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Young Lives

"The Challenges Made Me Stronger": What Contributes to Young People's Resilience in Ethiopia?

Gina Crivello, Agazi Tiumelissan and Karin Heissler

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Young Lives

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Summary

This working paper explores the meanings and experiences of resilience, and its gender dimensions, among a cohort of Ethiopian children exposed to poverty and adversity across the early life course. It asks why some girls and some boys seem to fare well as they transition to adulthood, despite the challenges and obstacles they had faced, while others do less well. The data comprise repeat life history interviews (from ages 12 to 24) and survey questionnaires over a 20-year period (to age 25). Qualitative analysis (n=64) revealed how children's lives did not follow linear paths, and were easily derailed by unplanned events and shocks, including: (a) climatic shocks; (b) societal influences; (c) school transitions and relations; (d) household changes; and (e) child health and social development. Gender mediated children's experiences of risk and their individual and family coping mechanisms.

In-depth analysis of the life stories of 11 exemplar cases (four male, seven female) identified significant resilience factors, including: supportive and facilitative relationships (especially elder siblings); enabling and protective systems and environments; government and NGO support; young people's inner resources and pro-social skills; and second chances. A combination of well-timed, mutually reinforcing factors within holistic support systems, rather than a single factor, appeared to make the most difference.

1. Introduction

This working paper uses a gender perspective to explore resilience among a cohort of young people who grew up in poverty in Ethiopia. It asks why some girls and some boys seem to fare well as they transition to adulthood, despite the challenges and obstacles they had faced, while others do less well. The paper uses data from Young Lives, a longitudinal mixed-method study of childhood poverty that began in 2001 and follows the well-being and development outcomes of a cohort of 1,000 children born in 1994 in 20 diverse locations across Ethiopia.[1]

The young women and young men at the heart of this study lived out their childhood and adolescence under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs, 2000-2015) that set out to significantly reduce global poverty and provide 'education for all'. Their transition to social adulthood coincides with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2015-2030) that aim to tackle gender and other forms of inequality and to reach the most marginalised groups as part of a commitment to 'leave no one behind'.

During this time, Ethiopia has distinguished itself as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, even though it remains one of the poorest countries. Young people in the country continue to face precarious circumstances. In 2020, they confronted intersecting crises involving a global coronavirus pandemic, and in some regions, violent political unrest and a locust plague, on top of the myriad 'ordinary' shocks that commonly befall households in their communities, such as rises in food prices, drought, unemployment, illness or death. Crises affect social groups differently, and there is growing evidence that the pandemic has exacerbated existing social and economic inequalities among Ethiopian youth (Porter et al. 2020; Woldehanna et al. 2021).

Rather than focus on these barriers, this paper highlights the positive triggers and protective factors that help socially and economically marginalised young people to navigate pivotal moments of risk, change and opportunity across the early life course. Missing from much of the research into childhood adversity and later outcomes is 'explicit attention to how people interpret the course of their lives in light of the adversity they have experienced' (Schafer, Ferraro, and Mustillo 2011: 1053). As a counterpoint to this omission, we draw heavily on personal narratives recorded in 2019 with 64 young people (27 male, 37 female) from the Young Lives Older Cohort (born in 1994), including 11 exemplar cases (four male, seven female) interviewed over a 13-year period (between the ages of 11/12 and 24/25)[2] whose life stories illuminate differing facets of resilience.

Crucially, our starting point is what young people told us about the kinds of lives they believed they had reason to value and were striving to lead (Sen 2000), and what, according to them, were the 'turning points' and support that had made the biggest difference to their life trajectories. At age 15, most of the young people aspired to go to university, although

1 See younglives.org.uk (international) and www.younglives.org.uk/content/ethiopia (country website). Young Lives is conducted in four countries: Ethiopia, India (in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Peru and Vietnam. It studies two birth cohorts; this paper focuses on the Older Cohort born in 1994. Young Lives also studies a Younger Cohort born in 2000/1. The sample is pro-poor and is not nationally representative (Woldehanna and Pankhurst 2014).

2 All ages are approximate. Although the cohort participants were initially recruited in 2001 on the basis of having been born in 1994, many do not have birth certificates or know their exact ages.

aspirations were lower for girls than for boys (70 per cent and 78 per cent, respectively)[3] and for those in rural areas compared to urban areas (64 per cent and 88 per cent, respectively)[4] (Tafere 2014: 6).[5]

As children, they had imagined future adult lives that were different, and in their view and their parents' view, better than those of their parents. For example, at age 19, only 1 in 10 young men and 1 in 20 young women living in rural areas aspired to be farmers (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016: 18). However, by age 22, most (58 per cent) of those employed in rural areas were working in agriculture (Woldehanna, Araya, and Pankhurst 2018a).[6] By this age, only a third of the cohort were still enrolled in formal education, with slightly more young men than young women (Woldehanna, Araya, and Pankhurst 2018a).[7] Almost half of those in rural sites were still at school in Grade 10 or below.

All the young participants had faced hardship and setbacks in childhood, and 'resilience' in their view was the capacity to "change one's life" for the better in the face of such challenges. By age 25, some of the young women and young men expressed regret that their lives had gone off track ("married too young", "left school too soon", and so on) and were at risk of feeling like "failures". Others felt that they were on a positive path and faring well as young adults. The latter are the individuals who the research literature might describe as 'resilient' because they seem to have 'bounced back' after difficult periods (Smith et al. 2008) or to be 'overcoming the odds' (Werner and Smith 1992) and even 'flourishing under fire' (Ryff and Singer 2003). Some might be seen as 'positive deviants' who demonstrate above-average outcomes in impoverished environments (Kelly, Bhabha, and Krishna 2015).

Our intention behind looking at positive aspects is not to diminish the role of vulnerability and suffering in the lived experiences of children growing up in challenging settings. Rather, we wish to contribute to efforts within the social sciences to move away from 'narratives of failure' and from deficit approaches, towards 'narratives of possibility' (Gilligan 2015) when describing young people's paths to respectable adulthoods, accepting their journeys may be 'complicated and convoluted' (Langevang 2008). We build on an earlier qualitative study of positive youth trajectories in the four Young Lives study countries (Crivello and Morrow 2019); the current study covers a longer timeframe (into early adulthood), focuses on Ethiopia, and looks deeper into the role of gender.

The next section of the paper offers a brief contextual backdrop, followed by a summary of the key concepts, relevant literature, and methodology. We then report on what girls and boys identified as major risks and defining moments in childhood. The remaining empirical sections draw out the factors that helped young people navigate these experiences and overcome setbacks, illustrated through exemplar cases. Finally, we reflect on the importance of contextualising understandings of resilience, the influence of gender, and, briefly, the implications for policy and programmes.

3 n=492 male; n=475 female. Round 3 survey.

4 n=390 urban; n=577 rural. Round 3 survey.

5 The Round 3 survey in 2009 asked: 'If you could study as long as you would like, what level of formal education would you like to complete?'

6 n=265 rural male; n=211 rural female. Round 4 survey.

7 At age 22, 38 per cent of young men (n=411) were enrolled, compared to 34 per cent of young women (n=362).

2. Context: uncertain promises of change for this generation

Ethiopia aspires to become a lower middle-income country by 2025. Although it has made some progress towards the SDGs, it ranked 173rd out of 189 countries on the 2020 Human Development Index. In recent decades, the government has implemented a series of poverty reduction strategies, and in 2005 launched the ongoing Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) to address widespread food insecurity. It has also promoted gender equality through various policy reforms and is a signatory to both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). International organisations operating in the country have popularised empowerment programmes for girls and women, emphasising girls' education and the elimination of harmful practices, such as child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting, which the government has committed to eliminate by 2025 (UNICEF 2018).

The young people in this study were born the same year the Ethiopia Education Policy (1994) was formulated, and in their lifetime, enrolment has increased at all levels of schooling, and the gender gap has narrowed. The government counts over 40,000 primary and secondary schools in the country (UNICEF 2019: vi). The expansion of formal schooling has signalled a major intergenerational shift, with the younger generation making noticeable progress in attaining higher school grades. Such trends are borne out by findings from the Young Lives survey which found that by age 22, about 1 in 4 of the young people had reached post-secondary education, compared to 6 per cent of their parents (Woldehanna, Araya, and Pankhurst 2018b). Many of the children were first-generation learners within their families (Ogando Portela and Atherton 2020). Moreover, there were fewer children who had never been to school (4 per cent) compared to their parents (21 per cent). However, grade repetition, slow progress and early school leaving remain problems among the younger generation,[8] particularly in rural areas (Woldehanna, Araya, and Pankhurst 2018b), and learning outcomes are below what might be expected (Rossiter, Azubuike, and Rolleston 2017). More than 40 per cent of the young men and about 30 per cent of the young women left education without completing Grade 8.

Nevertheless, schooling has become a defining and desirable feature of modern childhood in Ethiopia, that promises an escape from persistent poverty and preparation for social adulthood (Tafere and Tiumelissan 2020). Educating girls is increasingly socially accepted compared to the past (Bevan and Pankhurst 2007). However, girls, more so than boys, contend with multiple, sometimes contradictory, messages regarding the kinds of respectable life paths they should pursue, whether through school, work, migration, marriage or motherhood (Camfield and Tafere 2011). Their life choices remain constrained by poverty and by patriarchal social hierarchies based on gender and age, despite a modern discourse of female empowerment and gender equality (Crivello, Boyden and Pankhurst 2019; Bevan and Pankhurst 2007).

8 At age 15, when students should leave primary education and transition to secondary education, only 27 per cent of the cohort had progressed as expected (Favara, Chang, and Sánchez 2018: 16).

The transition to adulthood for young men is also challenging, since they are expected to achieve economic independence and to own land or housing as prerequisites to marriage and fatherhood in a context of job and land scarcity (Mains 2007). The rising costs of marriage payments in some communities prevent young men from marrying when they are ready, or push them into debt when they do (Tafere et al. 2020).

Young men's and young women's capacities to deal with hardships signal their readiness for social adulthood (cf Cooper 2018: 666). Ethiopian anthropologist Tatek Abebe asserts that the current generation of young people are trapped between the disparate worlds of 'eroded tradition' and an 'unfulfilled modern life' (Abebe 2008: 23). In the same vein, Jeffrey and McDowell (2004: 137) contend that 'it is a cruel irony that, as western ideals have been exported outside Euro-America, it has become increasingly difficult for young people in Third World settings to emulate these ideals' (cf Berlant 2006). Educational attainment is not guaranteeing 'success', and the struggle to find meaningful employment after completing university has created a class of 'educated unemployed' (Pankhurst and Tafere 2020; Tafere and Chuta 2020a; Mains 2011).

A growing body of ethnographic research examines how young people in Ethiopia engage with uncertainty as they strive to attain new visions of social adulthood (Mains 2011), including potentially positive aspects of uncertainty as a creative space wherein marginalised young people recraft their lives and sustain hope (Johnson et al. forthcoming; Di Nunzio 2015).

In 2020, the combination of the global coronavirus pandemic and violent conflict, including a war between the federal government and the leaders of the ruling party in the Tigray region, further compromised the well-being and futures of the country's young people.[9] Young people confronted school closures and disrupted learning, restrictions on jobs and mobility, food shortages and ill health within their households (Woldehanna et al. 2021). These intersecting crises raise concerns, both about the current well-being of affected young people, and about the potential reversal of developmental gains made by and for their generation since the MDGs.

3. Young Lives data and methods

Young Lives is an ongoing, international mixed-methods cohort study that aims to generate evidence and influence policies on the drivers and impacts of childhood poverty and inequality across the life course.

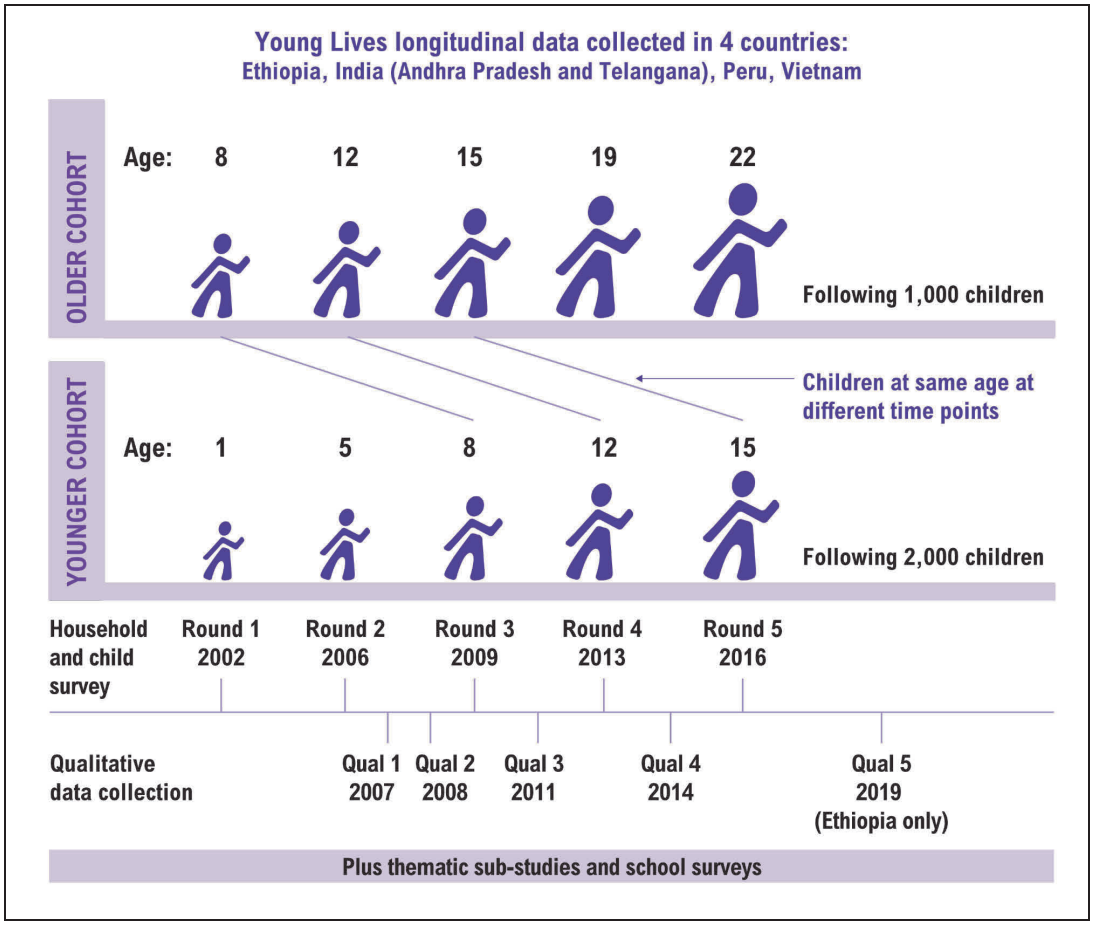
Between 2002 and 2016, Young Lives collected five rounds of child, household and community panel survey data linked to 1,000 girls and boys born in 1994 in 20 rural and urban communities in Ethiopia (Figure 1). In 2020, Young Lives conducted a mobile phone survey (consisting of three calls) with young participants about the impact of COVID-19 on different aspects of their lives and well-being.[10]

9 See Abebe 2020 on protests in the Oromia region.

10 The phone survey was carried out as part of the Young Lives at Work programme funded by the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

In addition, a nested sample of over 30 Older Cohort children (in five sites) have participated in qualitative longitudinal research, exploring everyday experiences of poverty, shocks, major life changes and well-being, between 2007 and 2019 (in five waves of data collection), from around the age of 11/12 to 24/25 (Tafere and Chuta 2020b). The 2019 qualitative fieldwork was expanded to include five additional Young Lives sites (neighbouring the existing five) and a larger sample of young people. Information from 64 individuals was used in this paper. Several qualitative sub-studies addressing specific policy topics were also carried out between the main survey and qualitative data collection periods.[11]

Figure 1. *Young Lives research design*



The examples of young people featured in this paper come from the five sites studied between 2007 and 2019 (Box 1), thus the qualitative data were collected prior to the coronavirus pandemic. Descriptive statistics from the Young Lives survey help to situate the qualitative cases within the context of cohort trends and to uncover the possible influence of structural factors. We extracted case-level information from the COVID-19 phone survey to update the longitudinal profiles of the exemplar cases.

[11] Qualitative sub-study topics include orphanhood and vulnerability; child labour; child marriage; violence against children; urban relocation; and the national safety net programme.

Box 1. *Qualitative longitudinal research sites*

Bertukan is located in the centre of Addis Ababa. Regarded as one of the city's old quarters, the neighbourhood has a relatively dense settlement pattern and poverty is widespread. As a hub for commerce and small- and medium-scale enterprises, many local residents make a living in the informal economy.

Leki is located in the Rift Valley in Arsi Zone of Oromia close to a lake, and relatively close to a major town with market opportunities. Most residents are farmers who produce vegetables through rain-fed agriculture and irrigation, and a smaller proportion engage in fishing at the lake.

Leku is located at the centre of Hawassa, the capital city of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' region. Most households live in poor economic conditions, earning a living through petty trade, daily labour, street vending and self-employment. There is a lot of inward migration from within the region.

Tach-Meret is a rural community in Amhara, which predominantly grows crops but is vulnerable to seasonal food shortages. Many poor households depend on the state-run PSNP. The community is close to a town, where many households and young people access services, and where there are also opportunities for formal and informal employment.

Zeytuni is a village in Tigray. Residents depend on farming for their livelihoods, and as the area is food-insecure it receives PSNP support. In recent years, young people have been generating income through small-scale irrigation activities and wage labour in the fast-growing construction sector in nearby towns. However, in 2020 (after the fieldwork was completed), a conflict broke out in the region leading to a humanitarian crisis, which is still underway at the time of writing.

An experienced team of Ethiopian social researchers who speak the local languages, some of whom have been involved in Young Lives since 2007 or 2008 and have built up relationships with the families and communities, undertook the qualitative data collection.[12] The main method used is the repeat biographical interview, including life histories and creative methods (drawing, mapping and daily diaries) with the children at different ages (Crivello, Morrow and Wilson 2013). Individual and group interviews with their parents/caregivers, peers and community members provide information about changing family and social environments and wider norms.

3.1. Selection of exemplar cases

The selection of exemplar cases through which resilience could be explored adapted the approach used by Crivello and Morrow (2019) that was purposefully iterative and flexible, and based on a combination of etic and emic indicators.[13] We began with the larger survey and qualitative datasets, with each phase going deeper and narrower. We agreed on an initial list of well-being indicators at age 19 (Round 4 survey) and created a shortlist of cases

12 Ethics approval to undertake the 2019 qualitative field work was granted by the institutional ethics review boards of the Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists (ESSSWA) and the University of Oxford.

13 See Annex 1 for details.

based on those performing above average for their sex and location. We analysed qualitative data to identify context-specific understandings of resilience, then used this definition to adjust the list of cases based on outcomes at age 24 (qualitative wave 5 in 2019).

Initially, our aim was to select between six and eight focal cases, with equal numbers of girls and boys, but as we further refined our understanding of resilience in this context, we agreed a list of 11 (four male, seven female) to capture a wider range of experiences. The 11 individuals were selected from the qualitative longitudinal sample on the basis that the analysis would be enriched by the unique life history data offered. We do not use 'resilience' as an objective measurement tool or a way to identify the most 'extraordinary', 'successful' individuals, or 'outliers' within the wider study. Our intention was to start by meeting young people 'where they were', rather than to judge each one against a single criterion. Indeed, we included a young male farmer who had left school by Grade 3, and a young woman who married age 15 and had her first child soon after, with such cases also raising the question of 'who defines success?' (Crivello and Morrow 2019). The case-based approach fostered understanding of biographical complexity across time and of the wider social processes, structures and cultural contexts in which young lives take shape (Jeffrey and Dyson 2008; Ragin and Becker 1992). Individually and collectively, the life stories of the exemplar cases illustrate a range of challenges and choices faced by children in poverty; the influence of gender and location; and what helped them to land on a relatively positive path as young adults.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the exemplar cases*

Name	Sex	Wealth tercile (1= poorest; 3=less-poor)	Location origin	Sibling birth order	Highest level of education	Challenges	Support	Illustrative quote from the young person
Afework	Male	3	Bertukan (urban)	5 of 6	Enrolled in college	• Death of mother and father • Stopping his university education due to political conflict • Quarrel with his college teacher, leading to temporary suspension	• Highly supportive sister and cousin • NGO support • Maid hired, reducing his workload at home • Sister paying for private school • Brother and partner helped him start a business	"We are changing in good ways."
Ayu	Female	1	Leki (rural)	6 of 9	Left school at Grade 2	• Neck illness, and dropping out of school • Abduction/elopement • Lost four goats that she had bought with 3,150 birr savings	• Started small restaurant • Living conditions improving as she and her husband work hard	"It would be difficult to improve my life on my own."
Biritu	Female	1	Leki (rural)	4 of 8	Graduated from university	• Unsupportive, alcoholic father • Eye problem causing her to drop out of school • Death of ox • Unable to get a job (though has degree)	• Highly supportive brother • Moved to town to live with brother and attend a better school • Joined university and graduated	'If God wills, there is nothing that keeps me back.'
Fanus	Female	2	Zeytuni (rural)	2 of 6	Completed Grade 10	• Father migrated, relinquishing his family responsibilities which fall on her mother, exacerbating her illness • Suffering from epilepsy, disrupting her schooling • Quarrelling between her parents, affecting her health • Out of work	• Passed Grade 8 and relocated to village Q for Grade 9 (mother and uncle supportive) • Father's return coincided with improved health and medical treatment • Supportive teachers • Supportive workplace (factory) • Having a job (but company closing and she is at home)	"I hate spending my day idle."

Table 1. *Characteristics of the exemplar cases continued*

Name	Sex	Wealth tercile (1= poorest; 3=less-poor)	Location origin	Sibling birth order	Highest level of education	Challenges	Support	Illustrative quote from the young person
Haftey	Female	1	Zeytuni (rural)	1 of 1	Completed Grade 10	• Death of mother and father • Failed Grade 10 despite her expectation that she would pass	• Living with grandmother • Supportive aunt and her husband living in town • Migration to the Middle East and saving	"I am happy because I am living by working."
Mulu	Female	1	Tach-Meret (rural)	5 of 7	Enrolled in university	• Death of father and decline of family income, leading to her involvement in paid work • Workload increased when elder sister joined college, causing tension with younger sister	• Electrical power came to community enabling her to study in the evening • Supportive sister (and role model) in town with whom she moved to live and study	"My life will be better than my mother's because I am educated."
Mesih	Male	1	Zeytuni (rural)	4 of 5	Enrolled in university	• Late enrolment to school (lagging behind his age mates) • Illness of his father (he had to cover his father's work) • Death of his father	• Supportive family to continue his education • Family started irrigation • Moving to live with sister in town to attend school	"The challenges helped me become stronger."
Netsa	Female	2	Bertukan (urban)	1 of 1	Enrolled in college	• Mother out of job, lack of finances, causing stress • Does not know her father • Failed Grade 8 despite her expectation that she would pass • Failed Grade 12	• Her mother supports her, covers college fees • Attending private college • Internship at dental clinic, receives pocket money • Cousin who was living abroad maintained and improved the house, buying household equipment and mobile phone for her	"I want to have my own income and I would also like to improve my family's living condition."
Tufa	Male	2	Leki (rural)	3 of 10	Left school at Grade 3	• Parents did not send him to school while other siblings went; he looked after the cattle • Father's imprisonment led to him dropping out of school to earn money • Mistreatment by employers and not paying him at all or on time • Lack of rainfall leading to food shortage	• Highly supportive uncle with whom he was working and who supported him to be independent • His experience in irrigation work • Sisters living in the Middle East bought the family a motor pump for irrigation	"After I've earned more money, my plan is to construct a house and marry in the future."
Yitbarek	Male	1	Leku (urban)	3 of 4	Graduated from technical and vocational education and training (TVET)	• Failed to pass Grade 10 exam • Sister married and left, creating greater workload for him • Couldn't find job for 3-4 months after graduation, and started laborious, low-paid work in an industrial park	• Increase in amount of father's monthly pension payment • Had his first-choice field of study in TVET • Secured good job after sitting for exam and earns a good salary	"If I work hard, I am sure that I will progress in my current job."
Yordi	Female	2	Leku (urban)	3 of 4	Enrolled in university	• Death of father • Bouts of illness, gastritis	• Supportive relatives and friends of parents • Supportive teachers • NGOs supporting family • NGOs providing her with school materials and scholarship	"I won't sit without having a job."

3.2. Analytic approach

Our analysis cast a wide net across the corpus of Young Lives qualitative data. We undertook thematic analysis using five waves of qualitative data (between ages 12-24), combining *cross-case* analysis (across the wider qualitative sample, identifying similarities, differences and wider structural factors and social norms, n=64) and *within-case* analysis (of the 11 exemplar cases, identifying biographical themes) (Crivello and Morrow 2019; Thomson 2007; Braun and Clarke 2006). We reviewed interview transcripts and creative outputs from young people at different ages, including life-course timelines and daily diaries, and used matrices to create longitudinal profiles for each of the exemplar cases to determine what made a difference, when and why. We developed thematic summaries based on the full sample, building a cumulative picture of the ecologies of support for young people in different circumstances and contexts (Crivello and Morrow 2019; Ungar 2011; Bronfenbrenner 1979).

Themes emerging from the qualitative analysis are: gendered risks and turning points; social relationships – support from family, especially the role of elder siblings, as well as other kin and friends; enabling systems and environments; inner resources (knowledge, skills and competencies); and the role of second chances and viable alternatives (cf. Crivello and Morrow 2019).

4. Theorising young people's life trajectories

We drew on the concepts of 'turning points' and 'resilience' to help focus analysis of young people's engagement with risk and change across the early life course, and through which the structural influences of gender, location and poverty could be explored. Here, we briefly describe our thinking around these concepts, and the contextualised definition of 'resilience' that underpinned the analysis.

4.1. 'Turning' and 'tipping points'

An increasing number of youth studies draw on the concept of 'vital conjunctures' to examine crucial and constellating moments within the life course, and as an alternative to the more normative concept of 'transitions' (Langevang 2008: 2040). First developed by Bourdieu (1977) and later by Johnson-Hanks (2002), vital conjunctures are defined as 'specific periods of potential transformation in a life or lives' that may trigger instability and/or hope (Johnson-Hanks 2002: 870). Emphasis in these key life junctures is on the way in which structures coalesce in individual lives to shape actions and trajectories, and on young people's strategies for navigating these crucial moments of potential change (Jeffrey 2010a: 498). Drawing on an earlier study (Crivello and Morrow 2019), we refer to these crucial moments as 'turning points', and suggest that, under pressurised conditions of poverty and compounding disadvantage, turning points can 'be experienced as tipping life chances and fortunes in transformative (positive or negative) directions' (Crivello and Morrow 2019: 7).

Notwithstanding the force of social structures and of young people's 'socio-economic circumstances which limit, but do not entirely foreclose, their opportunities to act', turning points frequently involve negotiation and crucial decision-making with respect to young

people's futures (Holloway, Holt and Mills 2019: 462). They are therefore contextual, and influenced by gender, location, economic circumstances, and other social factors (Ursin and Abebe 2017; Juárez and Gayet 2014; Morrow 2013). A growing body of scholarship about young people in developing countries increasingly points to the limits of their agency within these processes (Lancy 2012), favouring terms such as 'thin' (Klocker 2007), 'bounded' (Langevang and Gough 2009), and 'ambiguous' (Bordonaro and Payne 2012) to describe their agency in socially and economically difficult circumstances.

4.2. 'Resilience'

If 'turning points' provide a lens onto specific periods of potential transformation in young people's lives, then 'resilience' is about how young people fare during such periods. However, many scholars reject a perceived shift towards an emphasis on resilience in policy and academic fields, arguing that it promotes a neoliberal view of agency that places responsibility for dealing with crisis away from the public sphere and onto the shoulders of individuals (Bracke 2016; Neocleous 2013). Another criticism is the lack of a common definition or theory, leading some authors to suggest 'relinquishing the metaphor of resilience while retaining the focus on particular factors that moderate and mediate poverty experiences and outcomes' (Boyden and Cooper 2007: 12). Others disapprove of attempts to search for universals and point to the lack of cross-cultural understandings of resilience and the tendency to impose normative value judgements, particularly when it comes to resilience measures (Panter-Brick et al. 2018; Scheper-Hughes 2008; Hunter 2001). As Boyden (2009: 117) contends, 'identifying adversity is not straightforward because beliefs affect the outcomes of such experiences, and different cultures and actors hold different views on the matter, so that assumed risks can in some cases be protective and foster specific competencies in the young.'

Despite these critiques, many researchers retain the concept of resilience but illuminate its complexities. For example, individuals might demonstrate resilience in one domain of life (e.g. academic achievement), but fare poorly in another (e.g. psychological well-being) (Camfield 2012; Luthar 1993); or they might be deemed resilient as children but fare poorly as adults (Lothe and Heggen 2003; Werner and Smith 1992; Werner and Smith 1982). Moreover, not everyone who experiences the same circumstances will feel that they were deprived (Boyden and Cooper 2007), and children and adults often have different understandings of what is challenging or risky for children (Tekola 2009; Hunter 2001).

Risks and protective factors may differ for girls and boys of different ages, and coping strategies are also gendered and aged. Coping strategies may inadvertently deepen vulnerability, for example, when girls in poor households abandon their studies to marry or when boys leave school to support their families (Chuta 2014; Lothe and Heggen 2003). At the same time, research shows that some exposure to risk is beneficial to children who need to acquire capabilities and pro-social skills to deal with challenges, pointing to so-called 'steeling effects' (Rutter 2012). Children may recognise the benefits that come from their reasonable engagement with risk, a point illustrated by Bereket, one of the boys in our study, who at age 12 asserted, "I take risks to learn new things".

However, the literature on children's resilience in Ethiopia is sparse and based mainly on small-scale qualitative approaches. For example, Lothe and Heggen (2003) used in-depth interviews with eight male and female young famine survivors living in Addis Ababa to

identify factors that supported their resilience, including 'faith and hope'; 'having a living relative'; and 'having memories of one's past roots'. Tekola's (2009) qualitative study, also in Addis Ababa, pinpointed children's sociability, or their ability to relate well to others, as a key competency that enabled children in poverty to access important resources, like food and care (Camfield 2012). Mulugeta's (2004) study of successful female students emphasised the interplay between girls' individual and social resources, such that hard work, aspiration and faith were the main drivers behind girls' success which was boosted by, but not entirely attributable to, their supportive relationships. Finally, an evaluation study by Ambelu et al. (2019) of an intervention programme that had aimed to increase the 'resilience' of poor children in selected rural areas concluded that the evidence of impact varied greatly depending on the qualitative or quantitative tool used to measure impact.

4.3. The meaning of resilience in this paper

Our understanding of resilience is based on what the young people themselves told us, which encompassed two key attributes and temporal orientations. First, *personal strength* to confront present-day challenges, as when 13-year-old Mulu described resilient people as "strong"; she explained, "they find solutions to problems and that is how they become able to have a good life". Emebet, age 15, whose father died when she was 6 years old, said, "When I face a problem, I am ready to stand against it". This sense of resilience is captured in the different local languages used by the participants (Table 2).

Table 2. *Related terms for 'resilience' as personal strength*

Language	Word(s)	Meanings
Afaan Oromoo	*dandamachuu danda'u*	'the ability to withstand challenges'
Amharic	*yemekwakwam chilota*	'success in defying expectations'
Tigrina	*mitswar*	

The second, related, attribute, was a future- and growth-oriented *capacity to change one's life for the better*. This capacity emerged as core to young people's sense of well-being in contexts of risk and uncertainty, first arising in adolescence and growing in importance in the transition to adulthood. In this context, progress might be understood as 'the expectation that the future will not be like one's past and that, instead, it will be qualitatively better' (Mains 2007: 665). Defined ecologically, resilience in this sense is the capacity of young people to navigate to resources that sustain their well-being in the face of life challenges and the capacity of their environments to provide these resources to them (Ungar 2008). This requires structural conditions that cultivate a sense of vitality and hope (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016: 34). For 19-year-old Gemetchu, changing his life meant "to flourish with better progress."

Both girls and boys held schooling as the prime space in which to cultivate the capacity to change their lives, and as they grew older and left school, the role of working and earning assumed greater relevance. On average, boys in our study left school earlier than girls did, and they had greater opportunities to earn money and work outside the home in early adulthood (Pankhurst and Tafere 2020).

> Though I regret [leaving school] it is also good that I can change myself [by] earning money. (Habtamu, young man, age 19, Tach-Meret)

> I think it was better for me to work for change. It was why I started working … to change my life. (Denbal, young man, age 18, Leku)

Within this logic, young people across both sexes disparaged 'idleness' and considered it a moral failing, particularly when idleness was judged to be a personal choice. Adolescent boys and young men were particularly susceptible to accusations of idleness since society expected them to be breadwinners and to achieve economic independence in early adulthood, despite limited economic opportunities to earn. In Bertukan, Bereket, age 12, explained why it was important for boys like him to avoid becoming idle:

> If [a boy's] life is not changing from day to day and if he does not do anything to boost morale, he starts to lead a hopeless life. He starts to say 'there will be no change' whether he lives today or tomorrow and that all the gain is toiling … [I]t makes me happy having a job rather than staying at home the whole day ...

Encapsulated in the wider literature through the concept of 'waithood', our young respondents used phrases like "just sitting" or "simply counting my age" to describe a phase of developmental stasis, which was to be avoided (c.f. Honwana 2014; Jeffrey 2010b). Being seen as 'idle' or 'waiting' put adolescent girls at greater risk of early marriage which was an incentive for them to stay in school or work for pay (Tafere et al. 2020).

Once married or parents, young people avoided idleness by fulfilling their gendered roles through paid and unpaid work and caregiving, and the aspiration to change one's life became a joint endeavour between couples, rather than an individual ambition. Meanwhile, unmarried young women who had reached higher levels of education and who had expected to find work perceived themselves as idle if unemployment left them dependent on their families and solely occupied with housework. In Zeytunni, Fanus, a 25-year-old unmarried Grade 10 graduate and factory worker, indicated that idleness caused a person to "think too much". She said: "What I hate is being without a job and being idle which leads to mental problems and stress."

However, not all work was valued the same (Bogale, Crivello and Porter, forthcoming). According to young people's accounts, on one end was 'survival' work, including daily labour that trapped young people in what they referred to as "hand to mouth" living, depriving them of an orientation towards the future. On the other end was work that was characterised by its transformative potential. It allowed for saving and planning, promised promotion and gave scope for continued learning through part-time or distance courses. The opposite of 'idleness' and mere 'survival', the key feature of this type of work was that it afforded young women and men the capacity and hope for change.

5. Risks, shocks and turning points

5.1. The first two decades of life

The young people in this study grew up in challenging environments and circumstances that gave them reason to want to change their lives, and at the same time threatened their capacity to do so. In repeat interviews and timeline exercises conducted between the ages of 12 and 19/20, young people identified myriad critical moments they had experienced in the first two decades of life encompassing both risks and opportunities. These included: (a) climatic shocks (heavy rain, drought, pests); (b) societal influences (inflation, neighbourhood safety, development, aid); (c) school transitions and relations (progress, exams, leaving, teachers); (d) household changes (illness, death, births, separation/divorce, income, migration); and (e) child health and social development (Table 3).

Risks were cumulative and occurred in differing combinations; they could be gradual or abrupt, planned or unexpected, with varying impacts on children's trajectories. Children experienced some defining moments, such as performance in the Grade 10 national exams or an untimely marriage proposal, as tipping points (Gladwell 2000) that either opened up or closed down doors to particular imagined futures.

Table 3. *Risks, shocks and turning points across childhood (self-reported, full qualitative sample)*

Ages	0-5	6-10	11-13	14-19
Girls	Parental death Divorce of parents Illness and injury Female circumcision Household/care responsibilities Sibling birth/death Migration/family relocation/ travel Livestock became lost Lack of personal hygiene Saw a car for the first time	School – starting, achievements, failures, violence, leaving and changing schools Bullied on way to school Injury and illness Increased household chores Receiving own animals First paid work Relocation/migration Parental illness and death Domestic violence Divorce/loss of father's financial support Festivals and family celebrations Birth of younger siblings Migration of family/siblings Family included in PSNP NGO support; aid for schooling Rainy season (brings food insecurity)	School – achievements, grade repetition, changing school, leaving school Injury and illness Migration for education Paid work Increased household chores Parental illness and death Family discord/father's drinking Loss of father's financial support Sibling marriage/visits Household improvements Getting electricity at home Family excluded or included in PSNP	Pass or fail national exam School – achievements, changing school, grade promotion, leaving school Migration for education Teacher conflict Death of beloved teachers Injury and Illness Migration (child, siblings, parent) Increased household chores Start own business (selling goods) Child buys/sells animals Increased church participation Female circumcision First-time marriage/childbirth Getting electricity at home Festivals and family celebrations Domestic violence Death of livestock Father injury Sibling marriage/employment/ university

Table 3. *Risks, shocks and turning points across childhood (self-reported, full qualitative sample) continued*

Ages	0-5	6-10	11-13	14-19
Boys	Birthday celebration	School – starting, progression, failure and leaving Injury and illness Birthday/family celebrations First time wearing complete suit First exposure to town Started household chores/herding Injured while tending to family animals Punished for losing family animal Food insecurity during rainy season Plentiful food during non-rainy season Changing care relations (caregiver) Migration, family relocation Family conflict Parental death Sibling injured Recruited into this study	School – starting, leaving, achievements Injury and illness Migration for education First exposure to town Start farming Paid work Household chores Loss of family animals Father's incarceration Family death Household purchases and improvements Family migration/remittances Crop failure Food shortage Drought/rains Inflation	School – changing, progression, achievements, leaving and failure Teacher conflict Injury Migration/travel Sport Household chores Started irrigation/farming, selling crops, fishing Pride in ploughing on one's own (independently) Pride in purchasing own clothing Cattle lost House fire Family discord Increase in father's pension Family pays off debts Father released from prison Sibling employment/university Sibling/family death Loss of food aid Drought/rains Inflation

In children's accounts, adversity was a pervasive feature of childhood for both girls and boys, affecting the livelihoods that their families depended on (Chuta 2014; Ogando Portela and Pells 2014; Boyden 2009). Survey data found that families who reported the greatest number of shocks were also those with the fewest economic and social resources to cope (Berhane, Abay, and Woldehanna 2015); and they struggled the most to access loans or credit from financial institutions, or from relatives, neighbours or friends who may have been exposed to the same threats (Ogando Portela and Pells 2014).

Powerful social and gender norms structured household strategies for mitigating the impacts of poverty and shocks (cf. Kelly, Bhabha, and Krishna 2015; Smyth and Sweetman 2015). Strong interdependencies between household members meant that everyone who was able to, was expected to contribute, including the young (Chuta 2014; Ogando Portela and Pells 2014). It was common for adolescent girls to substitute for elder females when they fell ill or left for work, and shocks affecting fathers had ripple effects on their sons (Dhanaraj 2016). In Leki, for instance, Tufa's life was turned upside down at age 15, when his father was imprisoned, causing him to leave school in Grade 3 to tend their fields and fill in during his father's absence: "There was no one to help my parents in the fields when my father was jailed."

Our data indicate that, from early ages, girls and boys tended to do similar amounts of work, but gender played a significant role in which types of work, such that girls contributed more to

housework and caring, and boys spent more time in the family business (Boyden, Porter, and Zharkevich 2020). Children's timelines reflected these differences, with girls in all settings recording the growing volume and complexity over time of their unpaid workloads at home. Meanwhile, boys in rural areas referred to their roles caring for animals, attributing the acquisition, loss, sale, injury from or theft of cattle, goats, and so on as affecting their well-being and their evolving standing within their households (Crivello and Morrow 2019: 7). Both girls and boys acquired skills through their responsibilities for social reproduction amidst socio-economic insecurity (Jones and Chant 2009; Abebe 2007). Sometimes the influence of gender norms was stark, but gender processes operated alongside factors of poverty, age, and location, as well as sibling birth order and household composition and dynamics (Boyden et al. 2019; Heissler and Porter 2013).

5.2. Transitions to adulthood

Follow-up interviews with the young people in their early twenties found that the nature of some risks had changed. For example, marriage at age 15 posed different risks for females than marriage at age 24, by which time risks related to separation, divorce, and single parenthood had arisen (Pankhurst and Crivello 2020). Meanwhile, concerns about not being able to afford to marry, due to lack of steady income, housing and land, intensified among young men, who bear this responsibility. Young people who had graduated from school or higher education wanted to find employment in their fields of study but struggled to find relevant work (Pankhurst and Tafere 2020; Tafere and Chuta 2020a). Moreover, political violence affecting multiple regions in the country disrupted access to university and vocational courses, curtailing migration for both education and work.

After the qualitative fieldwork in 2019 was completed, the conflict situation worsened and the coronavirus pandemic posed the greatest shock affecting this generation of young people at a crucial phase of the life course when they are expected to bolster the foundations of their adult lives. A phone survey conducted between August and October 2020 with Young Lives respondents age 25 (n=774) documented how the pandemic had disrupted many aspects of young people's lives and families. A significant number of households had experienced economic shocks such as a loss of income (50 per cent) and increases in expenses (70 per cent) (Porter et al. 2020). During the pandemic, many of the young people had shifted to agricultural jobs and self-employment. Young women bore the brunt of increased household and caring responsibilities, with 70 per cent spending more time on domestic work (and only 26 per cent of young men), and almost 50 per cent spending more time on childcare (19 per cent of young men). It is unclear what the impact of widening gender and economic disparities will be in the long term for this generation of young people.

6. What helped? What made a difference?

Next, we identify what helped young people to deal with risk and to access opportunities, in their quest to change their lives. The children who appeared to be faring well as young adults had counted on a combination of well-timed, mutually reinforcing factors within holistic support systems, rather than on a single factor that made the difference. Significant resilience factors identified were: supportive and facilitative relationships (especially elder siblings); enabling and protective systems and environments; government and NGO support; young people's inner resources and pro-social skills; and second chances (cf Crivello and Morrow 2019: 8). These factors, pertaining to both girls (young women) and boys (young men), emerged in the context of young people's engagement with, rather than in spite of, or separate from, the risks that they encountered. Echoing the paper's title: "the challenges made me stronger" (Mesih, young man, age 19).

6.1. Supportive and facilitative relationships

Having someone to advocate on a young person's behalf, to give advice, or to call on in times of crisis and when navigating major life transitions was a key ingredient in each of the 11 exemplar cases (Table 1). A varied web of support was most helpful: parents and caregivers (particularly in early childhood), elder siblings (in adolescence and beyond), wider kin (aunts, uncles), teachers and, as they grew older, friends, spouses and co-workers. Both girls and boys benefited from supportive social relationships; however, assumptions about girls' vulnerability, in particular, created different logics of risk and protection for girls and boys, which sometimes affected the nature of relational support extended.

Elder siblings stood out as particularly influential when it came to information, networks, and resources that their parents could not provide. Elder siblings had experience and wisdom gained from their efforts to change their lives. They advised younger siblings on education and jobs and helped finance their ambitions; lobbied parents on younger siblings' behalf; improved living conditions; and facilitated migration and access to housing.

> All of my family members have a positive attitude and contributed greatly to my education. My mother, my siblings, all have helped me … My siblings buy clothes, school materials, shoes … and the one who lives in the village has also bought a school uniform for me. (Mesih, young man, age 19, Zeytuni)

In rural Leki, Biritu's elder brother was highly influential to his sister's educational success. He supported her in ways she felt her parents, with little schooling and few resources, could not. The fourth of eight siblings, Biritu had overcome the odds for girls like her in her community to earn a university degree in statistics, and she described her aspirations and achievements as inseparable from her brother's influence.

> [T]his has not been only my aspiration. It has been backed by my brother. My brother has been supporting me as a mother, a father and a brother. He has been all these three bodies for me … I did not have any worry.

Her brother's influence was pivotal at different turning points of decision-making. He dissuaded Biritu from migrating abroad and guaranteed to support her schooling, and later followed through by helping her to leave the village, despite facing resistance because she is a girl. Biritu said:

> [I]t is because of my brother that I was allowed to move and live in town. All other family members refused. Even neighbours [tried to stop me]. They said, 'how can a girl be set free to live away in town?' It is only my brother that influenced them and enabled me to live in town by telling them that it is better for me to live free from the stress they used to cause to me. He said that it is better for me to live in town to seek a job as well. He has been supporting me in such a way for he is educated and has experienced the challenges.

Elder siblings played a pivotal role as family trailblazers, forging pathways through education, work and migration for younger siblings to follow their example; or they served as cautionary tales of undesirable life paths to avoid (Crivello and Morrow 2019: 8). Mulu's life history illustrates this. She grew up, the fifth of seven siblings, in a poor household in rural Tach-Meret. Her family's economic situation deteriorated following the death of her father when she was 9. They received aid because of their hardship. Age 10, Mulu started working, harvesting coffee and later picking haricot beans, along with her sisters, and she attended school. When her mother fell ill, she and her sisters picked up the slack. Although it was challenging to juggle school, housework and paid work, the money she earned helped her family and paid for schooling. In Mulu's teen years, the influence of her elder sister grew increasingly apparent. Her sister joined college when Mulu was 13; four years later, her sister got a job, moved to town and sent money home to help the family. Her sister's departure from home resulted in more housework for Mulu and her younger sister, who fell out because the younger sister insisted that Mulu earn more money picking beans rather than focusing on her studies. Passing the national Grade 10 exam strengthened Mulu's determination to continue studying. Her elder sister lobbied their mother to permit Mulu to move to town with her to study, and promised to keep a watchful eye over her sister. Age 22, Mulu was living with her elder sister in town and was in her third year of university. The younger sister was left to fill the work gap at home. Mulu's example illustrates the interdependence of young people's pathways; in this case, Mulu's elder sister forged a positive path for her to follow, but as a result, the youngest sister felt left in the shadows.

However, the influence of social relationships went beyond siblings. For Tufa, in Leki, it was an uncle who made a difference by helping him to migrate and giving him a job, saving Tufa's earnings so that when he eventually returned to Leki, he was able to purchase land for irrigation farming. For Netsa, in Bertukan, a cousin played a pivotal role in her trajectory. An only child, Netsa was raised by her mother who laundered clothes for a living and she never knew her father. She was acutely aware of her family's poverty. She persisted at school, despite repeating Grade 8 and later not scoring high enough to qualify for university. A female cousin who had migrated to the Middle East for work started supporting Netsa's household; they renovated the house, fixing the roof and decorating, and purchased a washing machine, water filter, refrigerator, stove and flatscreen television. Netsa enrolled in a nursing programme at a private college and her cousin gave her a smartphone which she used to study. In 2019, the cousin had returned to Ethiopia and she and her small child began living with Netsa and her mother. Although Netsa would have preferred to be at

university or a government college, she seemed to be faring well despite the setbacks she had faced and a limited web of support.

Also in Bertukan, we first interviewed Afework when he was age 12, and most recently when he was 25, and by many accounts he had been a 'vulnerable' child; the fifth of six siblings, his mother died when he was 7 and his father when he was 10. At age 12, he was living with a male cousin who agreed to be his caregiver and an elder brother in a one-room house belonging to the local *kebele* (council). After his mother died, his education was disrupted since they moved around a lot and often did not have enough to eat. As an orphan, he was given a scholarship to attend private school and the household received support from an NGO. He said he felt cared for and was encouraged by a teacher who shared his own experience of orphanhood, and by interacting with other orphans in his neighbourhood, which fostered mutual emotional support.

At age 16, Afework was still living with his brother and cousin, who between them managed the household together, dividing responsibilities. Their housing conditions had improved, thanks to his sister's remittances from the Middle East; they had new furniture, a television, a PlayStation, and a new roof and flooring. He had a positive outlook: "We are changing in good ways. Every year, things are getting better." He was also preparing to take his exams and was motivated by those around him: "I see my friends studying hard and am motivated to study. I get good grades … [M]y older brother has completed Grade 10 and is in vocational school. My teacher also helps me."

At age 19, Afework was still living with his cousin and his sister had returned home, which made him happy. As they were in a better financial situation, they hired a housemaid which freed Afework to focus on his schooling. He said he had a lot of friends: "people trust me, and my friends respect me." He was a leader in his *mahber* (Christian community-based association). He no longer qualified for NGO support, but his sister paid for him to continue studying in private school. They experienced a shock when a young relative took his own life, and Afework missed school for two months. He was supported by neighbours to get through the pain. He worried at the time that his cousin and sister were giving up part of their own lives to support him: "They are not married yet because of [me and my brother] … [T]hey have done their best and helped us from the moment my mother died. I am the fruit of their hard work."

He later left to study at university but political conflict in the area forced him to return home. He enrolled in a local college, and with his friends applied for a government loan to open a neighbourhood pool hall, and later open a second business, a game zone, which was also successful (Pankhurst and Tafere 2020). In many respects, he was thriving as a young man; the quality of the care he received and security of his relationships, combined with other resources, including personal grit, meant that losing both parents as a young child had not consigned him to a bleak future (Himaz 2020; Crivello and Chuta 2012).

6.2. Enabling systems and social and material environments

Institutional, systemic and infrastructural environments provide a framework within which young people growing up in poverty cultivate the capacity to change their lives. This section highlights some of the enabling factors within children's homes, schools and communities that explain why they were faring better as young adults than might have been expected.

6.2.1. Home and care environments

Enabling factors in children's home environments included food security, adequate shelter, services, such as access to electricity, family health, harmonious relations and fair workloads for children and young people. Conversely, the negative effects of poverty and shocks on food security and on children's paid and unpaid workloads were common disabling factors, sometimes affecting girls and boys differently, in their family and home environments.

Although parents/caregivers were often limited in the material support they could provide their children, they helped in other important ways. Crucially, girls and boys who went far in their education benefited when their families reduced their paid and unpaid workloads so that they could focus on their schooling and preparing for exams (cf. Crivello and Morrow 2019). They were encouraged in such environments to maintain high educational aspirations and belief in their capacity. It helped when young people had gained reputations for being bright and somewhat exceptional. The rewards they received created a cycle of positive reinforcement, enabling young people who did well to continue progressing. Afework's family had hired a maid so that he could study more, and Mulu gave up paid work when she moved to town to live with her sister to study. Similarly, Yordi's family, in urban Leku, released her from doing most of her household chores so that she could prepare for the national school-leaving exam and assigned her younger sister to cover Yordi's load (as also happened in Mulu's case). That foregone work was often delegated to younger siblings suggests that conditions that were experienced as enabling by one person may be experienced as disabling by another person within the same household.

6.2.2. School systems and environments

Responsive schools, sympathetic teachers and caring classmates made a difference when young people missed school due to personal or family illness or the need to work, or when they struggled to pay school fees. For example, Mesih's family, in Zeytuni, did not enrol him in school on time (at age 7) though he was ready. They needed him to stay home to herd since no other boys were available.[14] When he was 9, a village campaign aiming to mobilise parents to send their children to school reached Mesih's family, and he started school. He regretted being behind his friends but was happy to be in school and progressed steadily through the grades thereafter, eventually making it to university.

Missing school due to their own or a family member's illness was common at any age, and children benefited when their schools were flexible to their needs, for example, permitting them to make up work and exams. Yordi was a top student but reported multiple bouts of illness throughout her childhood. When she was 17 (Grade 11), she experienced a gastritis flare-up that resulted in her missing three months of school. Her teacher facilitated the process for her to re-sit exams and her friends helped her with missed lessons, preventing her from falling behind. Likewise, Yitbarek**,** in urban Leku**,** missed three months of Grade 2 when he fell ill with typhoid and malaria, but his friends helped him to catch up: "I was asking my classmates about what they learned. And at home I was writing down everything they wrote … I was able to catch up in that way."

14 About a third of the cohort children, mostly from rural areas, started school late (Favara, Chang, and Sánchez 2018; Tafere 2014).

Fanus' life story, in rural Zeytuni, is particularly compelling on account of her chronic illness jeopardising her desire to study, and the positive role played by her schools. Fanus has suffered from epilepsy since the age of 9 and missed a lot of school over the years. Her aim was to go to university. Though she frequently fell ill, she progressed well and eventually moved to town with her elder sister to attend secondary school. However, at age 15 (Grade 9), her illness worsened; with two or three fits a day, she felt a burden to her sister who missed school to care for her. In a daily diary completed by Fanus as part of this research, the effect of her illness was apparent (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Extract from Fanus' (aged 16) daily time-use diary*

Day 1 Between breakfast and lunch	4 hours 30 minutes	Slept because I was sick. Ate lunch with my family at home.
Between lunch and dinner	2 hours 35 minutes 40 minutes	Slept. Travelled to Village Q by a car with my mother. Ate dinner with my mother.
Day 2 Between breakfast and lunch	4 hours 1 hour	Travelled to Mekelle with my mother and got medical treatment. Ate lunch and drunk coffee with my mother at Village Q.

She left school and returned home to live with her mother. She described this period as "sad", "disappointing" and "idle". At age 19, she was back in school and feeling better. With her mother's help, she enrolled in Grade 9 with her younger sister and returned to live in town.

> I was interested [to re-enrol] and my mother too helped me to get registered. We went together to the school and asked people to collaborate to help me get my certificate. So, other people too have encouraged me and helped me to get registered and continue my education … [M]y mother has been very happy to see me be successful in my schooling; she does everything she can so that she fulfils my educational materials … She pays my rent.

Her experience was positive: "I am a happy student and I love my classmates … We are all happy and we have very good teachers." She had been worried that her illness might prevent her from returning to school.

> When I returned to Grade 9, I was very happy because I didn't expect it due to my illness … So, I was really happy to see my friends there; we used to love each other … Now, my old friends are going to Grade 12, I kind of feel regret. But they give me emotional support that the most important thing is my health, and it is a matter of time that I will complete my education, as long as I am healthy.

Fanus benefited from being in schools that were flexible in allowing students like her to re-enrol after long absences; however, that, on its own, was not enough. Her strong support network of family, teachers and friends, her perseverance to return to education, and her schools' response, made the difference. In contrast, Tufa left school in Grade 3 when his father was jailed and Tufa was needed to earn money and help at home. He did not have anyone to encourage him to return to school, nor did he imagine it was a possibility, so he never re-enrolled.

6.2.3. *Community environments*

Young people's views on their everyday environments affected their perceived capacity to change their lives. In both rural and urban settings, young people noted a plethora of shocks affecting their particular communities that threatened to thwart their well-being, such as drought, heavy rains, livestock disease, inflation and political violence (Table 3). One of the reasons Afework left university and returned to his family in Addis Ababa to attend college was because he did not want to get caught up in the escalating violence in the region where he had been studying that had forced him to hide in the forest overnight for safety.

Young people's sense of place could also be a source of hope and motivation for change. In rural areas, for example, girls and boys noted the arrival of electricity as a positive turning point in their households and communities, making it possible for them study in the evenings. The construction of irrigation systems in Leki and the opening of a private quarry in Zeytuni provided jobs to young people and bolstered belief in the possibility of change. That access to a water pump (irrigation) could improve one's fortunes encouraged many young men to orient themselves towards staying and investing in their communities, rather than migrating (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016). For example, Mesih, age 16, looked up to a man in his village who had bought a water pump and been successful in irrigation farming. However, such opportunities in agriculture were limited for young women who were pushed into lower-paid and lower-status work (Pankhurst and Tafere 2020). Many young women aspired, and some attempted to, overcome such structural barriers through migration to one of the Arab states to work as domestic maids, despite the well-known risks this entails (Birhanu et al. 2021).

In Bertukan, urbanisation made visible many signs of development: construction of large international hotels, modern shopping malls, condominiums, Chinese investments, an overground train line, and the grand African Union building. However, urban young people often felt socially excluded and physically displaced when such developments did not provide jobs or improve their livelihoods (Crivello and van der Gaag 2016). Such developments had the potential to generate feelings of uncertainty rather than hope when their benefits were out-of-reach to the young people who felt cut off from such proximate opportunities.

6.2.4. *Social and gender norms*

Social norms and expectations were both enabling and disabling in young people's efforts to change their lives, structuring the choices and opportunities for girls and boys from different social and economic backgrounds. As children grew older, they articulated greater awareness of the influence of gender and other structural inequalities on life chances, and on their diverging trajectories to adulthood.

Mesih (age 19, from Zeytuni), for example, suggested from his experience that girls were actually favoured and performed better at school whereas boys were drawn into paid work.

> There are more girls [in school] because boys tend to work in the cobblestone [quarry] rather than continue their education … because we want to work … [M]ost of my friends are females because female students are the clever ones, while the males do not do well … [T]he school doesn't do anything [to help when students complain about poor teachers] except helping female students by giving them tutorial classes; but males do not get any support.

In a similar vein, Yordi (age 18, from Leku) rejected an invitation to join her school's female-only maths tutor group in favour of studying informally with her friends; she explained that girls in her school outperformed boys in maths (with only one boy in the top ten), and that targeting girls sent the wrong message about girls' competencies. However, Yordi was already a top student, in receipt of a scholarship and local NGO support, and had a paid tutor, which meant rejecting the invitation to join the group was unlikely to compromise her academic trajectory, whereas other girls, with fewer resources, might have benefited greatly from the opportunity.

Girls, in particular, benefited when they developed the personal capacity and social allies to challenge restrictive gender norms that limited their options. Compared to boys, girls lacked the authority to make decisions on their own or to transgress social rules. Earlier, we highlighted the pivotal role that Biritu's brother had played in convincing their parents to let Biritu leave the village to study; her first step to the nearby town under her brother's guardianship was a gateway to her eventual independent journey to university. According to Biritu, exposure at university to new ideas and people from diverse backgrounds had changed her worldview:

> I think the main change happens in this dimension, even more so than in the education aspect … living separate from family for the purpose of education is lesson giving. It has some unique aspects when one lives with a community at university … it gives lifelong lessons.

She returned to her village from university as a self-appointed role model and gender champion, intent on teaching villagers what she had learned.

> They should give equal opportunity to both their male and female children rather than limiting the girls to doing domestic activities … of course, living in towns is largely an opportunity for females because when they live in the rural areas, they may suffer from their workload. So, it is a very good opportunity for female students.

As in Biritu's case, what often made a difference was the tenacity of girls, boys and their allies to challenge social norms that held them back, since many structural barriers remain. Enabling environments were therefore spaces in which attempts at such transgressions were possible.

Moreover, disadvantaged girls and boys benefited from seeing relatable 'success' in action within their social environments (Kundu 2016: 27), as seen earlier with respect to the influence of elder siblings. Relatable role models and trailblazers expanded young people's ideas regarding their possible selves and futures (Markus and Nurius 1986), countering what psychologists refer to as 'availability bias' (the tendency for individuals to choose from options that are familiar to them) (Tversky and Kahneman 1973). Many of the girls mentioned knowing young women either from their communities or "like them" who were already working in their desired professions. Yordi, for example, highlighted as a turning point in her life (at age 15) the day her brother introduced her to his friend, a female engineer, who she later referred to as her role model. Yordi went on to pursue a civil engineering degree at university.

6.3. Government and NGO support

Each of the young people who were faring well as young adults had accessed government and/or NGO support, in the form of food, cash, healthcare, pensions, loans, school materials,

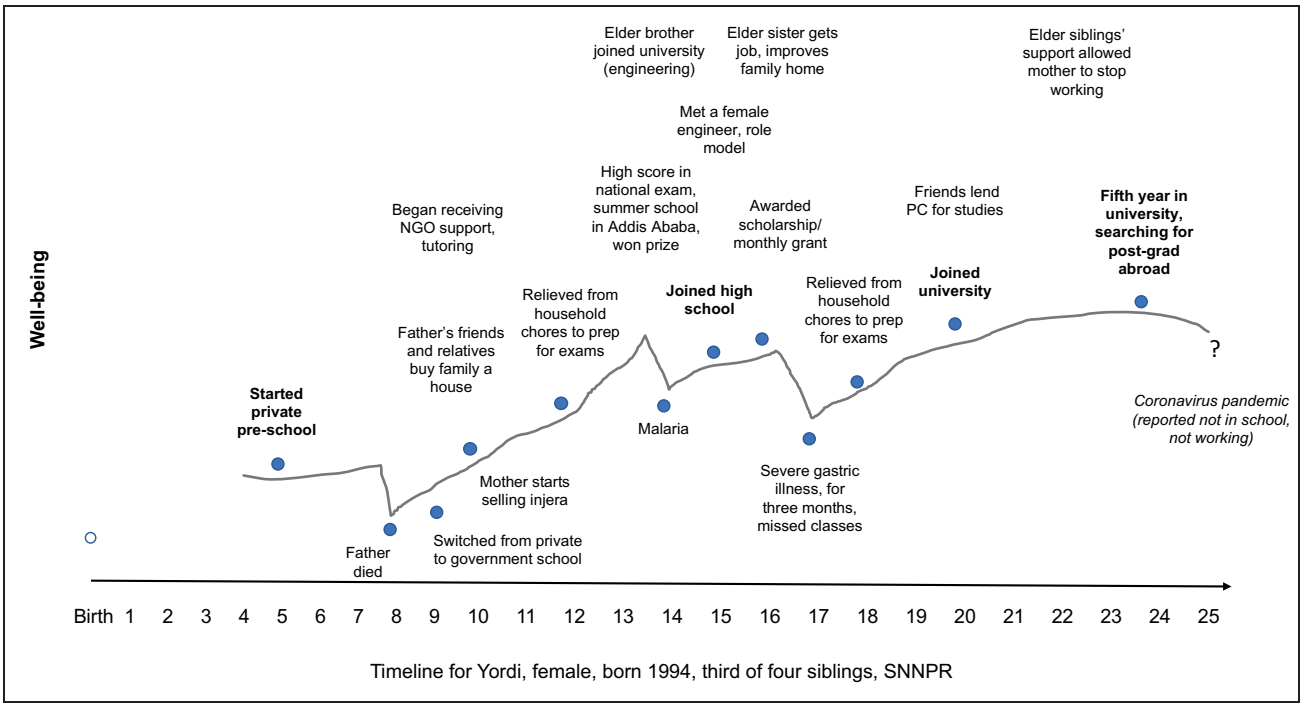
tutoring, scholarships or school fees. For example, Yitbarik (age 15, from Leki) attributed an increase in his father's pension from 180 to 280 birr to his family's improved living conditions.

> We used to suffer a lot as the result of the shortage of money in our house. My father is living on his pension. Last year, his pension was increased and we have a better life as a result.

However, among the 11 exemplar cases, the type, variety, amount and duration of support varied, resulting in a few individuals benefitting from prolonged and/or multiple sources of support, compared to others who were also in need. Some types of support targeted children with specific vulnerabilities, such as orphans, and in some cases prioritised support for girls.

Yordi's example illustrates the difference that NGO support, in particular, can make to a child's life, especially when part of a holistic support system (Figure 3). The third of four siblings, her trajectory was characterised by an early shock, age 8 (father's death), leading to her household's sudden economic decline and psychological pain affecting the core of her support network. Her father's death was a tipping point for the whole family. However, a multitude of external support, including from government and NGOs, gradually helped her family, catalysing a virtuous cycle in support of Yordi's academic potential. Being recognised as a clever student from a vulnerable household garnered her support from SOS, Mary Joy, Mother of Theresa House, and Centre for Concern NGOs that provided free healthcare when she fell ill, school materials, school uniforms, after-school tutoring, special library access, and wheat and flour for her household. She did not work as a child to earn money. As a top-ranking student in her high school, she received a scholarship from an NGO of 300 birr a month for three years, and the same NGO provided her with a laptop and 500 birr a month based on her second-year university grades.

Figure 3. *Yordi's timeline*



Timeline for Yordi, female, born 1994, third of four siblings, SNNPR

Similar to Yordi, NGO support appeared to have made a big difference to Afework's trajectory. He too was a bright student and a (double) orphan, and for all but one year, his private school fees, school uniform and school supplies were covered by an NGO and the local kebele. Neither was he required by his family to work as a child, and he progressed steadily through school without repeating a grade. Age 19, he mentioned accessing a local library run by an international NGO.

> I can get books there if they are not available in our school's library. If I have homework, since I get lots of books there, I will go and do my homework then after that go back to my home. After eating my supper and playing a little, I will start studying again.

An NGO provided his household with wheat and oil once every two months, but by age 16 this aid stopped for a reason unknown to Afework. He said that the financial support he received to cover his schooling helped him to study well, and he had won the annual prize for clever students several years in a row. He also benefited from support from the local kebele that provided him and his friends a space to launch their joint business (a pool hall) (Pankhurst and Tafere 2020).

Meanwhile, in rural areas, several young people mentioned having benefited from the national PSNP that aims to support the most vulnerable and food-insecure households. However, many were excluded at some point for reasons which were not always clear to them. For example, Biritu's household was a beneficiary and was able to purchase essential goods, but in 2011 was removed from the list of beneficiaries. Mesih's family benefited from the PSNP and received grain, cash for food and school materials. For a short time, Mulu's family received wheat and oil from the programme. Tufa's family also participated in the PSNP until they were dropped from the list because they had bought land.

In the Young Lives sample, PSNP was operating in 15 of the 20 sites, with 530 out of the 1,886 households[15] (29.1 per cent) active beneficiaries of the programme in 2006 (Porter and Goyal 2016). An earlier Young Lives study found that PSNP was effective in addressing hunger within food-insecure households, but it was not necessarily effective at preventing children from dropping out of school and may in fact have added to their workloads within and outside the home (Tafere and Woldehanna 2012). At the same time, having enough to eat was a crucial protective factor in children's positive trajectories and well-being, and reduced pressures on them to leave school prematurely or to engage in hand-to-mouth labour (Morrow et al. 2017). In this way, PSNP prevented bad situations from becoming worse, but did not, on its own, create the conditions that fostered individual resilience so that young people might change their lives.

6.4. Inner resources and pro-social skills

So far, we have highlighted the external resources that contributed to resilience, in the form of young people's social relationships, everyday environments and institutions, and the support they and their families received from the government and NGOs. However, it was essential that young people brought their own strengths and skills to bear on the challenges they faced in poverty and adversity, no matter the quality and quantity of their external sources of support (Crivello and Morrow 2019; Sanders, Munford, and Boden 2018; Mulugeta 2004).

15 This refers to households of the Younger Cohort born in 2001/2.

Although the individual characteristics of, and life stories behind, the exemplar cases were unique to each, taken together they demonstrated a number of traits. Most importantly, they believed they could change their lives and maintained 'confidence that the odds can be surmounted' (Werner and Smith 1992: 207). They persevered through setbacks and structural constraints. They were self-motivated and motivated by their relationships with others. Some, but not all, were leaders or excelled academically. They all expressed a strong work ethic. They made plans but also adapted to change, taking risks and seizing opportunities. They related well to others.

Some of the individuals had earlier been flagged as children who 'stood out' from their peers by the researchers who met them. The researcher who interacted with Biritu at age 15, individually and in group discussions, noted:

> The respondent was so free, expressive and knowledgeable on the topic of discussion. She is so participatory in both group discussion and individual interview. She is the one who usually breaks the ice before others speak. Though the girl lives under a lot of pressure in the family, especially her father's bad character, she is so unshakable and she is a girl with a firm stand … [T]hough she is vulnerable to the risks of poverty, family disputes and [chronic eye] illness, she is quite strong and pictures a bright future through her education … I presume she is a good example of resilient children in the community.

Indeed, at the time, Biritu had asserted, "If God wills, there is nothing that keeps me back." Age 19, she remained steadfast: "I want to push forward with my education and become successful. I want to enjoy a better life than the one my family has … I expect a better life." Age 25, she saw herself as a leader and champion of girls' rights in her village.

Afework, who was raised by a cousin following the death of his parents, also saw himself and was seen by others as a leader among his peers. He cultivated his inner resources within the context of his social relationships, as the following quote, from an interview with his cousin when Afework was age 19, suggests:

> I advised him when he was a child; but it is [Afework] who advises me now. He seems older than his age. He has changed in many ways – he is even taller than me. It is no exaggeration to say that he is a role model even for those with parents. He is sociable. He is a model student. He helps others to study, and he asks other people if he doesn't understand anything. He helps little children from the neighbourhood to study twice a week. And through his association he helps disabled and helpless people. To have such a disciplined and clever student is a great satisfaction for the family. I am like his father and I am happy about this. There is a saying that 'even an uneducated mother can give birth to a president'. I feel I have done the same thing.

Mesih, in Zeytuni, further exemplifies the difference that children's inner resources can make within their holistic support systems. His trajectory is one of steady perseverance, riddled with challenges, which he overcame through a combination of his family network and his focused, determined character. He enrolled two years late for school (at age 9) because his family kept him home to herd, and regretted lagging behind his friends. The fourth of five siblings, his family were among the poorest households, and his father died when he was teenager. Up until age 13, he reported only modest academic ambitions, hoping to finish school and "have a good life".

> I was not thinking like that [academically] when I started going to school because I did not know much about the future. At that time, school for me was just a kind of place where you spend your time.

Age 14 (Grade 4) was a turning point when he ranked first in his class, and he continued to do well over the years, which gave him the confidence to increase his ambitions.

> [W]hen I was in Grade 4 and stood first in the class, my parents were very happy. As a result, they bought me new clothes, exercise books, pen, pencil, and all necessary things. At that time, I felt happiness and encouragement.

Mesih's mother described her son as a "clever student" and gave him fewer chores to do at home so he could focus on his studies. The researcher that interviewed him at age 16 noted that: "he stands out among the other boys, his situation appears to have improved, he was dressed neatly and well-spoken." By age 16, he had formulated a plan for finishing Grade 12, and by age 18, he was implementing his plan, having migrated to town to live with his sister so he could continue his education. His mother and other siblings collectively covered his living and schooling costs. Reflecting back on his life (at age 19), he asserted:

> The challenges have helped me to be a hard worker. For instance, when the drought happened, I came to learn that I must be a hard worker to cope with such issues … [T]he challenges helped me become stronger.

Age 25, when he was contacted during the pandemic, Mesih was enrolled at a government university studying for his undergraduate degree.

Although inner resources were an essential ingredient in children's holistic support systems, they were not sufficient on their own. Children fared well as young adults when their high aspirations, optimism and competencies were reinforced by supportive relationships, material and food security, wider structures and opportunities (Crivello and Morrow 2019).

6.5. Second (and third) chances

Second chances sustained hope for 'changing one's life' when life did not go to plan and during particularly influential turning points, such as parental death or exam failure, that risked becoming tipping points capable of reversing a young person's fortunes (Crivello and Morrow 2019). Second chances took many forms and were important for both girls and boys. In the transition to adulthood these included returning to education (Fanus), land acquisition (Tufa), job offers (Yitbarek), and migration (Haftey). In some cases, chance encounters with persons who opened up opportunities led to major turning points in young people's lives, as the example of Haftey in Zeytuni illustrates (see also Werner and Smith 1992; Bandura 1982).

Haftey is an only child, who was raised by her grandmother from the age of 7 after both her parents died. She went to stay with her aunt in the city so that she could attend a better school, returning to help her grandmother on the weekends. She preferred living in the city. She progressed well in school and planned to continue to university. However, unexpectedly, she did not pass the Grade 10 exam. This situation epitomised the concept of 'vital conjunctures', at which point, Haftey lost all hope for her education. She took a job working in her uncle's garage and auto parts shop and was happy to be earning money. She described the serendipitous moment that happened next:

> One day my relatives came for a visit from one of the Arab countries. I told them to take me back with them. I decided to go. They agreed to help me fill out the visa application and I paid for it with the money I saved from working in the garage. My family didn't want me to go but once they knew I was going, they loaned me money for the travel.

She worked as a maid in the Middle East for two years and, fortunately, her employers were kind. She remitted money to her family, and saved 30,000 birr (around US$1,400) for herself. She mentioned that besides the money, she had learned Arabic, how to cook, and had "broadened her mind", having never been outside Ethiopia.

Haftey looked back on her childhood and, despite the blow of failing her exam, she judged her trajectory to be positive.

> Because if I'd dropped out earlier, say in Grade 3 or 4, maybe they would have made me get married, and that would have ruined me as a child. For those who stay in the village, soon you'll be married. In the city it is different, they push you towards schooling. I can say that since I reached up to Grade 10, I know myself and I can support myself. I can lead my life by working.

Compared to Haftey, Ayu's experience of second chances played out somewhat in reverse, yet bore similarities. The sixth of nine siblings in rural Leki, Ayu left school in Grade 2 at the age of 13. Once out of school, she was happy to start earning money as a farmworker. She then married at 15 to a man ten years her senior; he made her give up work, and she lost touch with friends. By age 21 she had two children. Although she was not in paid work, her husband said he would support her wish to open a small shop when the children were older. Age 24, Ayu had opened a food stall selling *beyayinet* (a traditional food platter) at the entrance of her family compound.

At the time, she was preparing her documents and had already obtained her passport and completed some training in Addis Ababa to migrate to the Middle East for work; with that move, she would become the main earner, thus promising a second chance for her family too. She explained, "I just want to improve my life condition". However, a follow-up call with Ayu during the pandemic (in late 2020) found that she had not left the country; she had continued with her food stall, though the costs of running her business had increased during the crisis.

Also from Ayu's village, Tufa's second chance reflected wider family dynamics and his responsibility to find solutions to household problems. One of ten siblings, his parents enrolled him late for school because he was needed at home for herding and farming. His father had been in prison, and he dropped out of school on multiple occasions, first when his family home burned down, and then when there was no one to plough or guard the farm. Age 16, he was still in Grade 2, while other boys his age were in Grades 5 to 8. His father, having been released from prison, nevertheless regarded Tufa with respect:

> He has been working hard day and night on the farm. His effort is even greater than mine and he never gets tired … [W]hen you see him, his physical height may seem short. But, in his mind, he is very mature. For example, he goes with the other children to pick 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. (Tufa's father, interviewed in 2011, Leki)

Tufa left school in Grade 3, having felt "left behind" compared to his friends. He wished he had learned more: "If you learn mathematics, arithmetic, then you can work. So, if one comes to irrigation work after education that is good." Age 19, he said he would have taken night classes if they had been available in his village. He was the main earner at home (from fishing and daily wage labour) since both his parents were chronically unwell. He saw many new irrigation projects in his village and was inspired by his uncle who he said went from "nothing" to become a successful irrigation farmer. Another uncle gave him a job in a city and after a few years he returned home and used his savings to buy back his family land, which his parents had been forced to sell due to poverty. He bought a water pump with remittances sent by his sister who was working in the Middle East, and he began irrigating his land.

By age 24, he had developed a strong conviction that he was improving his life through this irrigation farming, and he had helped finance the migration of another sister to the Middle East. He reported that previously they were among the poorest in the area and had sought out loans from others in times of need, but they had since been able to reciprocate and help others.

6.6. The uncertainty of 'success'

Finally, we return to Biritu, the university graduate who had returned to her village a self-appointed gender champion intent on improving the odds for girls in her village. By many measures, she might be labelled a success story, having overcome myriad barriers to become one of the few female university graduates from her village. However, her trajectory is not straightforward either. In 2019 she had been unemployed for two years after graduation, unable to find a job in her field (Tafere and Chuta 2020a). She came under increasing scrutiny from local villagers who questioned why she had deviated from her promised path to success. She explained:

> The people in the community, for example, every time they come across me, they may say, 'Are you still here? Have not you gone?' But this is nothing for me. I have passed through more challenges.

Yet she was at risk of feeling a failure, having become the community's symbol and litmus test of the legitimacy of the promises of education. Her beloved brother elaborated:

> The worth that the community gives for her status is diminishing as she remains unemployed after graduating. The youngsters in the area become discouraged to continue their education by referring to her unemployment. The failure of a single person has an impact on the entire community. I am noticing that her failure is not only affecting herself or her family but also the community and the younger children. This has resulted from the high expectations that they had for her.

Occupying a liminal period of 'waithood' was an experience Biritu shared with other unemployed graduates in the country who like her were anticipating their 'second chance'. Many were first-generation learners in their families, navigating unchartered waters and conditions that felt beyond their control. Their experiences underscore the fragile nature of resilience for young people who, having 'beaten the odds', continue to face structural barriers and uncertain futures.

7. Discussion

This working paper set out to explore the meanings and experiences of resilience, and its gender dimensions, among a cohort of Ethiopian children exposed to poverty and adversity across the early life course. Following the same individuals using repeat life history interviews (from ages 12 to 24) and survey questionnaires over a 20-year period (to age 25) has illuminated the twists and turns in their lives, which did not follow a set pathway from childhood to adulthood. Our aim was to understand what made a difference in the lives of those children who appeared to be faring better than might have been expected as young adults despite adverse childhood experiences, while others fared less well.

We worked with a definition of resilience derived from young people's understandings that encompassed two key attributes and temporal orientations. The first was about *personal strength* to confront and find solutions to present-day challenges: the second was a future-oriented *capacity to change one's life* for the better. Both girls and boys valued these attributes, although gender mediated the individual, social and systemic factors contributing to resilience and the structural constraints they strove to overcome.

We found that children who appeared to be faring well as young adults had counted on a combination of well-timed, mutually reinforcing individual and contextual resources within holistic support systems, rather than on a single factor. Figure 4 depicts the way risk and protective factors interacted at key life junctures, creating tipping points that had the potential to alter life trajectories for better or for worse. Supporting young people's resilience therefore requires ecological approaches and policies and programmes that are aimed at the young people and their families, as well as the institutions, systems and infrastructure that provide a framework within which they can thrive.

Emphasis on alleviating household poverty and mitigating family and economic instability and shocks should be a top priority, since so many of the everyday challenges faced by young people had their roots in poverty and family troubles (cf Carmichael, Darko, and Vasilakos 2019: 16). The aspects of poverty that imperilled young people's trajectories and thwarted their aspirations included food insecurity, the social and economic costs of ill-health within households, lack of jobs and threats to livelihoods, with weak safety nets. Although many households had benefited from the PSNP and scholarships made a difference to a minority of the children, more can be done to strengthen these vital resources. Reducing poverty through broad-based, child/youth and gender-sensitive social protection, and building resilience to shocks so that children are not forced to pick up the slack is imperative. Such efforts should address the differences in girls' and boys' expected social roles within their households and their coping mechanisms in poverty, which are early contributors to gender inequities across the life course. Supporting resilience therefore requires intersectional approaches that 'recognise that people will have different identities, needs, priorities and capacities which are not static, and will shift and change over time …' (Chaplin, Twigg, and Lovell 2019: 1).

Enabling environments promoted resilience within children's homes, schools and communities, fostering opportunities for both girls and boys to connect, contribute, learn and earn, all of which underpinned their efforts to change their lives. Important features of enabling environments identified by children included food security and electricity

in their homes, sympathetic teachers in their schools, and safety and livelihood opportunities in their communities. Access to relatable same-sex role models who expanded girls' and boys' beliefs in what was possible for them to do and become made a difference too.

Individual processes were nevertheless essential, as girls and boys brought their knowledge, skills, creativity and competencies to bear on their situations and environments. For example, self-efficacy, grit and sociability were important individual resources, pointing to the need for services that facilitate the positive psychosocial development of young people in adverse circumstances. However, it is not just the individual or environmental factors but their interaction that that is important, such that the capacity to change their lives was more so the result of 'reciprocal coactions between the individual and their contexts and culture, with relationships as the key drivers' (Osher et al. 2020).

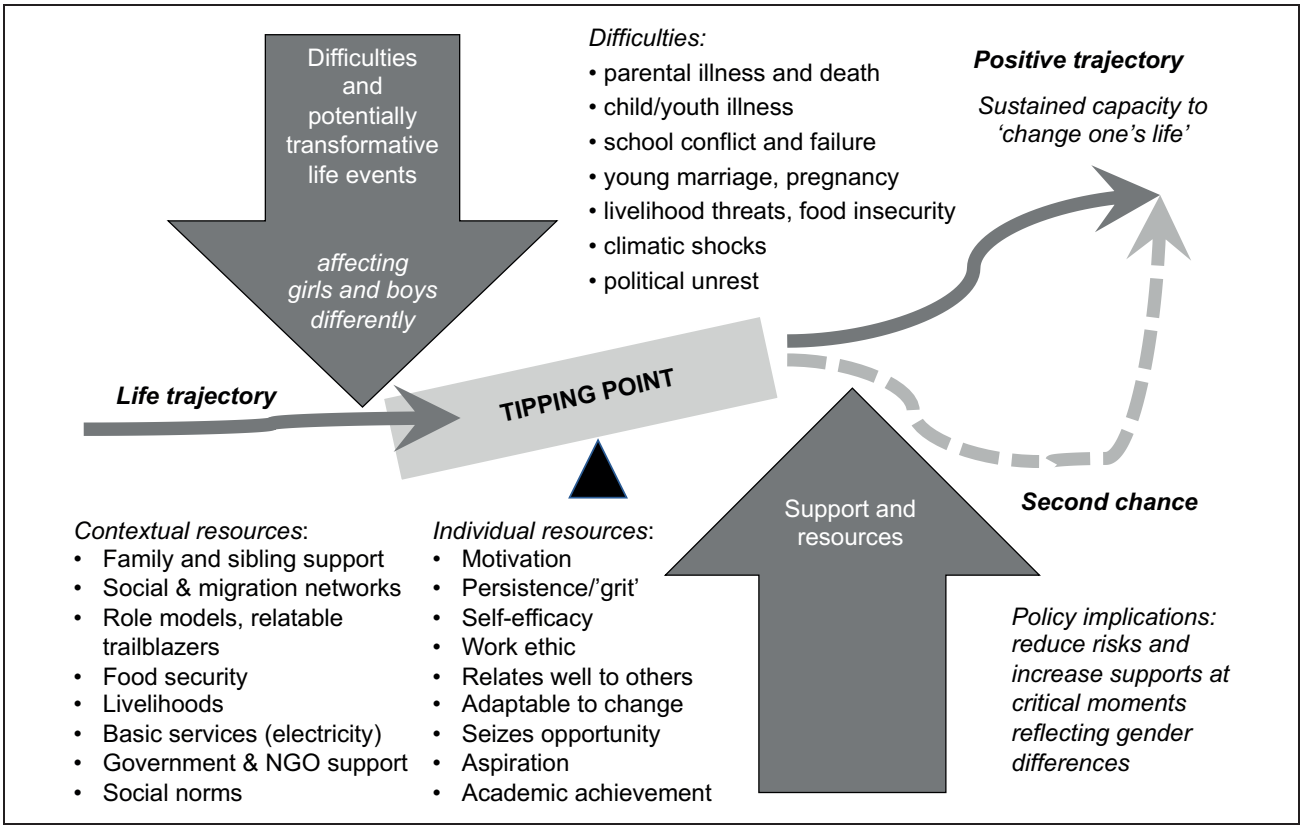
All of the individuals we profiled as exemplar cases had at least one person who had provided support at pivotal moments in their life course. Most helpful was when a young person had a varied web of support including parents, siblings, wider kin, teachers and friends. Girls, in particular, benefited from social allies who supported them to challenge discriminatory gender norms that constrained their ambitions, for example when they wanted to migrate for school or work, or delay marrying.

Elder siblings – both sisters and brothers – stood out as active protagonists within young people's social webs of support, advocating on behalf of younger siblings, providing advice, inspiration, financial support, housing and access to jobs and migration. Our findings illuminate the relational character of resilience, such that lives were intertwined, like when one sibling's opportunity to improve their life chances depended in part on another sibling being 'left behind'. Young people with weak social webs of support or in conflicted relationships at home or in school were at a disadvantage, and their experiences highlighted the need for targeted support, for example through school clubs or NGO groups through which information-sharing and social capital may be strengthened.

Second chances were crucial for many who had experienced failure or felt stuck, and meant that setbacks did not guarantee a bleak future. Second chances were not solely about 'bouncing back' to an earlier version of one's self, and more often than not entailed finding alternative paths to respectable adulthoods when life had not gone to plan. Our analysis drew attention to particular moments of risk where timely interventions and safety nets can make a big difference by preventing turning points from becoming tipping points. For example, failure in the Grade 10 national exam left many young people confused and disappointed, and they could have been helped to re-sit exams or be advised about vocational options. Related to this, short- and long-distance migration was a vehicle for girls, young women, boys and young men to pursue second chances in education and work. Migration was a type of second chance when young people feared that "the future will be like one's past" if they did not leave, and a strategy, albeit risky, to overcome structural constraints of poverty, lack of opportunities and gender-based disadvantage in their localities.

At times, the result of serendipity and chance encounters, second-chance opportunities required that young people be disposed to seize them and willing to take risks. Such opportunities arose in early adulthood too, underscoring the maxim that it is never too late.

Figure 4. *Factors supporting children's positive trajectories in Ethiopia*



Source: Adapted from Crivello and Morrow 2019

8. Conclusion

The longitudinal qualitative approach used in this study is well-suited to capture local understandings and the granularity of children's changing lives in their changing contexts, over time. The analysis strongly highlighted the need to connect individual stories to the systems and contexts that they co-create and in which they are embedded. A spotlight on the individuals underscores the 'ordinariness' of resilience, rather than supporting a view of children as 'invulnerable' or 'invincible'. There is space for vulnerability in resilience, as part of the human condition (Lothe and Heggen 2003; Werner and Smith 1982). Our findings echo the view that 'resilient children do not appear to possess mysterious or unique qualities' (Masten and Coatsworth 1998: 212) and that, in Masten's words (2001: 201):

> Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.

However, with ordinariness also comes fragility. The analysis revealed how children's lives did not follow linear paths, and were easily derailed by unplanned events and shocks, which often affected girls and boys differently. The risk that the coronavirus pandemic and political

conflict are recalibrating the odds for young people who have worked so hard to change their lives is a current concern.

Evidence from the wider Young Lives study suggests that the pandemic and effects of the lockdown have entrenched existing gender and economic inequalities, as families cope with increasing levels of food insecurity and losses in education and employment (Woldehanna et al. 2021; Porter et al. 2020). What we know about young people's coping capacities prior to the pandemic suggests that gender-sensitive and multisectoral interventions that reflect a life-course approach and target the concentric rings of influence in young people's ecological environments should be a priority (Tomlinson et al. 2021). Sustaining hope among young people through trying times is also vital, since hope motivates young people to realise different futures. However, this realisation requires that hope be well-supported and sufficiently resourced, that families are safeguarded against shocks, and that second-chance opportunities are timely for the young people who need them most.

A separate policy brief develops the implications of the research findings for policy and programming (van der Gaag 2021).

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Annex 1. Process for selecting exemplar cases

Phase 1

- Agreeing on an initial list of well-being indicators at age 19 (Round 4 survey), including cognitive and socio-emotional scores, education, marriage and work status and subjective wealth.
- Identifying the averages by gender, location, and wealth status (e.g. average school grade achieved by rural females at age 19).
- Mapping survey outcomes for individuals in the qualitative sample to determine where each child was located in relation to the mean across the indicators; each case reviewed at age 19, then an initial shortlist created.

Phase 2

- Analysing qualitative data from young people to identify local ('emic') understandings of well-being and resilience.
- Reviewing the most recent wave of qualitative data (at age 24), assessing outcomes of all individuals and settling on a final list of exemplar cases (six female and five male).
- Creating a set of longitudinal profiles based on survey and qualitative data, and updating these profiles as new information became available (e.g. COVID-19 phone survey at age 25/26 in 2020).

“The Challenges Made Me Stronger”: What Contributes to Young People’s Resilience in Ethiopia?

This working paper explores the meanings and experiences of resilience, and its gender dimensions, among a cohort of Ethiopian children exposed to poverty and adversity across the early life course. It asks why some girls and some boys seem to fare well as they transition to adulthood, despite the challenges and obstacles they had faced, while others do less well. The data comprise repeat life history interviews (from ages 12 to 24) and survey questionnaires over a 20-year period (to age 25). Qualitative analysis (n=64) revealed how children’s lives did not follow linear paths, and were easily derailed by unplanned events and shocks, including: (a) climatic shocks; (b) societal influences; (c) school transitions and relations; (d) household changes; and (e) child health and social development. Gender mediated children’s experiences of risk and their individual and family coping mechanisms.

In-depth analysis of the life stories of 11 exemplar cases (four male, seven female) identified significant resilience factors, including: supportive and facilitative relationships (especially elder siblings); enabling and protective systems and environments; government and NGO support; young people’s inner resources and pro-social skills; and second chances. A combination of well-timed, mutually reinforcing factors within holistic support systems, rather than a single factor, appeared to make the most difference.

Young Lives

An International Study of Childhood Poverty

About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty and transitions to adulthood, following the lives of 12,000 children in four countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam). Young Lives is a collaborative research programme led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the four study countries.

Through researching different aspects of children’s lives across time, we seek to improve policies and programmes for children and young people.

Young Lives Research and Policy Partners

Ethiopia
- *Policy Studies Institute*
- *Pankhurst Development Research and Consulting plc*

India (Andhra Pradesh and Telangana)
- *Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Hyderabad (CESS)*
- *Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalam (Women’s University), Tirupati (SPMVV)*

Peru
- *Grupo de Análisis para el Desarollo (GRADE)*
- *Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (IIN)*

Vietnam
- *Centre for Analysis and Forecast, Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences (CAF-VASS)*
- *General Statistics Office of Viet Nam (GSO)*

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