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## **Surviving Through Mobility: Young Lives and their Imagined Future in Burayu Town, Oromia National Regional State (Ethiopia)**

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### **Abstract**

The socioeconomic conditions in which rural youth live have become a major reason for moving to urban areas. Mobility has therefore become a coping strategy to escape poverty and unemployment and an opportunity to feel a sense of pride and self-respect and lead a family by providing economic support. The purpose of this article is to pinpoint youth mobility processes and structures, and to examine youth livelihood strategies and their accompanying mobility processes. Thus, this article attempts to address the following objectives: 1) the challenges imposed on youth and their life trajectories; 2) youth mobility processes and the reasons behind their opting for mobility and the life trajectories through which they realize their aspirations; and 3) youth livelihood coping strategies. To get the necessary data on these issues, qualitative data-gathering tools such as interviews, focus group discussions, and informal conversations were used. The findings revealed that youth in Burayu faced difficult livelihood trajectories but worked hard to overcome them by pursuing an alternative form of livelihood. Mobility has emerged as one of the most important livelihood strategies among the youth community because it improves their living conditions. Since youth have rarely been studied from this perspective in Ethiopia, it is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute to knowledge production and policy development by locating and exploring alternative livelihood mechanisms to improve the lives of young people.

**Keywords:** Youth, Migration, mobility, trajectories, livelihood pathways

### **1. Introduction**

Africa has become a young continent, with two-thirds of its population being made up of young men and women whose age ranges between 15 and 25 (AfDB, 2011). Africa's youth population is expected to grow by more than 18% between now and the end of the century. This means that young people

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are now in the majority in Africa and are the major stakeholders in the continent's economy and society. However, they largely feel excluded from power, are socio-economically marginalized, and are thwarted from realizing their life ambitions. This has become one of the major socioeconomic challenges that the continent is facing (De Boeck & Honwana, 2005).

As a result of these pressures and rapid socio-economic change, youth in most parts of Africa are searching for alternative livelihood strategies and aspiring to succeed in their life goals. Where young people grow up without access to a broad range of opportunities, they may develop aspirations that are either too high or too low to realize (Appadurai, 2004). Furthermore, global capitalist economic restructuring has greatly impacted African states' economies and forced youth in Africa to resort to new modes of livelihood that basically hinge on survival on the fringes (El-Kenz, Ali, 1996). This, along with the associated socioeconomic differences, contributed to the rise and development of class consciousness in youth beyond the derisive youth subculture commonly associated with urban life.

This plays out in contradictory forms, resulting in both youth agency and victimhood. Moreover, young people's lives are largely affected by global development and dynamic changes. The most striking features of these developments are the growth of cross-border flows of goods, labor forces, cultural products, knowledge, and networks with nodes of control in multiple locations (Castells, 1996). The migration from rural areas to larger cities has been going on for the last decades because of a lack of jobs in the home region and the expectations of a better life in the towns and cities. But as seen in many empirical studies, youths find it hard to be anchored in the labor market regardless of whether they live in cities or rural areas.

Young Ethiopians are increasingly using international and local migration as coping strategies for fulfilling their aspirations. Mobility is an important aspect of human social life. The ability to move from one place to another either to escape the effects of environmental and man-made disasters or to use opportunities that may be available elsewhere represents an important means of dealing with problems that beset many people (Parnwell, 1993). Parnwell (1992:12) indicates that "Migration is generally taken to involve the permanent or quasi-permanent relocation of an individual or group of individuals from a place of origin to a place of destination, whereas mobility refers to the movement of people in space" (Sheller, 2009). Mobility examines

the process, structure, and consequences of people, ideas, materials, and commodities. Thus, using the case of youth in Burayu Town, Oromia Regional State, this paper attempts to investigate youth mobility trajectory and livelihood coping strategies. In this endeavor, an attempt has been made to examine the process, structure, and consequences of youth mobility in the study area.

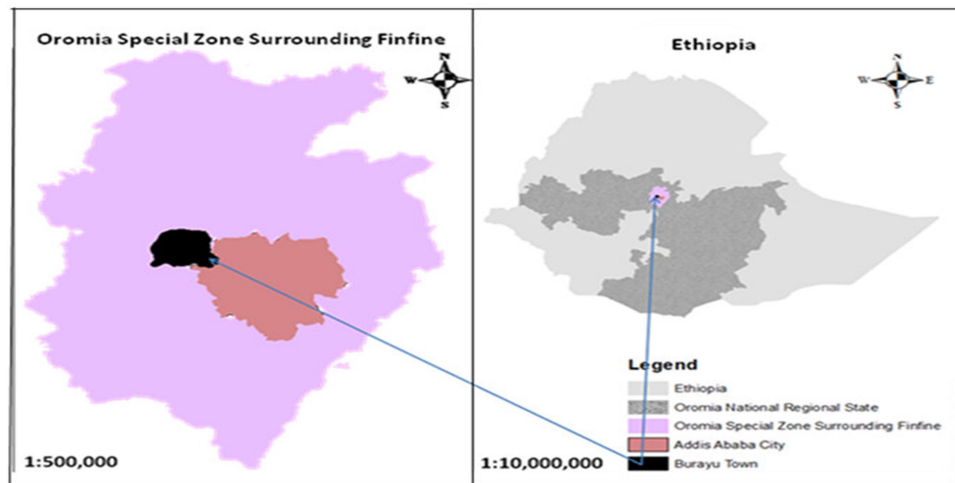
The paper argues that youth mobility is essential for the sustainability of livelihood systems and reflects the strong desire of youth to improve their lives and seize opportunities. In this paper, the sustainable livelihood approach has been applied to examine the livelihood pathways of youth in the study area. The sustainable livelihood approach gives due emphasis to the capabilities, assets (aka resources, stores, claims, and access), and activities required for a means of living (Chambers and Conway 1992:7). Scoones (1998:5) expanded on the concept of sustainable livelihood by connecting it to five key issues. The first three focus on livelihood and give emphasis ranging from work, employment, and poverty reduction to broader issues such as adequacy, security, well-being, and capability, whereas the last two focus on resilience of livelihood and the natural resource base on which a person depends.

Since this approach gives due emphasis to the coping mechanisms that people utilize using the resources that they have to recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance their capabilities and assets (Chambers and Conway, 1992; Scoones, 1998), this theoretical approach helps to analyze youth livelihood pathways. As a result of socio-political pressures and rapid socio-economic change, youth in most parts of Ethiopia find themselves on difficult livelihood trajectories and are searching for alternative mechanisms for earning their daily livelihoods. Youth who are affected by these events have tried to develop alternative livelihood strategies to survive. Young people will not only be valuable in the future, but they are already valuable in their status as young people through deploying different livelihood mechanisms to improve their lives. They contribute to society with their knowledge of what it is like to be young (Chambers and Conway, 1992:127–130). Thus, using this theoretical approach, the research attempts to examine how youth make use of, maintain, and enhance their capabilities and assets, which comprise material as well as social resources and activities, to address their daily means of living. Hence, employing this approach has helped to explore youth livelihood situation and locate their livelihood strategies, an alternative forms of creating livelihood opportunity by engaging themselves in mobility and moving from

one area to another. Furthermore, this article attempts to identify how, as forms of livelihood strategies, youth move from one area to another, engaging in both formal and informal economic sectors for a living. This clearly indicates the different livelihood pathways that youth pass through to sustain their lives.

## **2. Methodology of the Study**

This article is the result of an ethnographic study designed to contribute to our knowledge of the everyday livelihood challenges that youth face, the coping strategies that they employ to address these challenges, and the different livelihood pathways young people pass through to achieve their livelihood goals. The study took place in Burayu town located in Oromia Regional state. Burayu is a town located in the Oromia Special Zone<sup>i</sup> surrounding Addis Ababa<sup>ii</sup>. It is one of the fastest-growing cities in the zone, owing to its strategic location along the edges of Addis Ababa, the nation's capital. The town is one of nine municipal town administrations that make up the Oromia Special Zone that surrounds Addis Abeba. Burayu is the largest town within the zone, with a total population of 94,604 in 2021 (CSA population projection, 2021). The town has been a pole of attraction, especially for youth from all over the country. To address this issue, this study used the ethnographic method, in which the data were gathered through in-depth interviews with key informants, observation, focus group discussion, and informal conversations, which were supplemented by secondary data documents and published materials. There are six kebeles (the lowest administrative units of a town) under Burayu town administration. Among these Kebeles of Burayu are Abidi Nono, Gefersa Nono, and Gefersa Gude. Kebeles are the major centers where all the pedestrian areas as well as the asphalted roads are crowded by young people. The kebeles were selected to cover a broad variety of youth livelihood contexts and coping mechanisms. Three focus group discussions were organized from these kebeles, two with male groups and one with female groups, with informants ranging in age from 18 to 30 years from various youth groups. Snowball sampling was used to select youth from various backgrounds for in-depth interviews. Twelve key informants were selected, and in-depth interviews were conducted to identify the different socio-economic backgrounds, livelihood pathways, and mobility patterns. These data were gathered as part of a PhD dissertation on young people's political mobilization in Burayu Town in the period starting from September 2020 to September 2021 with multiple field visits.



Source: Oromia National Regional State, Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, Maps 2012

### 3. Key Findings and Discussion

#### 3.1. Youth life Trajectories and their Imagined Future

In this section, emphasis is placed on the issues surrounding the living conditions of young Ethiopians, the challenges that they face in their daily socioeconomic encounters, and the reasons why they resort to internal migration.

In academic discourses, most research in Ethiopia strongly argues that youth have been represented as members of society affected by socio-economic challenges that emanate from structural problems (Guarcello and Rosati, 2007; Getnet Tadele and Asrat Ayalew, 2012; Geneneet.al, 2001; Gezahegn Abebe, 2015) which is related to failure in the political economy and policy issues in addressing youth problems. Thus, young lives in Ethiopia are found in difficult life trajectory characterized by various perception and attitudes about their daily lives and living conditions.

Many scholars argue that agriculture and agribusiness are real, tangible opportunities for young Africans in general and Ethiopians in particular (El-Kenz, Ali, 1996). Currently, agriculture in Ethiopia contributes about 90% of the exports, 70% of the raw materials utilized by domestic industries, and above all, 80% of the labor force (Getnet Tadele and Asrat Ayalew, 2018). The

farming sector accounts for up to 60% of African jobs and roughly a third of the continent's GDP. Agriculture is expected to remain the main pool of employment for youth in sub-Saharan Africa. But for most youth in Africa, agriculture is often seen as outdated, unprofitable, and hard work (Bruno Losch, 2014). On the other hand, many youth argue that though agriculture is viable for their livelihoods, there is not enough land for agricultural activity in the rural parts of the country (Getnet Tadele and Asrat Ayalew, 2018; Fekadu Adugna, 2018). Thus, it is a matter of survival for the youth to design an alternative livelihood strategy.

Structurally, youth have a marginal opportunity to access land. State land policy has contributed to landlessness among young members of the community. Youth coming from poor family backgrounds and landless families remain poor and impoverished since there has been no land redistribution in Oromia since the fall of the Derg (Fekadu Adugna, 2018:34). Landlessness is a common occurrence in Oromia, affecting the livelihood of the most active working-age population who lack access to agricultural lands. The prevalence of landlessness is further aggravated by demographic factors since the proportion of the population in the working age group (15–64) has increased (CSA 2008). Further large-scale agro-investments, small-scale intensive agribusiness such as floriculture, investments in other sectors that need agricultural raw materials, industrial construction, and the mushrooming of cities and towns have become the major emerging competing interests on land that aggravate the pressures on farmlands. In addition, an alarming increase in land degradation due to environmental changes (Fekadu Adugna, 2018:47–48) has become common in Oromia, which affects the livelihood of poor youth farmers.

Furthermore, poverty, food insecurity (Degefa Tolossa, 2005), political injustice, unemployment and underemployment, and a lack of opportunities in a variety of life events all contribute to youth migration to cities (Bezu and Holden 2014). As a result, young men in urban parts of Ethiopia grapple with an increasing unemployment rate, which has become a problem of time for these young men (Mains, 2011: 47). Youth employment in Ethiopia presents immense challenges considering 71.1% of the population is under the age of 30 (UNDP, 2018). Compared to other regions of Ethiopia, the Oromia Region contributed the highest share of the unemployed population to the total urban areas of the country with 560,924 people and an 18.2% unemployment rate in the year 2020. This is mainly a result of rapid population and labor force

growth and the limited employment generation capacity of the modern industrial sector of the economy. Thus, youth should explore every opportunity available to them. This, in turn, leads to an enormous rate of migration through irregular and undocumented channels in search of better livelihood and economic opportunity, both internally and externally.

Alemeu Kitesa<sup>3</sup>, a 27 year old youth informant from originally from *Jeldu* (Western part of Oromia) area said that:

"I have tried hard to change my life by doing every available work in my locality, but I could not bring about any change at all. I was even engaged in sharecropping agricultural activities, but they brought me nothing. So, I had to leave my place of birth for Burayu and start working in daily labor activities."

Another informant, Mulatu Ogeto<sup>4</sup>, a 19 year old youth from Gamo area (Southern Nation, Nationality and people's Region) remembered his past life experience saying;

"I had lost hope of living in my birthplace due to unemployment, poverty, and food insecurity and decided to migrate to the city. I had to first establish myself and explore opportunities in Shashemene, which is close to my birthplace, but I eventually decided to relocate to Addis Ababa. Life in Addis was difficult. You cannot afford to rent a house because it is so expensive, and most of the time we slept on the street around our working places. It was because of this and other economic reasons that I had to move to the outskirts of Addis Ababa, first to Asko and then to Burayu."

Because they had few options, the aforementioned youths and others believed migration was the most valuable livelihood strategy. The above life experience narrative clearly demonstrates how young people design alternative livelihood strategies and find ways to have jobs in the urban towns of Ethiopia, as well as plan to migrate to any Middle Eastern country or western country through different means. The youth mobility process and patterns clearly indicate how they have developed alternative livelihood strategies by escaping to urban areas.

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<sup>3</sup> An interview conducted with him on September 28, 2020

<sup>4</sup> An interview conducted on November 17, 2020

### **3.2. Youth Mobility Trends and Processes**

In this section, I have attempted to address the issues of how youth resorted to migration and the different mobility pathways that they took to achieve their livelihood goals. Because of multiple reasons, people have resorted to mobility. The rural community migrates to urban areas more often than otherwise. Each year rural areas as well as some urban areas lose a significant share of their work force, among which youth are the most important, as youth leave their homes and migrate to cities or abroad in search of a better future and an imagined future (Hannna et al., 2005). Large migration flows of the youth community have recently become a common phenomenon as a result of widespread unemployment and poverty, as well as changes in the international political economy (Fekadu Adugna, 2018).

Internal migration flows in Ethiopia are currently larger than external flows, but the exact number of people who migrate internally is not well known (Fransen, Sonja, and Kuschminder, Katie, 2009). Internal migration occurs in the form of rural-urban migration, rural-rural migration, and migration in connection with resettlement policies, which are all substantial in Ethiopia. In a number of Ethiopian communities, there was a sense that increasingly younger people were migrating to urban areas in search of opportunity.

Youth have multiple reasons for moving often and may be influenced by the desire to take advantage of opportunities near or away from their localities or by a desire to escape challenging situations in their localities. Most of the time, most migrants move to urban areas in search of work and better economic and educational opportunities, and to escape rural areas they describe as bereft of hope and prospects. Most urban centers in Ethiopia are the foci of rural migrants. For instance, important urban towns like Shashemene (Bejeren, 1985:53), Awassa (Berhane, 1993:72), Bahir Dar (Shegawu G/Medhin, 1993), Adama (Kebede, 1991:70), Abraminch (Birru, 1997:50), and Addis Ababa are major destination points for migrants' communities coming from the surrounding rural as well as urban towns of Ethiopia (Feleke Tadel et al., 2006). Access to resources in home areas is likely to be a critical factor and one that varies according to individuals' wealth, gender, and generation (Tacoli and Cecilia 2001: 141).



A key informant<sup>5</sup> from Gefersa Nono Kebele, Burayu Town, linked the reason for migration with land scarcity:

"I am originally from West Wellega and have become a resident of Burayu Town because of economic difficulties. When I was in the Wellega area, there was land scarcity. Previous family land redistribution resulted in less land for new family members. Overcrowding exacerbates the scarcity of land. The only land open to cultivation is state and publicly owned. Young people from this locality have few alternative sources of livelihood. Since our locality is a small village, it is not well developed to have any forms of industry so that youth would have an employment opportunity to earn a living. So there was no hope of staying in my neighborhood. This factor has become the reason why I had to move to Burayu to embark on a new economic life."

The above life experience shows that people move from the countryside to cities in search of opportunities. This flow of people from rural areas to the cities reflects the existence of a clear difference in economic development in the two areas. Cities are centers of economic activity, providing different opportunities that attract huge numbers of people from rural areas as well as peripheral areas (Castles, Stephen & Miller, Mark, 2003).

Recently, the expansions of the city of Addis Ababa as well as the construction of an industrial hub closer to Addis Ababa and the surrounding towns and villages of Oromia Region have influenced mobility in those areas.

These mobility patterns have an impact on the demographic composition and expansion of most urban areas in Ethiopia, which also encourage rural communities to migrate to urban areas in search of opportunity (Fransen, Sonja, & Kuschminder, Katie, 2009). It is because of rural-urban migration that, in the post-1990s, the city of Addis Ababa has started to expand and grow in a speedy manner (Feleke Tadele et al., 2006).

The growth and expansion of Addis Ababa is related to internal migration from all parts of Ethiopia. Similarly, the growth and development of many Ethiopian urban towns can be linked to labor migration as well as trade-oriented migrants from neighboring areas. This expansion has impacted the

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<sup>5</sup> An interview conducted on April 2, 2020 with Mekuriya Biratu, a 29 years old resident of Burayu.

region immensely and encouraged the growth of peripheral areas like Burayu. In 2008, Burayu town was registered as an important city within finfine surrounding zone of Oromia regional state. This in turn impacted and encouraged various groups of young people and others to reside and pursue their opportunities in the town.

It is because of this that the recent dwellers in Burayu include youth from the surrounding areas of Ginchi, Jeldu, Gindeberet, Ambo, and Wellega, as well as migrants from distant rural kebeles in Wollayita, Gamo, and Gofa zones of the Southern Nations and Nationalities' Regional State (SNNRS).

From Burayu Town, areas such as Ashewa Meda have emerged as new locations for housing and market center development. In this site the Gurage community were known in residing in large number and engaged in different economic activities. Gurage youth have started business following using their family networks most of whom were residents of Addis Ababa in Kolfe Keraniyo wereda, likuwanda. This place is adjacent to Burayu town, where most of the residents are predominantly Guragigna speaking residents of Addis Ababa who have engaged in trade like meat butchering and other trade activities, and that is why this place is called Likuwanda. It was these young opportunity seekers, who are known for their perseverance and hard work, who later owned large businesses and industries in the town.

Burayu youth mobility patterns and livelihood navigation are related to multiple factors. For some youth groups, community security and political reasons are mentioned as the reasons behind their leaving their locality and relocating to Burayu. This is common among Oromo youth who came from western Oromia following the widespread political instability in their locality. In this part of Oromia, most youth were indicted as members or supporters of the OLF and sought a safe haven in other parts of Ethiopia, and thus Burayu has become the near-safe haven protecting their security.

A 28 year old youth informant from *Gindeberet*<sup>6</sup>, a small town in Oromia National Regional State not far from Burayu, who is working as a foreman in construction industry in Burayu Town, recalls the reason he moved from his locality because of security reasons:

"I am the only child in my family. For many decades, my father had been aware of politics and had been passively involved in any political

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<sup>6</sup> An interview conducted on October 1, 2020 with Melaku Beyene.

matters. Recently, there were some new political developments in Oromia that my father enthusiastically supported. He was supported in this new political development, and local government security officials imprisoned him; his whereabouts are not known. Even though I had no political interest at all, security officials were looking for me, and I had to decide to move somewhere else for these reasons. The existing political environment emerged as the major factor in my decision to leave my hometown. In Burayu, I have managed to find a peaceful haven and carry out my daily routine without any security challenges. To improve my economic situation, I have pursued my education and have been trying to transform my livelihood status.”

It is clear that people move from one place to another in search of a new economic opportunity that would bring impacts for the host community. Thus, the next section highlights how mobility pattern in this research site brings these kinds of changes and improve the livelihood of the youthful community of the town.

### **3.3. Youth Livelihood Pathways**

In this section, emphasis has been given to how young Ethiopians have tried to improve their livelihoods and the different livelihood pathways that they have gone through in achieving their life goals. Young people increasingly construct their livelihood aspirations by drawing inspiration and life experiences from the local environment and political economy, which is a result of the interplay of different forces spanning from urbanization, migration as well as engagement in diverse economic activities (Langevang and Gough 2012). This article has given due emphasis to examining the livelihood pathways of young people and the different livelihood inspirations that they have gained to achieve their life goals.

According to Ato Desalegn Getachewu<sup>7</sup>, one of the elders of Burayu town;

"On-farm and off-farm activities were the major sources of income for the residents of Burayu before the expansion of Addis Ababa into the fringes of the town. Before its urban expansion, Burayu and its surroundings were covered with thick forest. There was sufficient available agricultural land that could accommodate the community

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<sup>7</sup> An interview conducted on December 27, 2020 with Desalegn Getachewu, who is community elder of Burayu town

very well. The land provided agricultural products to the community. The area was also known for rearing cattle and other animals as a source of economic diversification. Honey was also one of the economic assets of the community. For generations and until very recently, we used to cultivate the land using both the ox plough complex and the hoe and produce maize, sorghum, teff, and other agricultural products. Factors contributing to the challenges of livelihood activities include urbanization, industrialization, internal migration, and their related problems for the lives of the local community.”

The process of urbanization attracts a large number of young people for their labor. Labor markets at destination are often segmented along lines of gender, age, and ethnicity, the latter reflecting the migrant networks’ control over specific sections of the urban labor market (Tacoli, Cecilia 2001:141). Young people coming to Burayu from different parts of the country are involved in various economic sectors to generate income to sustain their lives. These include agriculture, trade, handicrafts, light industry, and other service-giving activities. Some of the economic sectors that involve migrants are formally recognized and registered and hence are part of the formal economy, while others like street vending form part of the informal economy.

The current situation of young people in this town shows emerging livelihood strategies that young people make use of to survive. Thus, some youth of the town engaged themselves in labor-intensive agricultural activities, labor-intensive manufacturing industries, and physical labor activities.

Bikila Soressa’s<sup>8</sup>, a 28 years old resident of Burayu, life experiences show a remarkable livelihood trends that have navigated many ups and downs. He illuminated his life experience as follows:

“I grew up in Burayu village with a poor family background. I had the opportunity to join formal education here and completed both primary and secondary education here. I got a passing result for university and joined Haramaya University, where I graduated with a degree specializing in Ethiopian language studies. I applied for jobs in government institutions but received none. Then I moved to a relative's house in the Mojo area and worked as a daily laborer in the flower

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<sup>8</sup> An interview conducted on March 2, 2021 with Bikila Soressa

industry. Since working as a daily laborer could not satisfy my basic needs and negatively impact my health condition, I had to move back to my relative's house in the rural village. But conditions remained challenging in our neighborhood. We then returned to Burayu town and started working in the road construction industry as foremen.”

The aforementioned livelihood trend clearly demonstrated among youths of Burayu.

Recently, the Burayu labor market was dominated by youths who came from southern Ethiopia and engaged in infrastructure industries such as road construction as daily laborers, shoe shining, domestic work, and street vending. As a matter of fact, to secure everyday means of living, Burayu youth engaged in the manufacturing sector’s micro- and small-scale enterprises (Yordanos Mekonnen, 2006). This segment of the youth community works in light industry manufacturing sectors, such as the flour and plastics industries, which employ the town's limited labor force.

Informants of our focus group discussion<sup>9</sup> stated that the manufacturing and service sectors have provided job opportunities for few youth communities compared to the total youth population of the town. This is because of the prevalence of a fundamental skills gap that highly affects its labor force.

Many youth are engaged in the infrastructure sectors, like road construction, as daily laborers. Gamo and Wolayita youth were largely engaged in this sector as daily laborers. Most young people, whose ages ranged from 17 to 30, were the main actors in the construction industry of the town.

Focus group discussants<sup>10</sup> further stated that most of them forced into this situation of working as daily laborers because they lacked the necessary skills and knowledge. They pinpointed that:

“We have engaged in this activity so as to improve our economic lives. We serve as daily road construction laborers and foremen, as well as being engaged in the construction of houses and bridges in the town. It is our labor that causes changes in the community. This employment opportunity has brought about changes in our economic lives as well as improved the infrastructural development of the town.”

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<sup>9</sup> Focus group discussion conducted with Bikila Soressa, Mulatu Ogeto, Alemu Kitessa, Gurmesa, Alemayehu Gemetchu and Melaku Beyene on December 5, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Focus Group discussion conducted on December 19, 2020.

Females are also largely employed as domestic workers and as daily laborers in the building and construction industry. In this town, most domestic workers were young people who came from the southern part of Ethiopia.

The life experience of Buze Huto<sup>11</sup>, 29 years old youth, clearly shows the livelihood trajectories of most women in Ethiopia. She has served as domestic worker for individuals conducting works including house cleaning, cooking and later serves as waitress. With regards to labor intensive works, it is common to see young female engaged in the construction industry carrying constructional materials on their backs. The life of this young female indicates how the young generation are striving and thriving for a successful livelihood pathways.

Since the government could not provide jobs for everyone who graduates in the formal sector, most of the youth of the town in non-farm employment are engaged in small-scale trade activities, such as street and market vending. The activities of the urban informal sector in the public arena of cities are especially visible in street-based trading, also known as street vending. Street vendors include women, children, youth, and men engaged in microbusiness on the street as a means of livelihood. They are mobile, with no fixed or permanent selling areas, and sometimes work as sales agents for large retailers, relying on subcontracting for income (Bromley, Ray, 2000).

It was observed during a field visit to Burayu that young women dominated street vending business. Dorote and Buze<sup>12</sup>, two young women street vendors, stated that "... engaging in this economic activity, we are financially supporting ourselves and our families. Many of us are primary earners for our families. Our earning is necessary for survival and income multiplicity."

During the fieldwork observation, the streets of Burayu were full of street vending hosted by young men and women from all walks of life. Street vendors exchanged a variety of commodities like biscuits, vegetables, sweets, and cigarettes. Some of these youth have been engaged in the trade of changing coins for taxi and minibus drivers. Among the six Kebeles of Burayu, the streets of Abidi Nono, Gefersa Nono, and Gefersa Gude Kebeles are the major centers of street vending, with all the pedestrian areas as well as the asphalted road crowded by street vendors. Abdi Nono and Gefersa Nono kebeles are growing in a speedy manner, and they are centers of emerging

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<sup>11</sup> An interview conducted on October 25, 2020.

<sup>12</sup> An interview conducted on October 27, 2020

industrial activity as well as market centers where large numbers of the youth community are striving for job opportunities.

According to my informant, youth who are less educated have less access to formal sector employment, and thus the only option they have at hand is to engage in the informal sector, one of which is street vending. This sector has grown to be the primary source of employment for low-income residents as well as the town's unemployed youth.

A youth informant argued that the informal economic sector has provided economic opportunity for the majority of the youthful community. Since they do not pay tax to the state, they provide diversified marketable items for lower prices compared to formalized market prices. This helps to improve their living conditions and changes their economic lives.

According to Alemayehu Gemetchu,<sup>13</sup> a 27 years old resident of Burayu, street vending has provided job opportunity for those youths who have very little access to education or have no employment opportunity at all. He said:

"I came from the rural village of Ginchi. I am a secondary school dropout. When I came to Burayu, the only option that I had for a living was street vending. Thanks to this sector, I am alive and will survive. I always ask myself what might have happened to me if street vending did not exist as a source of livelihood."

These youth life experiences clearly demonstrate the predominant everyday livelihood trajectories that young people who do not have access to formal employment opportunities pass through.

Still, there are some sections of young communities that have found themselves on difficult livelihood trajectories. Life has become very difficult for some young people, so they chew chat and drink coffee all day in the town's traditional coffee houses to forget about it. These traditional coffee houses have become both the center of opportunity and the expression of areas of disgrace and lost opportunity. For this unemployed, young community, the problem of 'passing excessive amounts of time' (Mains, 2007) has become a common challenge that they face in their daily lives. Thus, this public place has become a gathering place to enjoy coffee and chew the fat throughout the day.

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<sup>13</sup> An interview conducted with him on March 5, 2021

This is highlighted by Gurmesa,<sup>14</sup> a 23 years old from Ginchi area, who says:

"Here you can find youth from various areas gathering to exchange their views regarding what is happening to their lives. This gathering includes all walks of the youth community who came from rural villages as well as those who reside in urban areas. It also includes youth who have a college degree as well as high school dropouts. This traditional coffee shop has evolved into a meeting place for youth to socialize, network, and exchange their daily livelihood as well as political experiences, as well as a venue for them to express their dissatisfaction."

The common topics of discussion among the youth informants were the lack of employment opportunities and the current political situation in the country. They criticize the government. Everyday experiences of these young people explicitly demonstrate the country's existing socioeconomic and political conditions for some young people. Every day, the experiences of these young people explicitly demonstrate the existing socioeconomic condition of young people in the country.

Even though some youth communities live under such marginal conditions, most youth in the town have embarked on immense livelihood strategies to transform living into a site for hope and possibility (Di Nunzio, 2012).

The aforementioned story did not apply to women and girls in the town. For some women and girls, this coffee house has become a center of economic opportunity.

In fact, the life experiences and livelihood pathways of young women add more success stories with regards to young people in Ethiopia. To improve their livelihoods, young women were searching for every opportunity at their disposal that would change their everyday economic lives. Dorote,<sup>15</sup> a 28 years old Burayu resident life experience clearly shows this livelihood pathway:

"I grew up in the rural village of Abaya, SNNP, which shows no sign of modern technological facilities such as modern education, asphalted roads, or single motor vehicles. I had barely seen any modern schools until I moved to Humbo, which is not far from our village. I stayed in

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<sup>14</sup> An interview conducted with Gurmesa on February 26, 2021.

<sup>15</sup> An interview conducted with her on October 27, 2020



Humbo for two years and left for Shashemene, one of the commercial urban towns in southern parts of Ethiopia. I became a domestic worker there for one year. My uncle, who lives in Addis Ababa, advised me to come to Addis Ababa and work with him in his traditional Ethiopian dress business. I worked with him for two years and then said enough of working for other people. Then I moved to Burayu to work as a street vendor, and after saving some of the money I earned from working for my uncle, I started my own small business with good motives to improve my life. I had to face many challenges but persistently overcame them by following my life goals for change.”

She underlined that ‘wait hood’ has no place in her everyday life experiences. She has been exploring every single opportunity, and life has taught her to try to change challenges into opportunities.

The aforementioned youth experiences show that regardless of what happens in their lives, youth face these challenges and pursue their life goals using various mechanisms and strategies. It is interesting to see the multiple livelihood pathways that young Ethiopians pass through and how they transform their life goals by employing mobility and other means of life survival strategies.

Despite these constraints and challenges, young people have shown an innovative capacity for local agency, creating, manipulating, and inventing new identities and strategies, transforming urban and rural contexts in surprising and unexpected directions (Honwana & De Boeck, 2005).

By exploring every opportunity at their disposal, youths have tried to change their livelihood challenges. Youth have striven to improve their livelihood capabilities, including material as well as social assets and activities required for a means of living (DIFD, 1999). They have also seen improvements in resource-related ownership, access, and decision-making.

Youth have started to improve their livelihoods by employing mechanisms that improve their capacity to generate and maintain their means of living and enhance their well-being and that of future generations. These capacities are contingent upon the availability and accessibility of options that are ecological, economic, and political and that are predicated on equity, ownership of resources, and participatory decision-making (Titi and Singh 1994). Youth put important livelihood efforts into survival and forging a future for themselves in a context of persistent poverty, conflict, and political crisis (Henerick Vigh, 2010:142).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The world has witnessed the movement of people and goods from one place to another using different means throughout human history. There have been various reasons behind such movements. Following the development of global means of communication, the speed and types of people's movements have shown an important change. The life trajectory of youth is affected by such global developments and change. Compared to the previous centuries, young people's movement from place to place has increased on an important scale. Thus, youth are increasingly taking action to create transformative change in their livelihoods. International migration and local migration are increasingly being used as coping strategies for the poorest youth in many farming communities.

Following changing patterns of global economic, social, and political conditions, youth should design strategies for mitigating the challenges of their everyday livelihoods. Youth-employed migration and mobility patterns change over time in relation to livelihood strategies as one important strategy for improving their livelihood. Youth mobility patterns have evolved over time in response to the types of livelihood strategies they used. Burayu youth migration patterns demonstrate the prevalence of both push factors and pull factors. Because of the presence of fewer opportunities in the socioeconomic situation of the area of residence, youth migrated to Burayu since Burayu has become a safe haven for both economic as well as sociopolitical reasons. In this paper, it has been observed that a sustainable livelihood approach that gives due emphasis to the capabilities of individual actors, the assets they possess, and the activities required by actors for a means of living is meaningful and congruent with the youth livelihood approach at the research site. This theoretical approach is clearly demonstrated in this research site's youth livelihood pathways. It is important to highlight here that mobility should be understood from a holistic perspective since this phenomenon contains both opportunity and challenges. It should be understood from the perspectives of those who are largely affected, i.e., those who move from one area to another to improve their lives, and from the perspectives of the host community, which is immensely impacted as a result of migration. It is because of these factors that youth design alternative livelihood mechanisms that guarantee their sustainable livelihood. Youth are being affected by many challenges and events, but they are resorting to overcoming those challenges by developing alternative livelihood strategies to survive.

The "waiting" perspective has been strongly challenged in this paper because youth strive to change their lives rather than waiting for someone else to do so. In fact, the paper highlights the resilience of those youth who strive to manage and improve their livelihoods by employing strategies that capacitate their assets, resources, and social capital in their everyday life experiences. This paper attempted to analyze the livelihood trajectories and livelihood pathways that youth have passed through by locating important mobility trends. The paper underlines that youth are not passive recipients but act upon their lives and others as an important member of a given community.

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### End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Oromia Special Zone Surrounding Addis Ababa is the name given to a zone which was established in August 2008 as one of the eighteen zones of Oromiya National Regional State. The main reason for creating this special zone was to ease the co-operation and development of surrounding areas of Addis Ababa and to control the urban sprawl of this city on the lands of Oromia.

<sup>ii</sup> Oromiya National Regional State is the largest region in Ethiopia and accounted for 41 per cent of urban centers in the country (CSA, 2007).

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