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This article presents a case study of a rapidly evolving urban community in Southern Ethiopia drawing on survey and qualitative data from Young Lives, a long-term international study of two cohorts of children growing up in poverty (born 1994–1995 and 2000–2001). It uses this to set visible changes in aspirations and experiences of schooling over time in their political and economic context. The article illustrates the value of mixed-methods approaches within international development research by juxtaposing individual and household level data, both survey and qualitative, with data collected through school- and community-based research. This enables analysis of processes of power and social change taking place in contemporary Ethiopia and reflected in changing attitudes towards education and employment. Finally, the chapter highlights the challenges for the Ethiopian education system in meeting children's aspirations, in the context of rapidly declining economic opportunities after leaving school.

Keywords: education; employment; children and young people; Ethiopia; aspirations; mixed methods