

Balancing School and Work with New Opportunities: Changes in Children's Gendered Time Use in Ethiopia (2006-2013)

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Abstract

We explore the temporal dimension of childhood, through time use of boys and girls in Ethiopia, focusing on the relationship between children's work and school attendance. We argue that children's time use reflects both current exigencies and more strategic future-orientated considerations, with work mainly serving the former, and education, the latter. We compare two cohorts of children aged 12 years from Young Lives longitudinal study, interviewed at two different points in time, 2006 and 2013. We examine the role of education aspirations, labour demand and structural factors such as household wealth and composition. Contrary to expectations, increased returns to work in rural areas have lowered boys' education aspirations and increased their school drop-out rates relative to girls'. Though time allocation is correlated with educational aspirations, we demonstrate that aspirations are not static, and change over childhood; locality and everyday exigencies interact with gender in reshaping children's aspirations and time-use.

Keywords: Ethiopia, child work, schooling, gender, time-use, education aspirations.

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INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on children's time allocation between school and work in Ethiopia and speaks to debates in the academic and policy literature around the factors shaping young people's everyday lives and ambitions for the future. The prevailing consensus amongst both global policy makers and national governments in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is that education, as a child right, is central to improving children's life options, whereas work undermines their wellbeing and schooling. In Ethiopia, this position is articulated in legislation barring children below age 14 from labour force participation and making schooling compulsory. While there is acceptance that families commonly rely on children's economic contribution to stave off poverty, child work, low school attendance and early departure are often taken to be due to cultural norms in which poor populations lack ambition for their children's futures. In the literature, this has generated a debate about the influence of educational aspirations specifically in children's lives (e.g. Dalton et al 2014; Froerer 2012; Grant 2017; Pimlott-Wilson 2011). Another common assumption is that girls are particularly disadvantaged in their time use due to discriminatory norms that relegate them to reproductive work roles and curtail their school access (Rose and Al-Samarrai 2001; UNESCO 2012).²

We interrogate these assumptions by examining whether or the extent to which education aspirations, alongside structural factors, such as wealth, and household dynamics, predict children's gendered time allocation in Ethiopia. We do this by drawing on survey and qualitative data collected from caregivers and children aged 12-13 years as part of the Young Lives study. Shifts are highlighted in the balance in gendered time allocation between school and work over the seven years between 2006 and 2013 and attention is given to two rural communities which reveal the difficult choices involved in children's time use. The analysis is situated theoretically within academic debates around the role of educational aspirations in influencing daily lives and futures in poverty contexts and links these debates to the literature on gendered time use and intersectionality in childhood. It builds on the hypothesis that children's time use reflects both current exigencies and more strategic future-orientated interests, with child work mainly serving the former, and education, the latter. Accordingly, it responds to the call by Ansell et al (2014) for greater recognition in research of the temporal

² In Ethiopia, this assumption has given rise to a series of 'pro-girl' initiatives to increase their participation, for example, <https://www.girleffect.org/where-we-work/africa/ethiopia/> and <https://girlseducationchallenge.org/#/>, focusing on school retention and related measures.

dimension of childhood as a means of understanding better the vital connections between children's current and future lives—our attention to the implications for gendered time use making a fresh contribution to the field.

We find that children's time allocation is correlated with educational aspirations, but that there are many other predictors as it is continuously mediated by instrumental and strategic considerations in which everyday exigencies compete with social mobility goals. Time use varies by gender, through childhood and between age cohorts and is also associated with household wealth and dynamics and the type of work and education available in particular locations. Finally, though challenging the prevalent assumption that girls in Ethiopia are disadvantaged educationally, we nevertheless show that gendered time use in itself, cannot be taken *a priori* as a sign of gender advantage or disadvantage.

The next section summarises relevant empirical evidence from Ethiopia as well as theoretical debates. Then we briefly describe the research methodology and data. The empirical analysis concludes with a discussion of the key findings and policy implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an extensive literature on children's work, here defined broadly as 'activities performed to achieve a purpose...whether or not...for payment or other rewards' (Bourdillon et al 2010, xv). In their summary of the key findings and debates in this field, Bourdillon et al (ibid) make clear that there are numerous motivations for child work, in which economic necessity is but one; work activities also facilitate children's wider social integration and learning of life and pro-social skills. Thus, it is not surprising that despite significant economic growth, poverty reduction and school expansion in Ethiopia, children continue to work, especially in rural areas where families still face considerable economic insecurity. Households apportion tasks by gender and social age (Crivello and van de Gaag 2016) and boys and girls contribute to varying degrees to both productive, domestic and care regimes (Cockburn and Dostie 2007; Heissler and Porter 2013; Woldehanna 2010). Child work is also appreciated as means of learning important life-skills consistent with gendered expectations of adults, an individual's level of maturity and generation (Abebe 2007; Crivello and van de Gaag 2016; Polak 2012).

Access to primary, and to a lesser extent secondary, schooling has expanded throughout Ethiopia in recent years. Nonetheless, there are many constraints as school entry is often late (Favara 2016), attendance irregular, progression slow and early departure common (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015). Moreover, work remains central to children's lives and many start work well before entering school. The time spent working and level of responsibility commonly rises between ages 10 to 12 (Abebe and Kjørhol 2009; Tafere and Pankhurst 2015), when the assignments undertaken also begin to mirror gendered adult roles. In the past, most of the work done by children was unpaid, particularly in rural areas. But growth in private rural enterprises (Abebe 2007 and 2015; Tafere and Pankhurst 2015), an increase in adult migration for off-farm employment (Abebe 2007) and social protection schemes planned to lift the poorest families out of poverty (Pankhurst, Crivello and Tiumelissan 2016; Woldehanna 2010) have stimulated their paid work. Thus, children in Ethiopia confront multiple demands on their time, school and work entailing costs and benefits that play out differently for boys and girls in the shorter and longer term.

Time allocation among children involves complex choices. In theorising how choices are made, the literature gives much attention to the concept of aspirations, which we take to be the desire to achieve an identified goal that is perceived as being within an individual's reach (Favara 2017). Research with children tends to focus on educational aspirations, in recognition of the fact that school has become the institutional context that most directly frames their everyday experience and perceptions and their hopes for the future (cf. Froerer 2012). In accounting for the link between aspirations, behaviour and outcomes, some authors go so far as to link poverty with an aspiration deficit. Dalton et al (2014) conceptualise this in terms of the 'psychology of poverty'—or a failure to aspire to one's own potential leading to a 'behavioural poverty trap'. Similarly, Appadurai (2004) argues that the 'capacity to aspire' is governed by social conditions and thus distributed unequally across society. He cites social structures that lead the poor to subscribe to norms that exacerbate inequality, undermine their dignity, and prevent their access to material goods and services, and contends that these constraints act with a lack of opportunity and the voice required to engage in civic action to dampen hope.

The literature focussing on children in poverty in LMICs tends to disprove assertions of an aspiration deficit (e.g. Boyden 2013; Crivello 2010; Naafs and Skelton 2018; Rao 2010).

Bourdieu's (1984, 170) notion of habitus has been extremely influential in accounts of how aspirations for children's futures are formed and operationalized. As a "structuring structure, which organises practices and the perception of practices" (1984, 170) habitus is conceptualized as constraining or facilitating rather than determining thought and action (Froerer 2012; Grant 2017) and it also affords a role for children's own agency (Pimlott-Wilson 2011). Both Pimlott-Wilson and Grant for example emphasize the influence of proximal relations invoked in familial habitus, the argument for inter-generational transmission being supported by empirical evidence that children's aspirations mirror parental aspirations in India and Ethiopia, with higher aspirations for boys in India and Ethiopia and for girls in Vietnam (Dercon and Singh 2013; also Favara 2017).

Ambitions for children's futures are found to be elevated among young and old alike, with education perceived as the single most effective route to both individual and familial social mobility. Some studies establish a link between aspirations and education outcomes, as in India where children's education aspirations at age 12 were found to correlate with grades achieved at age 15 (Serneels and Dercon 2014) and in Ethiopia, where they were strongly predictive of early school departure after age 15, particularly for boys (Favara 2017). Nevertheless, high ambitions for the future generally contend with everyday exigencies wherein children seek and are expected to work; thus, what is far less established is whether education aspirations or instrumental concerns grounded in household livelihood and care needs have greater sway over children's time allocation across work and schooling. Our concern is to explore the interaction of these factors as well as the extent to which the balance differs by gender, age, experience and other determinants.

In doing this, we draw on the theoretical framing by Ansell et al (2014) and Froerer (2012), in which the application of a temporal dimension in analysing the interaction between everyday material realities and more future-orientated considerations shows how children's and families' aspirations alter in relation to the changing possibility of realising them. Thus, Froerer (2012, 344) questions the ideology of education as an intrinsic 'social good' in India by showing that girls' aspirations are limited by the available chances of realizing them, these being governed in turn by social and economic conditions that lie outside their control. Above all, aspirations may be dampened by poor experience of and attainment at school, increasing the probability of early departure (Bourdillon 2006; Favara 2017). The current analysis reveals a complex and extremely dynamic pattern in which aspirations and time use

vary not only across childhood and between age cohorts but also according to experience—specifically the type of work and education accessed—and by intersecting structural forces in which gender, location and intra-household dynamics and wealth are key.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The Young Lives sample in Ethiopia comprises two cohorts: 2,000 boys and girls born around 2001 and 1,000 born around 1994. Households with children in these two age groups were randomly sampled from 20 sentinel sites in rural and urban locations that were purposefully-sampled from poorer parts of the country. The sites are distributed across the Amhara, Oromia, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, and Tigray regions, as well as Addis Ababa. Although not nationally representative, the sample reflects the diversity of the national population in terms of ethnicity, language and other social markers, permitting examination of how location interacts with social structural factors to shape both education aspirations and time allocation. Surveys were administered at community, household, caregiver and child-level.³ Qualitative data were gathered from a nested sub-sample of 60 children, 30 from each of the two age cohorts, in three rural and two urban sites. The qualitative data used in this article are from two rural sites, Zeytuni in Tigray and Leki in Oromia.⁴

There have been five survey rounds and four qualitative research waves (further referred to as waves) employing individual interviews and focus groups. We build on a unique feature of Young Lives: the two cohorts of children were surveyed at the same age seven years apart, allowing for the relative contributions of age, cohort, and historical time to be singled out. Using the second round of survey data for the older cohort and the fourth round for the younger cohort, we compare their main activities when they were aged 12, the qualitative data helping explain some of the trends. The intensification of gender distinctions in time-use

³ Relevant variables in the survey for our analysis include school enrolment, educational aspirations and attainment, and numbers of hours worked in different activities. Education aspirations are assessed by asking children: 'Imagine you had no constraints and could study for as long as you liked, or go back to school if you have already left. What level of formal education would you like to complete?' and caregivers: 'Ideally what level of formal education would you like {child's name} to complete?' 'Ideally what level of formal education would you like {child's name} to complete?'

⁴ Note that all village and child names are pseudonyms to protect anonymity of the respondents. See Morrow (2009) for discussion of this and other ethical issues raised in the Young Lives survey.

and aspirations around age 12 is one reason for focusing the current analysis on this age group.

We note some methodological limitations. First, the categories used in the surveys to distinguish different kinds of work may not always have been clear to respondents, despite efforts to explain them. Second, the surveys refer to work undertaken on a typical school day, whereas the qualitative research includes work done during school holidays and weekends, when the hours worked are likely to have been far greater. Efforts by the Ethiopian government to eliminate work under age 14 may contribute further to underreporting in the surveys, since enumerators had limited opportunity to build trust with respondents. Finally, the surveys and qualitative waves had slightly different timing, both in year and season.

ANALYSIS

Gendered trends in aspirations and time use

Turning to our analysis of time use among 12-year-olds in the Young Lives sample, school enrolment and educational aspirations (gauged through hopes to attend university) were remarkably high for this age group across all survey rounds and qualitative research waves. In both 2006 and 2013 around three-quarters of Young Lives caregivers hoped that their 12-year-old children would go to university.⁵ These ambitions were both gendered and dynamic. While in 2006 caregivers' aspirations for boys to access tertiary education were higher than for girls, by 2013 there was a five percentage point increase in the likelihood that caregivers of girls would express this hope, thus edging slightly higher than aspirations of boys' caregivers. The pattern was similar between urban and rural areas (see Table 1).

Children had somewhat more modest ambitions than their caregivers; their aspirations fell slightly in 2013 as compared to 2006. However, this average conceals marked differences by location and gender. The proportion of rural boys who aspired to go to university fell by 12 percentage points in 2013. The trend was particularly noticeable for poorer⁶ rural boys, whose aspirations to attend university were very high in 2006, at 70 per cent, but by 2013,

⁵ These findings may reflect the fact that in 2006 there were far fewer universities than in 2013.

⁶ To examine economic differences, we use a household wealth index, a composite of assets held by the household. We calculate the mean wealth index by survey round, separately for urban and rural sites. We classify as "poorer", children from households with lower than average wealth, noting that already the sample is chosen from poorer sites in Ethiopia.

had fallen to a half. This is offset in the overall average by the rise in the aspirations of urban girls: 85 per cent expected to reach university in 2013, a seven point increase on 2006.

*** TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE ***

Raised educational aspirations notwithstanding, the key question is whether these ambitions reflected children's actual experiences of and time allocated to school. In general, education quality in Ethiopia is poor (Hill and Tsehaye 2015). Late enrolment, especially among boys in rural areas, erratic attendance, poor progression and early school departure, were all common in the Young Lives sample (Aurino et al. 2014; Camfield and Tafere 2011; Tafere and Pankhurst 2015). Matching the two cohorts at ages 8 and 12 reveals allows comparison of their enrolment levels at age 12 (in 2006 and 2013). Although enrolment at age 8 increased over this period, by age 12 the levels were effectively the same. Thus, while enrolment among 8-year-olds increased to 77 per cent in 2009, 95 per cent of 12-year-olds were enrolled in both 2006 and 2013.

But again, enrolment averages mask crucial disparities in school access associated with gender and location; despite some notable advances, these disparities persisted across the survey rounds. While school enrolment among 8-year-olds in urban areas fell between 2002 and 2009, participation of rural children improved (Morrow et al. 2014). Even so, this still left rural children 20 per cent shy of their urban counterparts. Consistent with educational aspirations, in 2013 boys were 3 per cent less likely than girls to be enrolled at age 12, a small but statistically significant difference that represents a very slight widening of the gap from 2006. Lowered aspirations may be an outcome of poor school attainment. However, it is difficult to tease out causal relations. There were improvements in grade attainment indicators between 2006 and 2013, however, fewer 12-year-olds could answer the same maths question correctly in 2013 than in 2006 (Young Lives, 2014). Moreover, on average, rural children had completed only 2.9 grades by age 12, compared to 4.2 for urban children. Gender disparities in educational attainment were also evident; when the older cohort were 12, a full 60 per cent of the boys, compared to just 12 per cent of girls, were overage for their grade (Crivello and van de Gaag 2016; Favara 2017).

We summarise general trends in work time by adding together all time use that could be described as 'work'. Overall, boys and girls in 2013 spent an average of just under four hours

per day working; this is lower than in 2006, by approximately 15 minutes (significant at 5 per cent). This drop is observed mainly in urban areas, for both boys and girls. Rural girls working time fell, whereas boys' work allocation remained the same. Thus, overall, the gap between the working hours of rural and urban children widened, with rural children spending 5 hours on work per day in 2013, and urban children only 2 hours 45 minutes.

Gender was an important factor in the kinds of tasks undertaken by children. Girls were working longer in domestic and care roles, and boys in paid work, herding, family farms and other enterprises. That said, children's work seems relatively flexible, and hours worked and type of tasks also depend on the domestic cycle, birth order, and gender composition of the sibling group (Heissler and Porter 2013), as well as location (Bourdillon et al. 2010). Logic would suggest a decrease in hours of work associated with the rise in school attendance. However, while overall the place of work in the lives of girls and urban children declined between 2006 and 2013, surprisingly, some increases in working hours were seen between 2006 and 2013, especially for rural boys (Table 2).

*** TABLE 2 HERE**

The incentives to work were clearly higher for rural boys than other groups; the type of work is central here. Rural children worked significantly longer hours on family farms or enterprises than in the past. Boys worked for more than two hours per day in 2013, compared with less than an hour for girls. Chores and caring also showed a significant decline over this period, down to an average of 2.5 hours in 2013. However, the gender difference remained significant here too; in 2013 girls worked just over 3 hours per day on such tasks, and boys under 2 hours. The gender gap narrowed slightly relative to 2006, due to a greater fall in hours spent on domestic tasks by urban girls. Paid work also fell by a significant though small amount between 2006 and 2013 in both urban and rural areas. Only 3 per cent of urban 12-year-olds reported working for pay in 2013, compared to 8 per cent in rural sites.⁷

However, while the reduction is seen for urban boys and both urban and rural girls, paid work changed offered different incentives around time use for rural boys, who continued to devote the same number of hours to paid activities in 2013 as in 2006. Seemingly, the significant differences in time use for rural boys as compared with all other groups, and the higher school attendance and aspirations among girls challenge the assumption around a pro-boy bias in school access and work burden. In order to better understand whether this is indeed the case, we examine below the trends in two rural villages—Zeytuni in Tigray and Leki in Oromia—that have experienced considerable economic dynamism in recent years.

Community-level opportunities and constraints in children’s gendered time use

Zeytuni is an ethnically homogeneous, mainly orthodox Christian, community. Although just a few kilometres from the regional capital, the road was until recently only passable in the dry season, so the village has been relatively remote. Zeytuni is prone to seasonal drought and many households are reliant on the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (Tafere and Woldehanna 2012). The school employs a shift system, alternating between mornings and afternoons. Recently multiple quarries and stone-crushing plants were established to meet rising demand for aggregate for road and house construction.

On the shores of a lake near an area that has seen a recent expansion in private, export-led farming of vegetables and flowers, Leki has a largely Orthodox Christian population, with Muslims a minority. A local irrigation project supports five export-led enterprises, the first of which began operations in 2002 (Orkin 2012). Leki is also close to an expanding town, which offers work in construction, transport and services. Nevertheless, many inhabitants remain dependent on the PSNP (Tafere and Woldehanna 2012). The school in Leki is only open in the mornings and teacher absenteeism and education quality are significant problems (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015).

There have long been marked distinctions in gendered responsibilities and time allocation in Leki and Zeytuni. Girls generally assumed roles that facilitate marriage, parenthood and domestic proficiency, such as preparing and selling beer, cooking, and fetching firewood and water (Boyden et al. 2012; Crivello and van de Gaag 2016). Boys were encouraged to develop skills in productive work, such as farming, herding livestock and fishing. Intra-

household dynamics like birth order and sibling composition also influenced the type and burden of work. Thus, Hadush, from Zeytuni, the only boy in the household and youngest of eight siblings, took care of the cattle full-time while his sisters attended school. Mihretu, however, was able to attend school because his two elder brothers took care of the cattle. When a household lacked children of a particular sex, gender roles were sometimes reversed (Heissler and Porter 2013). Intra-household factors notwithstanding, the emergence of new income sources in both Leki and Zeytuni was decisive in altering children's gendered time allocation between school and work and between traditional roles and paid work.

In Zeytuni, overall, the time 12-year-olds allocated to work increased significantly between 2006 and 2013, the survey data showing a rise from an average of 4.6 hours to 5.6 hours a day, with boys averaging 6.3 hours in 2013, and girls 4.9 hours. At the same time, in 2013 fewer children were enrolled in school, girls having seen the largest percentage point fall, from over 96 per cent to just above 76 per cent, but even so overall fewer boys were enrolled. This gendered divergence was also evident in declining educational aspirations. Whereas more than three-quarters (of a total of 48) children aspired to reach university in 2006, by 2013 this held true for only half (of 87 children). Again, there was a notable gender divide: in 2013, 57 per cent of girls aspired to attend university, compared to only 47 per cent of boys. Unsurprisingly, aspirations were much lower for those who had already left school.

The qualitative data for Zeytuni help explain these trends. In 2007, boys were mainly engaged in livestock herding; two were combining this with school and the third was working fulltime. By 2013 herding occupied less of boys' time; none were in school and all were in paid labour. However, even at young ages the children were already working for wages, due to opportunities provided by a stone-crushing plant at a nearby quarry. Girls transported the stones, and boys loaded and fed them into the machines. Since then, five more stone-crushing plants have been established in the area, offering additional employment to both boys and girls. At wave three, only one of the Younger Cohort girls was doing paid work, transporting prickly pears to town for sale during the school holidays, and all were attending school.

As stone crushing expanded it became increasingly dominated by males. Girls in the Younger Cohort never entered stone-crushing and although three of the Older Cohort girls were engaged in the occupation at wave three, by the fourth wave they had all left. Haftey worked at the plant once during a school holiday, while Sessen and Haymanot were married, and

Fanus, whose family is slightly better-off, never worked there. Later, Sessen and Haymanot expressed a dislike for the work, seeing marriage as offering a more restful life. Boys seldom have the resources to marry young in Ethiopia and are under greater pressure to contribute to their families economically. Even though paid work in middle childhood was not something that children necessarily aspired to, given the local labour market, rural poverty and the rigid gender norms that put a pressure on men to provide, boys had little choice but to engage in waged labour much earlier than girls. Several boys expressed antipathy towards stone-crushing work. Mesih described it as a last resort used in times of hardship:

They [children] are also worried when they do a job like stone crushing which is very difficult because of their ages. They are forced to do such difficult jobs because of their parents. They don't want to see their parents starved and suffering.

Though stone-crushing remained an important fall-back measure for males in Zeytuni, by 2013 the demand for paving materials in towns had given rise to a new occupation for both boys and girls, the production of cobble stones. In this occupation labour is differentiated by age and gender. To safeguard school attendance the local administration created cooperatives as part of a youth-employment scheme for cobble production, restricting membership to those aged 18 and above. Although a few girls were registered as members and were encouraged to undergo training in stone-carving, in practice this task was almost exclusively confined to boys.

Children were excluded from the cooperatives by virtue of age, but were able to gather stones for carving into cobbles informally from their backyards. Earnings were higher, as much as 200 Birr per day, compared with only 1,000 Birr per month for cooperative members. Some children worked for cooperatives as day labourers. This is less lucrative and involves more difficult tasks like loading stones onto trucks. Along with his father and brother, Mihretu took up paid work in cobble production when the family's cattle died and by 2013 he was employed fulltime. Mesih left cobble carving because he found the work too hard and the pay insufficient. Hadush preferred irrigation farming and livestock rearing and was planning to set up an irrigation cooperative with others.

Some caregivers in Zeytuni expressed ambivalence about children's paid work, or concern that children might lose interest in schooling once they acquired a 'taste for money and

independence'. Others considered the income and independence given as positive. Several caregivers highlighted one of the main benefits of boys' paid work as enabling their sisters to attend school, revealing the mutuality of intra-household roles and the synergy between school and children's work. Accordingly, some argued that households containing mature boys or mixed-gender sibling groups were better off than those without. Others were more focused on the training benefits and opportunities paid work afforded boys:

Yes it is a profession. Look at this great stone, he crushes and then shapes it in a kind of square shape. This is great skill ... It may help him for building houses ... and if he added some knowledge with God he can build homes by taking contracts since he is now professional in crushing and shaping stones.

Thus, in Zeytuni remaining at school was no longer attractive to boys when paid work offered a direct financial return as well as a grounding for future employment. Girls, on the other hand, were eased out of stone crushing and were not accessing the most lucrative jobs in cobble-making cooperatives. So, for them, school and marriage appeared to be more viable options, which impacted their labour market aspirations.

Elevated education aspirations face gendered constraints

Opportunities for paid work seem to have been fewer in Leki than in Zeytuni: the difference in time allocated to work by the two cohorts at age 12 was negligible and not statistically significant, at just under 5 hours per day, almost an hour less per day than in Zeytuni.⁸ Associated with this trend, and in contrast with Zeytuni, between 2006 and 2013 there was an increase of around 10 percentage points in the proportion of caregivers and their offspring who aspired for children to reach university. This was mirrored by high levels of school enrolment throughout.⁹

Nevertheless, elevated aspirations and school enrolment were not necessarily reflected in attendance or attainment. Moreover, there were marked gender disparities in attainment in Leki, where, as in Zeytuni, boys fared worse than girls. The survey data suggest that although boys re-enrolled regularly at the beginning of each year, many failed to finish the year or to move to the next grade. Thus, at age 12 in 2013, 18 of the 41 girls were in Grade 3 or above, compared to only 9 of the 46 same-aged boys, which is a slight worsening for boys since 2006 (when 12 out of 29 boys and 8 out of 19 girls of this age were in Grade 3 or above). Comparably, three of the six boys in the qualitative sub-sample reported remaining in the same grade during the second, third and fourth waves of qualitative research.

The role of gender in combining schooling and work

Recognising that in Leki boys were not doing well at school, how is it that children in this community managed to combine school with household chores, and paid and unpaid work? Orkin (2012) argues that children in Leki are good at planning their work around schooling. Tafere and Pankhurst (2015) hold that the proximity of work sites to schools and parental acceptance of children combining work and schooling are key, and that morning-only schooling facilitates work in the afternoons. For example, at aged 12, Kebenga's daily routine typically included various household chores, assisting his father on the farm before and after school, and fishing for domestic consumption. Local farmers have adapted their practices so that children can combine school and work by doing piece work (for example, maintaining irrigation channels), or working at home when it suits them (Tafere and Pankhurst, 2015). Moreover, some children were working on their parents' land, and parents may be concerned to protect their schooling.

Given the complexity of children's work patterns in Leki what is not clear is whether, or the extent to which, the gendering of tasks in farming affected school participation by either sex. Overall, farm work seems to have been more widely accepted in Leki as an appropriate occupation for girls than in Zeytuni, weeding and hoeing vegetables and collecting haricot beans being regarded as largely female tasks, and fishing, maintaining irrigation channels and herding livestock, male tasks. But there also appears to have been greater flexibility around the gendered division of labour than in Zeytuni, especially in poorer households with a shortage of female labour, with some boys undertaking responsibilities normally assigned to girls, and others combining male and female tasks. For example, Negassa and Mitiku cooked,

made bread and sauces, and fetched water and firewood, also doing paid work hoeing and weeding during the school vacation. Their earnings were used to buy educational materials, among other items. Interviewees repeatedly emphasised that there was greater demand in Leki for paid female labour than male, reasoning for example, that: ‘The employers prefer women and girls. They do not need men in most cases. They include men and boys in their work only when they face shortage of labour. They believe that women and girls are more effective and efficient’.

The larger flower farms employed almost exclusively female labour, although generally avoided hiring anyone under age 18. When asked how paid work had affected her education Shebeshi replied: ‘It has no negative impact. I do paid work after school or over the weekend. I have never been absent from school to involve in paid work. I work in irrigation scheme in my free time. I study in school during my free time. I also study in the evening and at night during the exam time’. Conversely, Beletech, the only girl in her household, attributed the fact that she was only in Grade 1 at age 13 to frequent absences due to her sickness (tuberculosis and malaria) and workload. Beletech took over many of her elder sister’s responsibilities, following her marriage and departure from home. She did all the cooking, livestock herding and tending the shop; on non-school days, she also spent up to 6 hours a day doing paid labour digging vegetables. Beletech’s case may have been exceptional, but from the reports of two of the married girls, marriage relieved both from the challenges of studying and from strenuous farm work, enabling them to focus on lighter domestic tasks and caring for their babies.

It is striking that whereas in Zeytuni boys and girls were turning to off-farm employment, the introduction of irrigation ensured that farming continued to be regarded as a good option for the future in Leki. Indeed, one boy argued that it was a more attractive career choice than white-collar occupations. Further, enthusiasm for farming did not seem to have detracted from schooling. Kebenga regarded education as safeguarding future success in agriculture:

I want to become a rich educated farmer. I want to engage in producing vegetables and cereals on the irrigated land. As to my education, I want to complete Grade 10 and to start my farm business. I want to rent the irrigated land and work on irrigation activities. I want to save money and buy livestock

which will be an asset for me to start my future business... I have no plan to migrate. I will learn and work here.

If children's work was not the main constraint to school participation in Leki, education shortcomings may have been more significant. School observations from 2011 revealed extremely erratic attendance among children and even teachers. Several children argued that schooling was undermined by poor quality rather than work, citing violence and teacher absenteeism (Tafere and Pankhurst 2015).

Regardless of educational aspirations and school experience, paid work remained attractive to children in both locations. Developments in off-farm employment in Zeytuni involved particular gender dynamics; in 2006 children of both sexes were engaged in stone crushing, but by 2013 girls were no longer involved, whereas growing numbers of both boys and girls were working in cobble production, which offered greater flexibility in the relations of production. This may explain why, at age 12, boys in Zeytuni were working significantly longer hours on enterprises and/or family farms in 2013 than in 2006. Boys' continued engagement in stone crushing was also significant because it is the kind of inflexible, fulltime, waged work that impedes school attendance. By contrast, girls in Zeytuni were not working longer hours in 2013 than in 2006, and had increased their educational aspirations. Children in Leki on the other hand seemed to have been better able to combine schooling and work, despite growing opportunities for paid work on export-led irrigated farms. However, they often questioned the value of the education on offer.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The expansion of education in Ethiopia has had a notable impact on children's time allocation; time spent working has declined while school attendance has increased, especially in urban areas and among rural girls. Rural boys however are not working less. This article set out to examine whether education aspirations are the chief, or merely one, factor underpinning these trends. Data from the full Young Lives sample and from two rural communities with vibrant economies make it clear that in fact children's time allocation responds to multiple influences, each with different implications for their current and future lives. It varies not only through childhood and between age cohorts but also according to

household wealth and dynamics and the type of work and education available in particular locations, and is continuously mediated by instrumental and strategic considerations in which everyday exigencies compete with social mobility goals. In the intersectionality of gender, location and household dynamics, location can be the strongest determinant of gendered time use, with children from urban areas and wealthier families maintaining higher educational aspirations throughout childhood. This complex pattern belies simplistic theorisations around the drivers of gendered time use among populations in poverty contexts based in psychological or cultural factors and draws attention to the interplay between political-economic and socio-cultural forces in specific locations.

In trying to account for gendered trends in time use in Leki and Zeytuni, the incentives for girls are not clear. As in many other contexts, young women generally acquire social worth through marriage and motherhood, even among those in paid work. This may explain why in Zeytuni girls withdrew from or were eased out of stone crushing, a demanding occupation that may impede the accomplishment of familial responsibilities. But then nor does education have an obvious role in family formation or unpaid reproductive work, so it is hard to explain girls' continued aspirations around and engagement in education. It may be that because their labour market prospects are poor, there is no pressure to leave school for work. Alternatively, since the age of marriage has been rising in Ethiopia it could also be because they are remaining single for longer.

Conversely, time allocation among boys seems to be driven by a strong sense of futurity, inasmuch as their transition to social adulthood depends on possessing the economic means to marry; hence the pressure for boys to work from a young age and to seek paid work whenever possible. Much of the paid work available to boys in rural communities requires limited or no academic skill, so that the returns to schooling seemingly diminish over time and the incentives to enter the labour market grow. So, even though boys' educational aspirations were higher than girls' in 2006, they fell over the seven years and by 2013 were lower than girls'. Rural boys were also more likely than girls to fall behind at school. In contrast, the perceived association between higher education attainment and improved employment opportunities, given the more diverse labour market, is likely to be stronger for boys in urban areas.

Second, regardless of education ambitions, depending on the perceived returns to both activities, the choice in rural Ethiopia is not necessarily between school and work but rather how much time and effort should be given to each activity, the combination generally becoming harder as children grow older. Elevated education aspirations do not detract from children's work responsibilities, nor the perception of work as an entry point into adulthood, particularly for boys. Furthermore, schooling is not about attending continuously and progressing systematically through grades year-on-year. With classes taking up only part of the day, schools permitting children to work during school hours and employers accommodating school schedules, the combination of school and work can be quite feasible. In this respect, everyday exigencies have considerable impact on time use, despite strategic goals.

Third, the assumption that poor school attendance and early school departure are due to low demand is erroneous. Families and children in Ethiopia are strongly orientated towards a better future, with education regarded as the principle mechanism of change. That said, as children grow older, their aspirations shift in response to the structures of opportunity available to them. As noted by Froerer (2012) and Bourdillon (2006), the discourse of education as a vehicle for social mobility is gradually side-lined by the harsh realities of families' everyday lives, disillusionment with education quality and questioning of its relevance for future careers. In Leki and Zeytuni, disenchantment with education combined with economic development to change the incentive structures around time use in gendered ways. For boys, paid work became an attractive and viable alternative to education as a route towards productive adulthood, thereby posing a substitute for schooling in their strategic use of time. Due to its flexibility, commercial agriculture facilitated girls' contribution to household livelihoods, also allowing them to continue at school while stone crushing may have been seen as an impediment to their transition to adulthood.

Fourth, gender certainly is a key factor in balancing instrumental and strategic decisions around children's time use. But, without accounting also for the impact of location and wealth, huge discrepancies between girls and boys from rural and urban areas would be ignored. Further, the Young Lives evidence does not corroborate concerns that there is a systematic bias against girls in Ethiopia in either education access and outcomes, or the burden of work. Girls seem to have greater freedom to continue with their education, until marriage at least. Boys in rural areas have greater work responsibilities and appear to be

increasingly distrustful of schooling as a guarantee of future employment and social mobility. The question arising from this evidence is whether higher education ambition and school participation among girls and lower fulfilment on both fronts for rural boys challenges the common assumption of a pro-male preference in investments in children's futures. We suggest that on the contrary, this pattern is more likely to be a perverse outcome of a deeper gender bias whereby males have greater opportunities for paid labour in adulthood than do females. This finding mirrors Ansell's (2004) conclusion that in rural sub-Saharan Africa, young women who have experienced academic success remain constrained by gendered social expectations in the labour market and society as a whole. In fact, education may represent a risky investment of children's time and household resources and can potentially deprive them of valuable life-skills, especially when it is of low quality (Froerer 2015).

That said, being advantaged by gender in one aspect of life can produce—or be a product of—disadvantages elsewhere. Rural boys may be able to access more lucrative paid work than girls, but this is at the cost of their education and entails a higher burden of work, especially among poorer groups. This shows that the fixation on education aspirations, school attendance, completion and attainment as an indicator of gender equality might in itself be misguided, because boys and girls face very different gendered norms and expectations about what being a successful man or woman may mean. Without exploring these expectations, looking to education ambition and engagement as signals of gender discrimination conceals very different life-trajectories, challenges and opportunities that boys and girls will encounter later in life.

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