality and reproductive health problems and related needs of adolescents/ young persons (MoH, 2006);

- HIV/AIDS Policy (1998) to empower women, youth and other vulnerable groups to take action to protect themselves against HIV/AIDS;

- Population Policy (1993) aiming to improve the social and economic status of vulnerable groups, including youth, children, women, and elderly;

- Cultural Policy (MoYSCC, 1995) aiming to create culture-conscious citizens that are proud of their culture and identity;

- Environmental Policy for promoting sustainable social and economic development through sound management and use of resources and the environment; and

- More importantly, the Youth Policy (MoYSC, 2004) that aims to promote positive youth development in Ethiopia.

With the view to tackling the major threat of youth development in the Country (i.e. Unemployment), the Ministry of Youth and Sports has also sought mechanisms of empowering the youth with different skill trainings that would improve employability and thereby improve both their livelihood situation and social participation. To this end, MOYSC has also prepared, in addition to the Youth Policy Document and its Implementation Manual, an Administrative Manual for Basic and Small Range Skill Training Programmes for the Youth (2006), and separate development packages for urban youth (MoYSC, 2006a), and rural youth (MoYSC, 2006b). Towards implementing particularly the Youth Policy, several youth centres have been established in Addis Ababa since 2009. However, in a baseline survey of the major services of eight youth centres in Addis Ababa, Belay and Sentayehu (2008) found out that the youth centres were not functioning as expected and they were poorly stuffed, organised and financed. The services rendered in these centres were limited to four areas: 1) library, 2) ICT, 3) reproductive health, and 4) VCT services. Microfinance support was started, but its coverage was small. The various school clubs were non-functional or exist only nominally, particularly in government schools. So, the various policies were not implemented, and hence the situation of young person's was not improved. Budgetary constraints could be other problems. Many of the CAC

were not linked to any federal or regional budgets and this would discourage participation. This hampers youth development, which in turn affects strength-based perspectives/approaches toward young persons.

Conclusion

Research on young persons in Ethiopia seems to dwell much on the deficits of children and the youth. The strengths, roles, and contributions of Ethiopian youth were seriously overlooked. However, a glimpse at the past and present of young persons in Ethiopia clearly depicted that the youth have been the vanguards of economic, social, cultural and political transformations of this country as it was also implied from the empirical data on asset profiles in which, despite the vulnerability of young persons to a host of problems in the country, they were found to have moderate level developmental assets that in fact were better for females than for males. Hence, there is a need to scaffold further development of these emerging assets in different ways. First and foremost, there is a need to inform youth policy framework in this country along PYD. Then, stakeholders, mainly non-governmental organisations and governmental ones working on adolescence and youth, be empowered to reorient their programmes, services, support and opportunities along this PYD paradigm of cultivating strengths; not merely intervention with problem behaviours alone. Academic debates and discussions are still needed to deconstruct the hegemonic negative discourse and appropriate youth scholarship along with recent developments and research. Finally, we propose a separate research that takes a separate look into developmental assets to identify groups and subgroups who are more privileged or vulnerable in the Ethiopian setting.

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