



# Tufa's story

A profile from  
Young Lives in Ethiopia

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he is very mature. ... He is the wisest  
and most special of my children."*

Tufa's father

# Tufa's story

**Tufa is now about 16, although he looks much younger. He did go back to school for a short time, but then his father was sent to prison and he had to drop out again to help his mother. He is a hard-working and responsible boy, but it will not be easy for him to return to school again although he would like to.**

Tufa is about 16 years old, although he does not know his exact age. He has not grown much since our last visit and is still very thin.

When we visited Tufa's house he was not there. We met his mother and his new baby brother, plus two of Tufa's seven siblings, and some neighbours' children who were playing with them. Tufa's grandmother was making coffee.

There are two buildings in the family compound. One is where the family lives and the other is a kitchen with no roof. There is also a barn for storing crops, where Tufa often sleeps. Inside the house there is a bench, a box for clothes, two chairs, a big pot (used for water or *farso*, home-made beer) and a very small table. On the floor, there is a mat made from animal skin for sleeping or sitting on. The living room is very small. There is electricity but no running water. The family have a radio but no television. There is a wooden bed which has animal skins instead of a mattress.

Tufa is not very forthcoming in his interview. He says he is sad about dropping out of school again and feels he is falling behind his friends. The most recent time was when his father went to prison. His father explains what happened:

*"I was employed as a security guard and a machine was lost. I was sent to jail together with seven other people for a year. As there was no one to take care of the farm, Tufa had to leave school."*

It was not the first time that Tufa's father had been in prison. Tufa says: "My father drinks alcohol and when he gets home drunk, he beats my mother. That makes me very sad." Tufa's mother says the argument that made her leave home and caused her husband to go to prison the first time was over an affair he was having with another woman.

While his father was in prison, the family were entitled to join the Government's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), a social assistance programme which pays daily wages for unskilled labour, and provides food for those in need. Tufa's mother says the programme enabled her to buy food and clothes for the children. But she says there is corruption:

Tufa was 13 years old when we last met him. He was living in a village with his parents and five siblings. The family were poor and all lived in one room. Tufa had dropped out of school when he was 11 because the family home had burned down and he needed to work in order to support his family. He was hoping to be able to go back soon.

*“For instance, I have ten household members, but only four benefit. I ask them why they don’t register all my family members. They say the Government has told them to register only four or five members of a family of ten. But there are neighbours who register all their family members ...”*

Tufa has been working in the programme, although technically no one under 18 is allowed to do so.

“What types of work do you do?”

*We dig holes, plant seedlings, water seedlings, collect rocks.*

How many days do you work?

I collect rocks for two days and dig holes for two days.

Do you like working there?

*Yes*

Why?

*Because I am working.”*

But both Tufa and his parents agree that they are better paid if they work privately rather than on the PSNP. In any case, since Tufa’s father has been released, the family is no longer eligible. His father says: “We have now been categorised as ‘middle income’ and so we are not eligible to receive the support.” He says that he thinks life for his children is harder than it was for him as a child: “Though my family was not that rich, there was enough food for everybody. Neighbours would share. But children these days do not have enough food even to satisfy their basic needs.” He says he has had to sell most of the land he owned just to make ends meet.

His father says Tufa is a conscientious and hard-working boy:

*“He works hard day and night. His effort is even greater than mine and he never gets tired. He may not be very tall, but, in his mind, he is very mature. For example, he goes with the other children to collect leftover vegetables and sell them. But he does not spend the money immediately like the other children, but saves it to give to his parents and to buy clothes for himself. Sometimes he even buys a chicken.*

*He bought me the shoes I am wearing. He uses the money wisely to support himself and his family, especially his mother. Some of his actions are beyond our expectations. Even when the other children spend their time watching TV and playing, he usually does not want to do this. He is the wisest and most special of my children.”*

Tufa says his health is OK, though he continues to suffer from malaria from time to time. He says that he really wants to go back to school, although he might have to start in Grade 1 again. But he knows that it will be difficult to do this. He would also have to pay a fine for leaving school, which the family cannot afford. Very few of his siblings attend school. And neither of his parents had much education either. His ambition, he says, is to become a doctor. It is very unlikely that his wish will be fulfilled.

## A day in the life of Tufa

Period	Estimated time	Activities
Between waking up and breakfast	6.30am–8.30am	Took cattle to the field
	8.30am–9.00am	Came back from the field and ate breakfast
Between breakfast and lunch	9.00am–3.00pm	Fishing in the lake. Caught six fishes. Sold three of them at 12 birr (around 70 US cents) and gave the other three to the family
	3.00pm–3.20pm	Ate lunch with some of the money from the fish
Between lunch and bedtime	3.20pm–5.00pm	Came back home and rested
	5.00pm–5.30pm	Brought cattle from the field to home
	5.30pm–6.00pm	Spent at home
	6.00pm–6.10pm	Ate dinner
	6.10pm–7.00pm	Watched TV at neighbour's home with friends
	7.00pm–8.00pm	Came back home and played with siblings
Night	8.00pm–6.00am	Slept outside home to guard family crops in the barn

*“[Tufa] works hard day and night. His effort is even greater than mine and he never gets tired. He may not be very tall but in his mind, he is very mature. ... He is the wisest and most special of my children.”*

Tufa's father

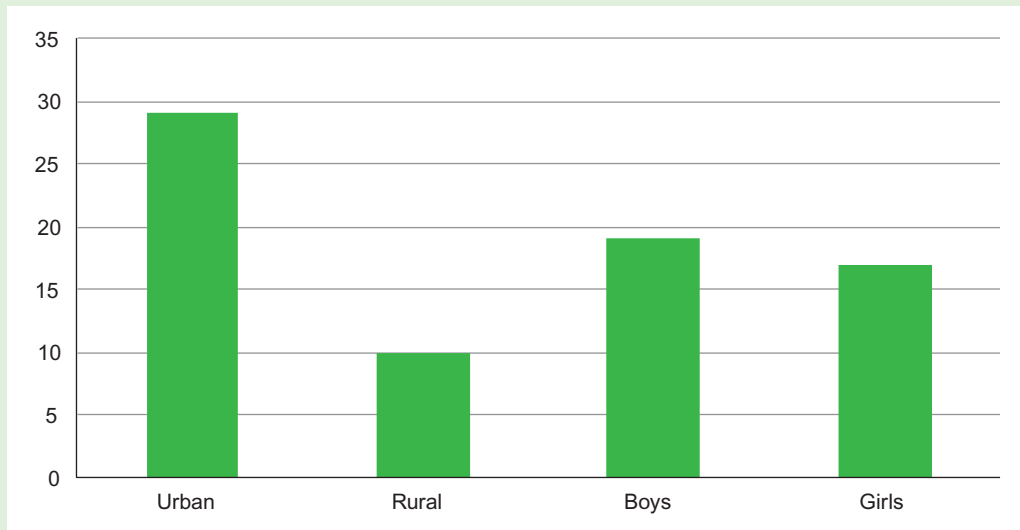
## School drop-out among older children

More children are now going to school in Ethiopia than ever before. This is partly because the Government has built many more primary schools – the number has almost doubled in a decade. As a result, the net enrolment rate in primary school increased from 21 per cent in 1995/6 to 83 per cent in 2008/9.

It is not surprising therefore that the difference in primary school attendance between our older and younger children reflects these improvements. While 77 per cent of the younger children are attending primary school, only 18 per cent of the older children have completed primary school by age 15. This is by far below the 72 per cent national primary school completion rate for all ages.

Like Tufa and Hadush, boys may drop out of school in order to support their families by working, especially if there has been an illness or a crisis in the family, while girls like Seble may leave in order to get married. There is a big difference between completion rates in urban and in rural areas.

### Primary school completion rate by age 15 (%)



**Sources:** Paul Dornan (2010) *Understanding the Impacts of Crisis on Children in Developing Countries*, Round 3 Preliminary Findings; Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.



## Country context: Ethiopia

Ethiopia, a country in the Horn of Africa, has a population of 80.7 million. It is Africa's oldest independent country but remains one of the world's poorest, although progress has been made in recent years. Child mortality has fallen, access to healthcare has improved and advances have been made in primary education, in part due to the commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The Government has also introduced a number of Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes.

For the last seven years, Ethiopia has had double-digit economic growth rate – around 11 per cent on average each year. More than 60 per cent of government spending now goes to what the Government calls pro-poor sectors, namely education, health, roads, water and agriculture.

But in 2011, the United Nations still ranked Ethiopia 174 out of 187 countries in terms of human development. Almost 40 per cent of the population survives on less than 1.25 dollars a day. The country also suffers regularly from drought, which affects up to 13 million people. Many families are unable to buy or grow enough food to feed themselves, and so need food aid each year to survive. The effects on children are devastating.

- 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.
- Nearly one in two children under 5 are stunted (short for their age), 11 per cent are wasted (thin for their height), and 38 per cent are underweight.

Despite significant investment to increase enrolment in primary schools, they are often poorly staffed and equipped. There are large differences in children's attendance between urban and rural locations, between boys and girls, and between and within regions. Overall literacy is low, at 31 per cent for rural and 74 per cent for urban residents.

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**Sources:** Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report 2011*; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children 2012*.

Young Lives is a unique international study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. By following the lives of 12,000 children and young people over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support effective policies for children.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from the interviews we did with the children individually and in groups. Each one is accompanied by a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that children are having to contend with, but also gives a sense of the wider context of their lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and their families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed here. The accompanying photos are of children in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

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**Young Lives, Department of International Development  
University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK  
[www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)**

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An International Study of Childhood Poverty