

Tufa's story

A profile from Young Lives in Ethiopia



Tufa is 13 and lives with his parents and five siblings. The family are poor and all live in one room. Tufa used to go to school but dropped out two years ago when his home burned down. Now he looks after cattle. He is sad about this and wants to go back to school one day.

Tufa lives in a rural area of Oromiya State. There are seven people in Tufa's family – his father, mother, two brothers (one older and one younger), and three younger sisters. He had another sister but she died of malaria. Tufa has also had malaria. The family are poor and his clothes are worn. They all live in one small corrugated iron room which is sub-divided in two and is used as a living room, bedroom, kitchen and to keep livestock. There is no toilet.

Tufa tells of his first visit to a town. It was exciting, partly because he hadn't been to a town before. He said: "It was the first time that I saw the school in a town. I saw that the school in the town was beautiful. I had never seen a car before." The first thing he did was to go to a barber and have his head shaved.

Tufa says he did well at school:

"I ranked third in Grade 1.

Out of how many children?

61 or 63 students.

At that time did you feel happy?

Yes.

Why?

Because most of the children are bigger than me but I did better than them."



However, he had to drop out to look after cattle and he is sad about this: "Some years ago, my parents stopped me from joining school and said that I must herd cattle; the other children were allowed to learn but I was not allowed to. There were no other children who could keep cattle except me at home; the rest of my brothers and sisters were allowed to start education. I asked my parents to allow me to be registered but they refused to send me to school."

Tufa said that his older brothers go to school: "It is not usual for older brothers to keep cattle while there are younger ones to do it. If an older brother volunteers to keep cattle, he can do so; if not, it is his right to stop herding and to join school." Tufa's younger sister also misses school as she helps at home – because "she wouldn't know how to keep cattle." His family, he says, has told him they will register him in school again in the future. But Tufa said: "I am not happy when I don't learn. I want to learn and become a teacher after I finish my education."





Asked when he was happy, Tufa described an occasion when his father bought him some new clothes:

“My father bought me clothes and he always buys clothes for me when he can get the money. He bought me clothes and surprised me; he did not consult me earlier but he bought and gave me shoes; so I was highly delighted.”

When was this?

About two months ago.

What type of shoes did he buy for you?

They were shera [made from rubber and denim].”

The family are Orthodox Christian: when the Young Lives interviewer came, Tufa and his mother and sister were getting the compound ready for the local St George ceremony, to be celebrated the next day. St George is the patron saint of Ethiopia and his feast day is observed on the 23rd day of each month.

Tufa's mother was educated up to Grade 5. She is 25 years old. She says that Tufa helps her with household tasks: “He fetches water for me from the river and I use him as a messenger to bring different things from the neighbours. He also keeps goats and stops cattle eating our crops.” He spends a lot of time fishing, though he doesn't necessarily enjoy it; it is needed to feed the family. Tufa points out one difference between poor boys and rich ones: “Poor children have to fish; rich boys buy their fish from poor families instead of fishing.”

Demand for fish increases during the Orthodox Christian Easter when devout Christians don't eat dairy or meat and consequently many boys stop going to school for the 60-day fast to make the most of the opportunity to earn extra money.

Tufa's mother also tells the interviewer how two years ago their house was burned down and this was another reason he had to drop out of school:

“You have told me that your house was burnt, but were there any problems that happened to your children in connection with that accident?

The fire didn't cause any human injury. But all our food was burnt by the fire.

What was the cause of the fire?

As it was a thatched house, a bottle lamp was the cause of the accident. The fire suddenly jumped from the lamp to the roof which was made from grass.

You have told me that your child's education was interrupted by the fire but was there any other damage caused by the fire?

Yes, all his exercise-books were burnt and his clothes too. As a result, he discontinued his education.”

This kind of unexpected event is sometimes known as a 'shock', an external event that has adversely affected a child's chances in life and its family's fortunes. Young Lives research showed that such shocks are common in Ethiopia, where many families do not have the resources to withstand this kind of difficulty. Young Lives research also showed that in the face of shocks, children and adults often have different concerns; that shocks often have an indirect impact on children's lives through their effects on community and family; that strong and supportive family dynamics can mitigate against adverse impacts, and even that adversity can enhance a child's competence. In the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, although only 1% of children lost their house through a fire, the more common shocks of family illness and death affected more than half the households.

Tufa's mother says he complains when he is asked to look after the younger children. “He says, ‘Is it only me who should care for the baby? Do you think that I am a girl?’ He says, ‘You should recognise that I am a boy. Let the girls carry the children!’”

But she has high hopes for her son: “When I compare him with our neighbours’ children, he is an obedient child. He does whatever I tell him to do. Other children are not like him. I usually tell him not to join them as they may spoil his behaviour.” She says: “He is determined and committed to continue his education. He knew a neighbour’s child who completed his education and now lives abroad. He wants to follow in his footsteps. We encourage him to follow that boy’s example. If he completes his education, he may go far and live in another area. Who knows, he may become a great person.”

“I and his father will together do our best to help him. We pray that God too will help us to help him. I shall gather firewood, sell it and pay for his education. If he learns, he can move from the darkness [illiteracy] and come to light [get knowledge].”



Child work in Ethiopia

Tufa is one of many children in Ethiopia who have had to drop out of school to work. According to the Central Statistical Agency (2002) half of all 5- to 14-year-olds, more than 7.5 million children in Ethiopia, were engaged in economic activity. The incidence of children working for pay in the Young Lives sample rises sharply with age, but 40% of even the youngest (5- to 9-year-old) children are involved in some form of economic activity. Rural children and boys are most likely to work. Among rural children aged 5 to 14, more than half are involved in economic activity compared with only 15% of their urban counterparts.

The economic activity rate of boys exceeds that of girls by 20%. However, this does not take into account household chores such as fetching water and collecting wood for fuel which are typically undertaken by girls. Girls were mainly engaged in domestic activities (such as collecting firewood and water, food preparation, washing clothes) while boys were involved in non-domestic activities like cattle herding, weeding, harvesting, ploughing, petty trading and other waged work. The participation rate in non-domestic activities was 62% for boys and 42% for girls. For domestic activities, this figure was 22% for boys and 44% for girls. In rural areas, children were more frequently engaged in non-domestic activities than in domestic activities, whereas in urban areas the opposite was true.

Source: Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2008) *Young Lives: Ethiopia Round 2 Survey Report*.

A day in the life of Tufa

This was not typical because he normally goes to bed at 8.30pm but his neighbour had just bought a new TV and all the children went to watch it.

Time	Activities
7.30am–11.00am	Collected firewood with three friends from a forest far away from the village
11.00am–11.15am	Ate breakfast with my family at home
11.15–12.00pm	Fished with two friends
12.00–1.00pm	Rested at home with my family
1.00pm–4.00pm	At farm land with five friends. As it is the harvest season we needed to keep the crops from being eaten by animals
4.00–4.30pm	Fetches water from the communal pipe with my mother
4.30–6.00pm	Played with five friends in the village
6.00–10.00pm	Watched TV in my neighbours’ house as they had a new TV
10.00–10.15pm	Ate dinner
10.15pm night	Went to bed and slept



Children's experiences of poverty and adversity in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, Young Lives has found some interesting results in terms of the effects of what are known as 'shocks' on individual households and children. These include, for example, family illness or death, a failed harvest, loss of land or cattle, home or belongings. In poor families, the number of these is often high – in Ethiopia for example, between 2002 and 2006 around 87% of households of the older children experienced at least one 'shock'. Over 30% of the whole sample were affected by events such as drought and increases in input prices; more than a quarter experienced death of livestock; a fifth reported crop failure, illness of either the child's mother or another member of the household; and over 15% experienced illness of the father.

One interesting trend is perceptions of illness in rural areas which, even though it was acknowledged as a frequent occurrence, was not generally regarded as significant for household well-being. So, even though 30% of rural families reported that the mother had been ill in the last four years, under half of this number considered this to be one of the three most important events affecting the household. Similarly, a quarter of rural households reported illness of the father, but only 11% indicated this as a significant event.

The effect of this can have both short-term and long-term effects on children's development. Interestingly, in rural areas of Ethiopia, caregivers felt that household economic shocks such as crop failure or the death of livestock had the most impact on the family, while children were far more concerned about situations affecting individual family members, family relations and the household. They saw family illness in particular as having a major effect.

Source: Jo Boyden (2009, forthcoming) 'Children's Experiences of Poverty and Adversity in Ethiopia', *Children, Youth and Environments* (summer 2009).

Young Lives is a unique long-term research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty. By following a group of children over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty, and provide evidence to support the development of effective policies. We are working with 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. The story here is one of a set of twenty taken from the interviews our researchers did with the children individually and in groups. Each child's story has a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that the children are having to contend with, but also gives a wider picture in relation to children's lives. This ranges from child work and education, to migration, health, domestic violence, inequality, gender, and individual circumstances such as being an orphan or being disabled.

The children and their families who are participating in Young Lives willing share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality. For this reason, the children's names have been changed. The accompanying photos are of children living in similar communities in similar circumstances to the Young Lives children. Photo credit: © Young Lives / Aida Ashenafi.

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Country context: Ethiopia

Ethiopia remains one of the world's poorest countries, although progress has been made in recent years. Child mortality has fallen, access to health improved and advances have been made in primary education. The population of Ethiopia is 73.9 million.

Ethiopia ranks 169 out of 177 countries in the UN's Human Poverty Index.

- Life expectancy is only 51.8 years.
- 77.8% of all Ethiopians live on less than \$2 a day and 23% live on less than \$US1. There are large discrepancies between rural and urban people.
- Most of Ethiopia's children remain very poor and continue to live with 'not enough' in terms of household assets, food and goods, basic services and opportunities.
- One in every 13 children dies before reaching their first birthday, while one in every eight does not survive until they are 5 years old.
- Ethiopian children have high levels of malnutrition. Nearly one in two (47%) children under 5 are stunted (short for their age), 11% wasted (thin for their height), and 38% underweight.
- Literacy is low, at 31% for rural and 74% for urban residents.

Sources: Young Lives Round 2 Survey Report: Ethiopia; 2007/08 UN Human Development Report

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Young Lives 
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