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**Young Women's Economic  
Daily Lives in Rural Ethiopia**

Yuka KODAMA\*

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**Abstract**

In rural Ethiopia, livelihood diversification is essential for households to be able to sustain themselves. Declining agricultural profits and a land shortage have accelerated this diversification. While the past literature has ignored young women's economic contributions in its discussions about livelihood diversification, this research indicates that the current rapid educational expansion for girls has changed their economic role in their households. This has resulted in changes in the conventional life courses of women in rural Ethiopia as they have more choices in terms of education, marriage, and the types and location of their economic activities, due to the increasing importance of young women's economic contributions to their households and their improved educational opportunities. The aim of this paper is to elucidate how the economic environment and government educational policy have affected young women's lives in terms of education, marriage, economic activities, and intra-household power relationships, especially with their parents.

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\* Senior Researcher, Africa Study Group, Area Studies Center, IDE  
(Yuka\_Kodama@ide.go.jp)

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**INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO**  
**3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI**  
**CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN**

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## Introduction

With their strong demographic presence in developing countries, young people have been expected to be growth engines for development. Attention has been paid by international aid agencies and governments to young people's economic and social lives in order to integrate them into national economic development. The United Nations (UN) claims that "[y]outh development requires that Governments and other stakeholders design and implement policies and programmes to protect young people from the negative social and environmental influences that can derail the transition into healthy adulthood" (United Nations 2007: xv). The UN also emphasizes the importance of "youth participation in areas such as employment, civic engagement, political participation and volunteerism" as well as in building their human capital (United Nations 2007: xvi).

This research explores young women's daily lives in rural Ethiopia. The existing literature argues how 'adult' societies integrate young people into existing economic, social and political activities<sup>1</sup>. Policy implications have often varied due to the various emphases paid to young people's roles. They are, for instance, "a hope of the future", threats to the social order, and victims of society (Ansell 2005: 18, 32; de Waal 2002: 13; Argenti 2002: 124-125, 134). They can be "a threat to the established order" due to the political tension between generations because traditional political structures have been dominated by adults and elders despite the fact that the young outnumber their elders (de Waal 2002: 13; Argenti 2002: 150).

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to draw a line between young and adult people. The period for young people has generally been defined "as a period of transition from childhood to adulthood" (United Nations 2007: xxxvi). Bradford Brown and Larson (2002: 6), based on a review by region, also examine commonalities among young people in the world and define young people as "an interval of transition and preparation between childhood and adulthood". De Waal (2002: 15) also defines youth "by what it is not: youth are not dependent children, but neither are they independent, socially responsible adults" while he recognizes that "[y]outh is therefore a problematic, intermediary and ambivalent category".

Young people are also particularly susceptible to political, economic and historical transformations as they have not been fully integrated into existing social and political structures (Bradford Brown and Larson 2002: 12; Durham 2000: 114). Educated or uneducated, young people, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have suffered from unemployment and underemployment, with the result that they have worked in the informal sector since the economic crises of the 1970s, the consequent economic liberalization with structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and on-going globalisation (Argenti 2002: 127-128; Ansell 2005: 32; Nsamenang 2002: 91).

This paper argues that young women's daily lives have been affected by the economic, social and political environment in rural Ethiopia although the analysis is still at an early stage, and a close examination of young women's life histories will be left for the future.

The aim of this paper is to elucidate how the economic environment and government educational policy have affected young women's lives in terms of education, marriage, economic activities, and intra-household power relationships, especially with their parents. The transformation of young women's daily lives will be complex and will diverge as a result of economic, social and political factors. Especially as young women's lives are determined not only by themselves but also by the power relationships that they have with their parents, the analysis needs to consider such household relationships.

The research was conducted at a market place surrounded by agricultural villages in South Gondar Zone, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. The survey participants were 52 randomly selected young women, aged 15-29 years old. The following interviews purposefully selected 26 women from the survey participants. The area where I have been conducting research since 1999 has been suffering from an acute land shortage although the area is classified as a crop-surplus area according to government officials in the

Amhara region. Considering that the market area has been absorbing landless people from the surrounding agricultural villages, the livelihood situation in the area indicates the future of the surrounding agricultural villages, especially with regard to livelihood diversification.

It is appropriate to examine young women as a distinct group rather than to classify them by marital status such as unmarried, wives, divorced, because the impact of rural transformation might vary from generation to generation. First, while the older generation has already established their households on the basis of previous economic and social structures, the younger generation is going to choose their economic activities and form their households on the basis of on-going rural transformations, such as de-agrarianisation due to acute land shortage, increasing outmigration, and educational expansion. Although gender relations are critical to understanding how young women have been affected by rural transformation, the analysis also needs to consider the livelihoods of young women as an age group because rapid economic changes in recent decades may have affected young women more strongly than the older generation.

Secondly, the role and contribution of young women in households tend to be ignored in discussions of livelihood diversification because the discussion focuses on how rural people acquire a cash income in addition to that gained from their agricultural production, but young women often engage in non-cash activities, such as domestic chores (Economic Commission for Africa 2009; Jolly 1991). Rural households diversify their livelihoods to avoid future risks and/or improve their livelihoods. Ellis defined rural livelihood diversification as “the process by which rural households construct an increasingly diverse portfolio of activities and assets in order to survive and to improve their standard of living” (Ellis 2000: 15). While the discussions about livelihood diversification contribute to pay attention to non-farm activities in rural areas, the discussions tended to focus on livelihood diversification within households and do not close examination about each household member’s behaviours to household economics (Ellis

2000: 18; Barrett, Reardon and Webb 2001). Given the high unemployment in developing countries, some of household members may not manage to support their natal households and just keep their own livelihoods. Rural household economics might need more elaborated tactics to sustain livelihoods of household members. Therefore, the previous discussions have not analysed young women as the central actors of livelihood diversification. Because of this oversight, it seems to be difficult to understand the economic activities and daily lives of young women undergoing rural transformation through past studies.

The limitations of this research are that it was conducted solely with young women and not with other household members. However, considering the absence of any analyses of rural transformation about young women and how they see rural transformation, this paper contributes to filling the gap in discussions about livelihood diversification and young people in rural societies.

The next section reviews the overall macroeconomic situation and discussions about women's education and marriage in rural Ethiopia. The second section briefly explains the research methods. Section three examines the survey results to get overall information about young women in the research area and section four examines our in-depth interviews with young women through reviewing their verbatim transcripts.

## **1. Background information**

### **1-1 The macro-economic situation in rural Ethiopia**

Rural people in Ethiopia have experienced drastic economic, political and social changes since the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) grasped power in 1991 from the previous regime (*Derg*), which adopted a state-controlled economic policy. The EPRDF has adopted liberalized economic policies; it has deregulated producer prices, liberalized marketing channels, abolished input subsidies, and devalued the currency.

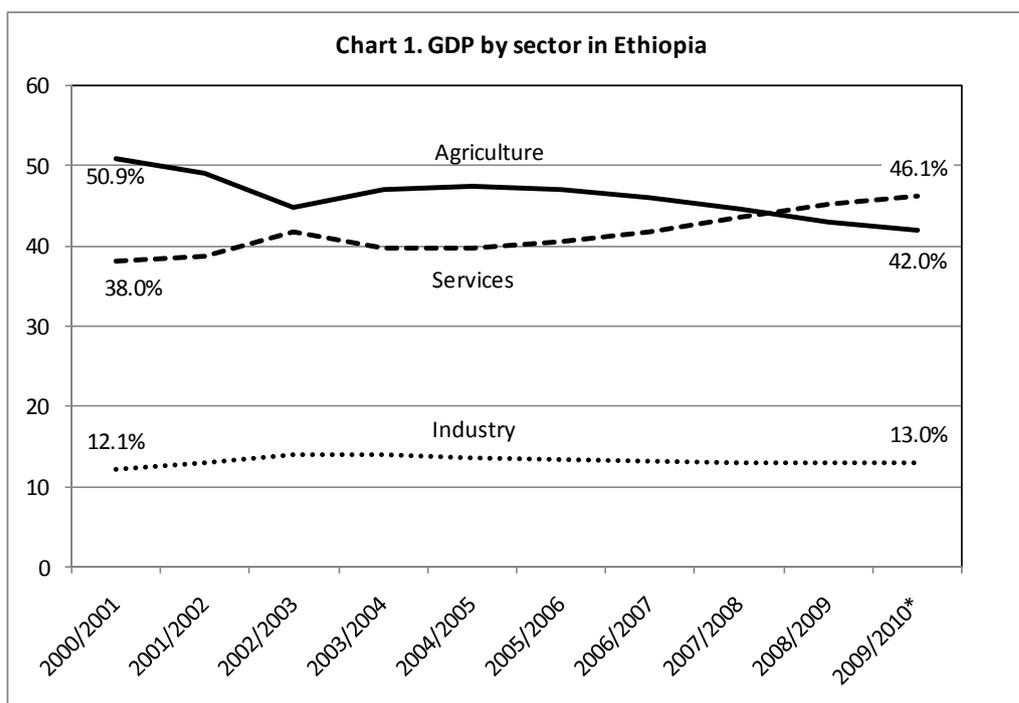
However, production per capita has been stagnant or decreased probably due to population pressures and land degradation (World Bank 2007a, b). The poor infrastructure, especially for transportation, has also squeezed the profits of small agricultural producers because producer prices have been depressed and the prices of inputs have increased in remote areas due to high costs of transportation (Jayne, Asfaw and Myers 1998).

The agricultural sector has become an unattractive option for rural people, especially young people who cannot expect to inherit land during an acute land shortage. Several studies indicate that many young men in the Amhara region have chosen to migrate to urban areas as wage labourers and to coffee-producing areas in the southern part of Ethiopia as seasonal labourers (Aklilu and Tadesse 1994; Yohannes 1997:57; Bevan and Pankhurst 2007).

Given the stagnation in the agricultural sector, the Ethiopian economy seems to be experiencing underlying structural changes. The contribution of the service sector to Gross Domestic Production (GDP) has surpassed the agricultural sector since FY2008/2009<sup>2</sup> although it is estimated that the agricultural sector still occupied 42% of total GDP (Chart 1) in FY2009/2010.

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<sup>2</sup> The Ethiopian fiscal year starts on July 8<sup>th</sup> and ends on July 7<sup>th</sup> (National Bank of Ethiopia 2010).



\*estimate

Source: Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, n.d.

This structural economic change implies a rural transformation at the micro-level in rural Ethiopia, such as de-agrarianisation with livelihood diversification within rural households, because these households have difficulties in maintaining their livelihoods through farm production alone.

Yohannes (1997) analyzed men’s livelihoods in rural Ethiopia and discussed whether men without land had difficulties in maintaining their livelihoods and thus had to depend on their parents rather than support them. The land shortage has also affected women’s rural livelihoods in Ethiopia through the changes in household livelihoods although most rural women have not inherited land from their parents due to the custom of patrilocal marriage despite the fact that official and common laws concede women’s right to inherit land from their parents (Women’s Affairs Office and World Bank 1998). For example, Sara Worku (2007) examined livelihood diversification process of rural women in the Oromia Region where has been suffering from population pressures and consequently scarce land and resources. Her research showed that women engaged in “casual, informal

and unregulated labour” to generate cash income for their household (Sara Worku 2007: 9). It is a contrasting result with the time budget study conducted in late 1980's<sup>3</sup> under the *Derg* regime, which showed that clear gender division of labour. A large portion of women's labour time had been dedicated to household chores, not to other economic activities, such as agricultural production (Dejene 1995: 27).

### **1-2 Women's marriage and education as important life events**

Marriage is as important an event for the early transition to adulthood as childbearing (Mensch, Singh and Casterline 2005:3; Grant and Furstenberg 2007:118; Van de Walle 1993; Yabiku 2004:561; Tambashe and Shapiro 1996: 1029). Women go to form economically independent households away from their natal households, and they live in different places, especially under the custom of patrilocal marriage.

Education has been widely considered as an influential factor regarding the age people marry because the expansion of mass education has contributed to the trend in late marriages in industrialized countries (Grant and Furstenberg 2007), although the effect of the expansion of education on the marriage age in developing countries has been mixed, due probably in part to the heterogeneity of young people, which blurs this effect (Yabiku 2004; Mensch, Singh and Casterline 2005). However, education is still one of the most important factors that affect the marriage age, together with urbanisation , the decline in arranged marriages, the cost of a marriage (the dowry and marriage markets), and changing laws and norms (Mensch, Singh and Casterline 2005).

Following on from the above discussion about the relationship between education and marriage, it is hypothesised that the rapid educational expansion recently experienced in rural Ethiopia might influence decision-making about young women's marriages and other factors in rural

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<sup>3</sup> The given data indicates that the research was conducted around 1987, but no specific year and date were given in the paper.

transformation.

In this section, literature related to marriage and the education of women in rural Ethiopia is examined to locate the research gap in the on-going rural transformation through a comparison with the past circumstances surrounding these women. The literature which analysed women's marital and educational condition a decade ago describes the custom of girls getting married in marriages arranged by their parents and poor educational opportunities for girls in rural areas.

### **1) Marriage**

Rural studies related to young women in rural Ethiopia have not focused on their economic activities, but have mainly focused on the custom of early female marriage from the sociological, educational and medical points of view (Haile 1994: 35; Berihun and Aspen 2010). Haile (1994: 35) discerned three issues behind the early marriage age for women. First, young wives are in a position that is subordinate to their senior husbands and parents-in-law without support from their natal families as patrilocal marriage is common, especially in northern Ethiopia, such as Amhara and Tigray Regions. Second, in many cases they lose further educational opportunities after marriage as they are expected to contribute household chores and agricultural activities. Thirdly, they are exposed to physical danger during pregnancy and childbirth at a very early age.

In literature related to marriage in Ethiopia (Pankhurst 1992; Tilson and Larsen 2000), the high divorce rate has also been discussed, especially among the Amhara people. Tilson and Larsen (2000) attributed this high rate to the custom of early marriage because their research showed that there is a higher divorce rate among women who got married at less than 15 years old than for women who got married after that age<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Although Pankhurst emphasizes women's empowered position because in many cases women showed their initiative in deciding to divorce as well as men, it is difficult to conclude that the high divorce rate is probably attributable to women's agency, due to a lack of specific data. However, as Tilson and Larsen (2000) also

It must be noted that the legal age of marriage has been raised to 18 years old from 15 years old in 2005. The law has become recognized by the local people although the tradition of early marriage are not fully prevented by the law (USAID 2008)

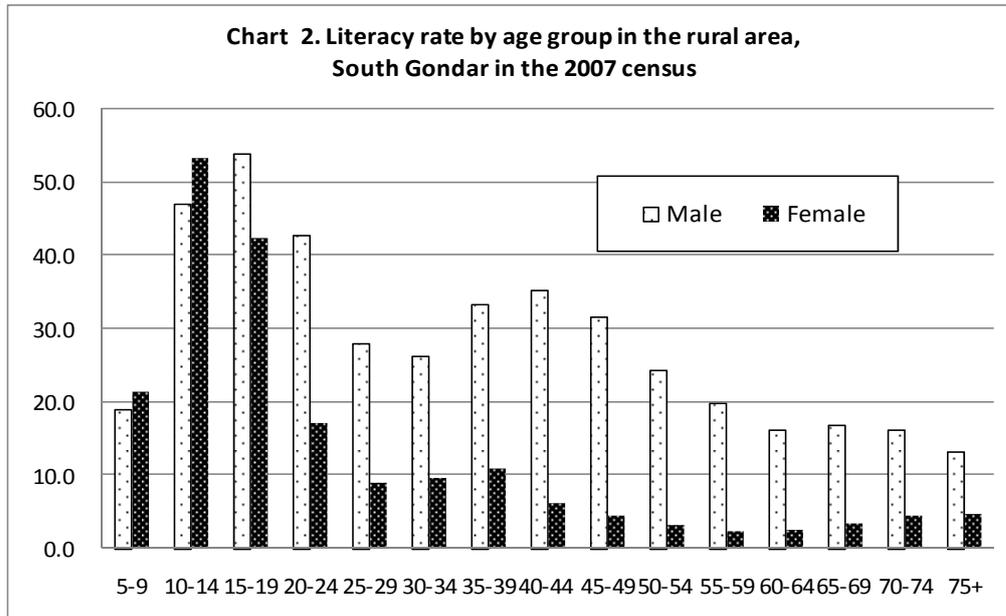
## **2) Education**

The research area experienced educational expansion like other areas in Ethiopia under the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), which is the Ethiopian government's policy for education. ESDP aims at improving gross primary education enrolment rate with geographical and gender equity (Lasonen, Kemppainen and Raheem 2005: 20). The program includes building schools at remote areas, shorter school days and free education until grade 10 (Lasonen, Kemppainen and Raheem 2005: 20). Although the ESDP was launched in 1997, the program has been in full operation since 2002 after the end of the war against Eritrea (1998-2000) (Yamada 2005) and ESDP IV has been currently under operation (MoFED 2010).

The 2007 census shows that women aged 10-14 recorded the highest literacy rate at 53.3%, followed by 42.5% for women aged 15-19, and then the literacy rate dropped drastically in rural areas in the South Gondar zone where the research area is located (Office of the Population Census Commission n.d.) (Chart 2). The literacy rate has significantly increased to 27.3% since the 1984 Census because only 7.4% of women aged 10 and over were literate in rural areas in the South Gondar Zone in 1994 (Office of the Population and Housing Census Commission 1998: 73).

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explained, divorce has been widely accepted by Amhara society and it is easy to remarry.



Source: Office of the Population Census Commission (n.d.)

However, there are discussions about the poor quality of education, which has not been able to catch up with the rapid educational expansion. The report “Ethiopia: 2010 MDGs Report” (MoFED 2010) is concerned that “the overall increase in the enrollment ratios though seems to come at the expense of educational quality” (pp.14-15) because the completion rate for elementary school was low at 74% for grade 1-4 and 46% for grade 5-8, when compared to the increasing rate of enrollment (MoFED 2010: 15).

Yisak (2010) attributed the low completion rate to various aspects of poverty within students’ households. He reported that poverty forced children to work for their households while attending school, resulting in low achievement, a high drop-out rate and later entry into school. His long-term study about the transition in children’s aspirations for education and occupations indicated that rural children faced educational barriers at earlier stages than children in urban areas because their aspirations dropped more rapidly than did those of urban children.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Data Collection**

I conducted a survey and in-depth interviews, both of which covered women aged 15-29. Given the early age of marriage, young women have tended to be categorized into mothers or wives, not as an age group, such as, for instance, 15-29 years old. The heterogeneity of young women is anticipated, considering the discussions about the process of rural livelihood diversification, although these discussions do not pay specific attention to young women's livelihoods. They analyzed the effects of livelihood diversification which has been accompanied with de-agrarianisation among rural households (Ellis 2000; Barrett, Reardon and Webb 2001; Akram-Lodhi and Kay 2009; Lanjouw and Lanjouw 2001; Start 2001: 496).

The specific research location is a market area surrounded by rural villages in the South Gondar zone in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. There are two main reasons why I chose this area. First, the situation of women in the market town provides the principal motivation behind my research together with how the women are changing their economic activities from farm activities to non-farm activities and move to new places due to their poverty. Second, I have conducted several pieces of research in this area over the past 13 years. These research experiences and my long-term relationships with the people in the area have given me an historical perspective on the changes that are taking place.

The initial objective of the survey is to understand young women's daily lives under rural transformation in the research area so that the results can be utilized for purposeful sample selection for the in-depth interviews that follow. The research investigated their daily lives from two aspects; first, their economic activities, and second, their life courses in areas such as education, marriage, and the time/location when/where they start their economic activities.

The 52 participants were randomly selected from a list of households that have young women aged 15-29, as of 2011. There were 145 households on the list, which referred to the door-to-door research results for the Ethiopia Trachoma Control Program that was conducted by health workers in 2008/09 (2001 Ethiopian Calendar<sup>5</sup>). The data were provided by the *qebele*<sup>6</sup> administrative office in the market town. On principle, I interviewed the eldest young women per household who were available at the time of my visit or my research assistant's visit to the house because background information about household members overlapped, and I put priority on a coverage of households rather than on a coverage of young women.

In-depth interviews aim to elucidate complex factors that affect and shape women's daily lives and their life courses. The interviews were critical because a survey cannot clearly explain cause and effect or the delicate changes in social relationships that are difficult to collect in closed questions. The interviews were based on the women's experiences at crucial points in their lives. These experiences affect their economic activities, such as continuing or discontinuing their education, getting jobs, and marriage/divorce.

The interviews were conducted with 26 young women, aged 15-29. The young women were purposely selected from the participants of the quantitative survey. Their profiles are initially categorized into two types; economically dependent on their parents or independent. Then they were further divided into four types; students, single women living with their parents who were not students in the economically dependent group, and married women and single household heads in the economically independent group. The latter means that they are independent from their natal households. The composition of the interviewee groups is shown in

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<sup>5</sup> The Ethiopian year starts on September 11th and 7 or 8 years behind the Gregorian calendar. For Example, 11 September, 2012 is 1st of 1st month (Meskerem), 2005. It is different from the Ethiopian fiscal year.

<sup>6</sup> The administrative divisions have four levels, namely region, zone, *woreda*, *qebele*, in decreasing order by size.

Table 1.

**Table 1. Composition of in-depth interviewees**

Economic status	Economically dependent on their parents		Economically independent from their parents		Total
Other attributes	Students	Single women	Housewives	Single household heads*	
[n]	5	6	7	8	26

\*This includes a woman who was legally married but had not received economic assistance from her husband who had migrated to southern Ethiopia (*Wallaga*).

## 2.2 Data Analysis

To elucidate the complex transformation of young women’s daily lives, this research utilized a mixed methods approach with a survey and in-depth interviews. Mixed methods research is a relatively new research methodology that aims to combine quantitative and qualitative methods (Bryman 2008: 603-604; Creswell and Plano Clark 2007: 1; Bergman 2008: 1). I have adopted the Explanatory Design approach<sup>7</sup>. The interviews utilize the initial survey data for a purposeful sampling for the selection of the interviewees and aim to help in the analysis of new findings from the survey. However, the survey is not confined to sample selection, but it also provides indispensable data for understanding the overall picture of young women’s daily lives. While the survey is a useful method for elucidating economic and social status and the activities of young women, in-depth interviews make it possible to examine the complex interactions between economic activities and social relationships at the individual level.

## 3. Survey results: profiles of young women and their households

### 3-1 Young women’s economic profiles

The survey indicated the heterogeneity of young women aged 15-29. The

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed explanation of the classification of mixed methods, please refer to Creswell and Plano Clark (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007)

economic activities of the young women can be categorized by their economic relationship with natal households into two types; young women who are dependent on their parents and young women forming households that are independent of their natal households.

Among the former are students who were mainly engaged in study, and single women who had completed their school or had returned to their natal households due to divorce and were living with their parents. The latter group, the women who are economically independent of their natal households, can also be classified into two: wives who are economically dependent on their husbands though some of them earned a cash income to some extent, and single household heads who are the main cash earners in their households.

**Table 2: Composition of Survey Participants**

Economic status	Economically dependent on their parents		Economically independent of their parents		Total
Other attributes	Students	Single women	Housewives	Single household heads	
[n]	14	13	17	8	52
%	27%	25%	33%	15%	100%

The biggest group among the 52 research participants consisted of wives at 33% (17 people), then students at 27% (14), single women who are dependent on their parents at 25% (13), and female household heads at 15% (8) <sup>8</sup> (Table 2)

#### 1) Students

Their ages range from 15 to 22 years old. They are financially dependent on

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<sup>8</sup> The female household heads include a woman who lived apart from her husband who had migrated to Southern Ethiopia but had never sent remittances to her although he contacted her intermittently on the phone.

their parents. Their priority is to study, rather than to make an economic contribution or support their domestic household. Students who study at higher than the 8<sup>th</sup> grade lived at a *woreda* town 15 kilometres away from the research area which has the nearest school for the 9-12<sup>th</sup> grades. They live apart from their natal households and regularly come back to their hometown every weekend and for long vacations. Most of them helped their mothers' economic activities at the Saturday market.

### 2) Single women

Their ages also range from 15 to 22 years old and financially dependent on their parents. They are not students and live in the research area with their parents. They do not have their own cash income and depend on their parents and siblings, although they are engaged in household chores or support their parents' cash income activities, such as mothers' income activities on the market days of Tuesday and Saturday. All of them have completed school up to at least the 9<sup>th</sup> grade except two divorced Muslim women living with their parents; one completed 7<sup>th</sup> and another received no education.

### 3) Housewives

Most wives, except mothers who have infants, engage in cash income activities. Their cash incomes are lower than those gained by their husbands. They engage in various types of income generating activities. Mothers who have infants claimed that they did not have time to engage in cash income activities due to childcare.

There are differences of religion; 81% are Orthodox Christians and 19% are Muslims among the research participants. Muslim women have limited economic activities due to the religious restrictions posed by the Muslims themselves and by the Orthodox Christians, who are the majority in the research area. Interviewees claim that Muslim women cannot engage in selling alcohol and other drinks and foods due to their religious restriction, and they cannot be hired by Christian farmers for daily labour, which is a

common job for Christian women because the farmers do not want to hire Muslim women for their agricultural activities seemingly due to religious reason by Christians though the reason was not clarified. Muslim women often engage in petty trading in, for instance, coffee, *barbare* (red pepper), and eggs.

Orthodox Christian women run local beer bars or teahouses or engage in daily labour for agricultural activities and non-farm daily labour. While the daily labour for agricultural activities has seasonal fluctuation, non-farm daily labour is available on a contract basis, such as laundry and baking *injera*, which is the main staple food, and in petty trading. Some wives also co-work with their husbands, such as hand sewing and ironing customer's clothes for orders, which their husbands have taken in as tailors, and selling shoes which husbands get from a wholesaler in Estie town. These wives explained that they helped their husbands and receive no money from them.

#### 4) Single household heads

Their cash income activities are the same as those for wives. The biggest difference is that female household heads sometimes received financial support from their boyfriends or lovers, although this support is not constant but short-term.

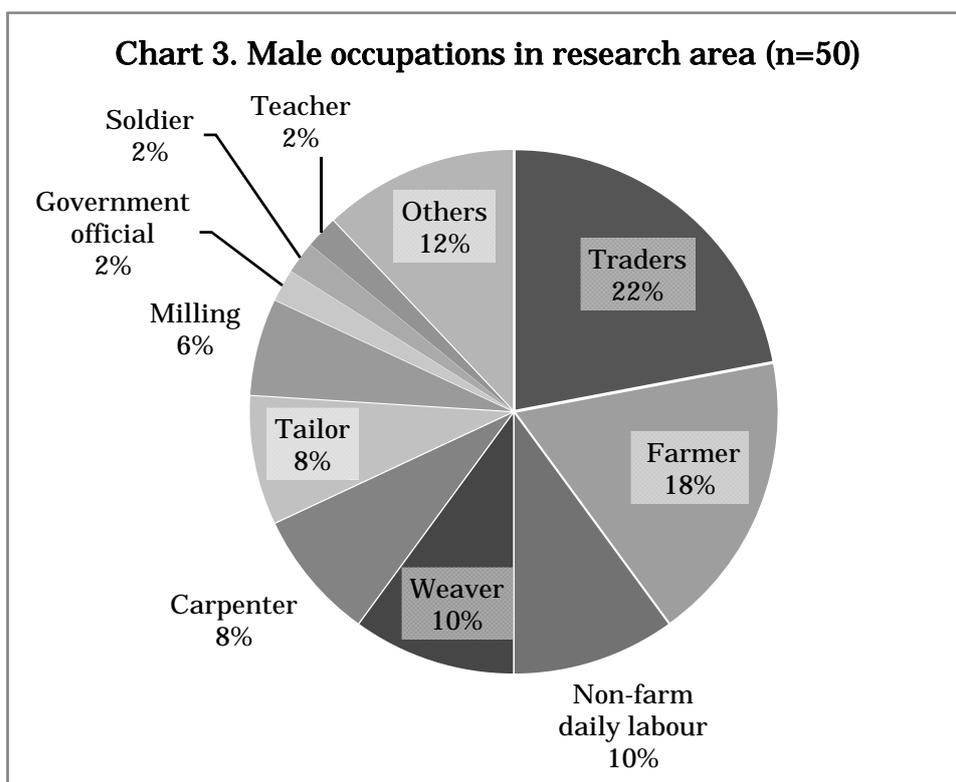
### **3-2 Household profiles**

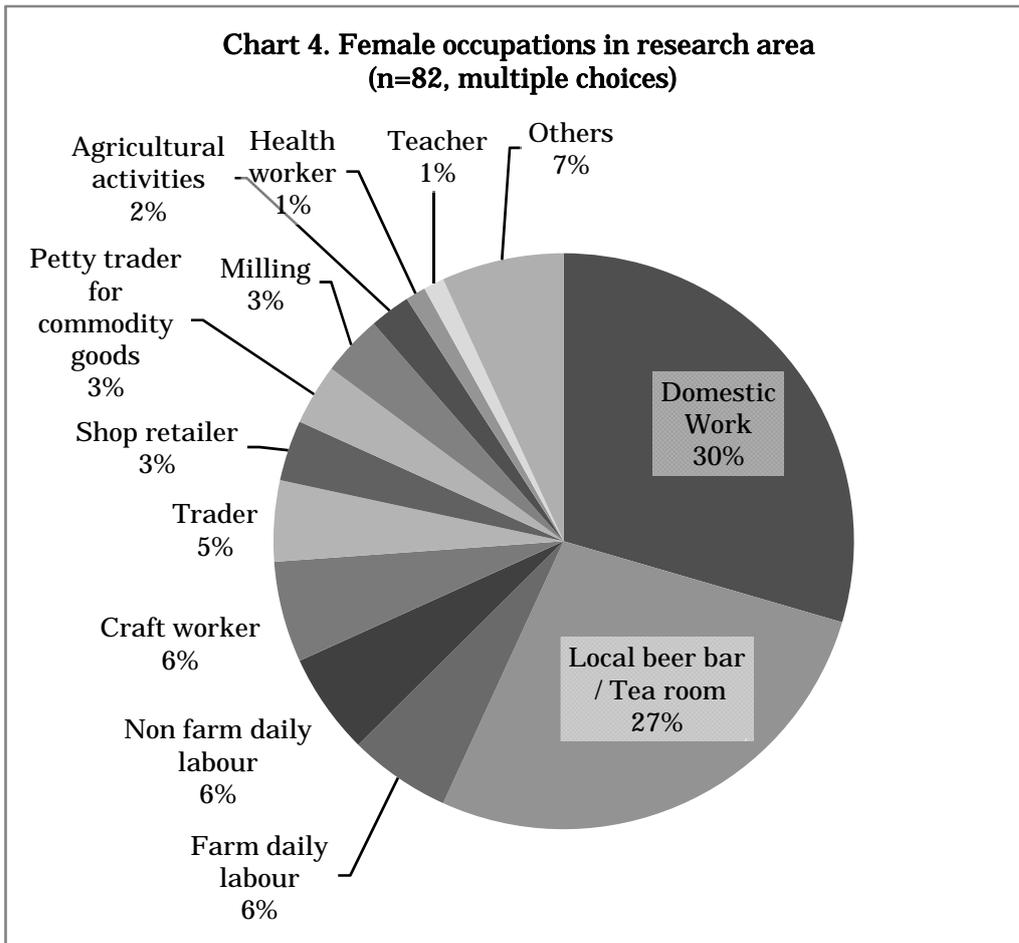
Most households are nuclear families because three generations rarely live together. No grandparents live together with dependents' households, except for one who is living with their granddaughter. No wives live together with their parents-in-law though some of them live close by. On the other hand, a half of women at the head of single-headed households lived with their mothers or grandmothers as 3 out of 8 lived with their mother or one grandmother.

Most of young women's siblings who are engaged in economic activities live

separately from their parents. Only 5 out of the 27 young women, who are economically dependent on and living with their parents, have siblings who independently engage in economic activities living with their parents. The majority of siblings who are independent of their parents live separately from their parents, mostly in the towns or cities.

The types of economic activities in the research area and in the areas to which siblings migrate differ between men and women as the following charts indicate (Chart 3-6). Although the Charts mixed interviewees' information with indirect information about their household members provided by interviewees, these data indicate the differences in the types of jobs between research area and other areas, mostly in urban cities and receiving areas of seasonal labours.





In the migration areas, the biggest occupation, which absorbs both migrant men and women, is work related to the government, such as in administration or as teachers or soldiers, all at 22%. For men, the second biggest occupation is as seasonal labourers at 14% and the third is in shop retail at 10%. There seems to be a dichotomy between occupations requiring higher educational profiles and ones that do not require higher educational profiles. Regarding women, except for 30% of the migrant women engaged in domestic work as housewives, the occupational patterns are similar to those of men. The biggest cash earning occupations are related to the government, such as teachers and government officials at 22%, followed by non-farm labour and shop retail both at 11%.

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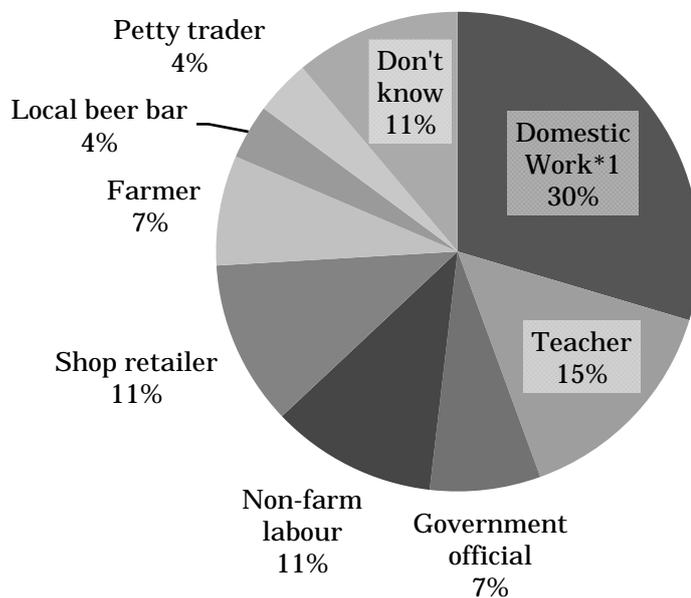
The survey shows that household members, especially interviewees' siblings, who are engaged in economic activities, mostly live in different places from their parents. Although some of them send remittances to households, the households do not build elaborated mutual support system among household members because as only limited number of siblings sends remittances to natal households.

In Charts 5 and 6, there is a reply "don't know" for both the interviewees' brothers and sisters at 16% and 11% respectively. This indicates that their households have not heard from them recently, implying that there is no financial relationship between them.

**Chart 5. Migrat male occupations (n=50)**



**Chart 6 . Migrat female occupations (n=27)**



\* All except one (housemaid) are assumed as housewives . Although they might engage in economic activities, data is not available.

## 4. In-depth interview results

### 4-1 Rapid educational expansion

The educational policy by the government promotes educational opportunities for girls through building more elementary schools in remote areas. The initial two phase of Education Sector Development Program (1997/98-2004/05) focused on increasing enrolment of elementary schools by constructing new school buildings. More than 6000 primary school had been built during these phases (ESDP-I, II), The number of primary schools increased 70.1% from the 1996/97 (Ministry of Education 2005: 7).

The *qebele* where the research area is located also enjoyed improved educational opportunities through increasing number of primary schools and higher grade which schools cover. All of the three agricultural villages surrounding the research area have elementary schools which had been newly built although they teach only up to 4th grade. A school in the market area was graded up from up to 6th to 8th grade and the nearest woreda town has also upgraded from up to 10th to up to 12th grade in the last 15 years.

The relationship between daughters and parents seems to encourage educational investment in young women, as parents expect financial support from their daughters as well as their sons. They explained the reasons for the importance of education as 1) education has provided useful knowledge for them, and 2) higher educational qualifications would provide employment opportunities in government jobs or in urban non-farm jobs.

However, this kind of recognition concerning education seems to be a recent phenomenon both for themselves and their parents if we look at the interviews with young women in their late 20's about their educational experiences. They found differences in their parents' attitudes toward education for themselves and their younger sisters. While they got married in their early teens, their young sisters have been encouraged to continue their education by their parents. Some of them complained that the

ignorance of their parents about education when the interviewees left school resulted in their missing employment opportunities, especially in government office.

One female single household head (research # 51) quitted her school when she was in the 6th grade because her mother said that her father who was her mother's lover and living with his legitimate wife would not help with her education and the interviewee had no money to buy her notebooks to continue her education.

She [her mother] said that “No [to her education]. [You studied] enough. Don't study because your study until today is enough, etc, etc..... (#51)

However, now her little sister has been encouraged to study more by her mother and half-brothers by a different father whom her mother had divorced previously. Now her little sister is a 12th grade student studying in the capital, Addis Ababa, and living with her half-brother. The interviewee complained that she was the only child who did not get enough education. When she was asked why such a difference in education had occurred between her and her little sister, she said,

In her case, her brothers back her up and give full support and say, “Keep it up! Keep it up!” and have her study. Only I do not have “Keep it up!” My mother said “Give it up” only to me. I was left out. Just [I was] left out. Left out. (#51)

A 25-year-old wife (#23) got married when she was 15 years old and left school in the 3rd grade. She tried to keep up her education after her marriage but gave up when she had a baby. Now her little sister is 15 years old and a 5th grade student.

She [My little sister] will not marry. The current age is not to marry. A very young child today is not going to marry.....It is also forbidden and punished by law..... [My parents] said “education is useful” (#23).

She explained the reason why her parents had changed their attitude toward girl's education by saying that “they did not understand education at that time.”

Most of them talked positively about education because they claimed that they gained useful knowledge. Although they did not explain the specific contents of their knowledge which they gained and it is difficult to differentiate their own thoughts from the government's promotion of education, experiences in studying for a higher education strongly influenced their social norms. This is not only because of the higher education itself, but also because of their study experiences with other students from an urban area. The cultural mix with other students coming from different places occurred because the research area does not have schools beyond the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and they have to live in the *woreda* town.

Education and their school lives seem to change their cultural values and provide opportunities for students to protect their own rights, especially about marriage. One interviewee said that she had not known that women did not have to get married immediately after leaving school until she went to school in Estie (#40)<sup>9</sup>. Another interviewee said that she was in the process of understanding what her friends who came from the *woreda* town were talking about because they talk about widespread topics about their private lives which the interviewee has not thought before coming to school (#35). She had been exposed to the different cultural norms at school, which otherwise she would not encounter.

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<sup>9</sup> The tape recorder failed to record this girl (research #40). This is based on my field notes.

An interviewee (#25) talked about how her little sister escaped from a marriage arranged by their parents when she was younger than the minimum legal marriage age which is 18 years old. Her sister asked teachers and the local government to help her avoid the marriage without her consent. Interviewee's sister's case is in contrast to the interviewee who got married when she was a 3<sup>rd</sup> year elementary student without her consent and was forced to leave school.

#### **4-2 Children who support parents**

##### **1) Support for household chores**

In the research area, nuclear households are typical because no young couples live with their natal households though a few couples live close by. Consequently no sisters-in-law of young women, who are the brothers' wives, live with their natal households. It indicates the change in custom of early marriage as early marriage is partly justified by expected contribution by daughters-in-law to household chores as mentioned earlier (Haile 1994: 35). Instead, all of the interviewees who are economically dependent on parents provided support as being engaged in household chores, and sometimes help their parents' economic activities.

As the survey shows, most of their brothers and sisters have left their households to get jobs and some got married in the places where they found work. Physical support for their parents is the responsibility of the daughters, mostly the youngest daughter rather than the daughters-in-law. When I asked who, among her and her siblings, had the responsibility for supporting her widowed mother, an 18 year old girl (# 31), who is the youngest sister with three big brothers and three big sisters, said that "I am responsible because I am the last one who remains,". Her meaning of "support" is not financial support, but rather support for domestic chores and her mother's job as a tearoom owner though it does not mean that she has to take care of her mother until the end. She can pass the responsibility on to her younger female relative who lives in the remote area. She explained that there are daughters of her mother's sisters, and her mother

will bring them from rural places in the future.

## 2) Financial support

Family ties between parents and children who are independent from their parents are not strong, especially in terms of financial support though some of the independent children financially support their parents. In the survey and interviews, only one interviewee whose husband is a *qebele* administrator claimed that her husband send remittances to his family who live in the Eastern part of Ethiopia while the others did not regularly give financial support to their parents. Some of interviewees mentioned their brothers and/or sisters who work in urban areas or work as government officials send remittances to their parents.

When all the children are engaged in non-farm activities, gender differences have less meaning. Some interviewees, especially those who have received a higher education at 8th grade and above, tend to claim that the person who earned enough cash should financially support their parents and that when all the siblings earned money, they should support their parents in accordance with their income and regardless of gender. The girl already mentioned as the youngest sister (#31) claimed that “we [all children] will help her [our mother] equally.”

An 18-year old girl (#35) who is a 10th grade student had no thoughts about supporting her divorced mother in the future. She just said that “older children” will help her. She claimed that her big sister who is 20 years old and working as a teacher would come back to their household and financially support their mother. Her mother also expected this. A 23-year-old brother who is a government official in a different place also financially supports their mother.

However, they also recognized the difficulties in continuing with their financial support after they got married, regardless of gender. One woman (#30) explained the dilemma of her brother who was a driver in Bahir Dar,

which is the regional Capital, had not got married and was sending remittances to his parents.

As a son's obligation, [my brother] helps with around 100 birr out of his 500 birr salary.....He thinks about his marriage. He said [if he would get married,] he cannot help (his parents) because he [will] help his own family..Parents agreed with the idea of his marriage.... [But also] they want his help(#30).

#### **4-3 Young women's aspirations concerning marriage**

Interviews with single women who were dependent on their parents indicated that they had not seemed to think about their marriage seriously, yet some of them expected arranged marriages in the end, or aspired to have a love marriage after completing their higher education and getting a job in an urban area.

Especially students tend to put a priority on their studies and on getting good jobs rather than on getting married. One girl who had completed 12<sup>th</sup> grade and passed the exam for university (#6) said, "I keep studying and then I will finish my education. Until then [I will form] no family. After that..... After that I want to marry".

#### **4-4 Young women independent from natal households in their late 20's**

In the research area, all the women who participated in the survey aged 24-29 are economically independent from their natal households. There are two types: 1) wives and 2) single household heads. Considering that the survey results for their siblings indicate that there are various life courses open for young women, forming their own households in the research area is only one pattern for them.

##### **1) Marriage**

There are two types of marriage in the research area: 1) marriage with an

unknown person, arranged by their parents (n=[4]), 2) marriage based on an agreement between the wife and husband beforehand ([3]). In the first case, the women migrated to the research area to get married with their husbands. In both cases, 6 out of the 7 women interviewed got married between 10 and 15 years old. The woman who got married at 19 years old might be an exceptional case of a couple with high educational profiles, because she got married with her fiancé who was going to graduate from vocational college, because she was pregnant, and left school when she was in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

In most cases, the wives in marriages arranged by their parents were not informed about their marriages until the last minute. 3 out of the 7 wives said that they were taken to the place where her future husband was living and attended their wedding ceremony at short notice or without prior notice. One of them said that she was not told about her marriage, but sensed it one month before because her mother and relatives started preparations for her marriage.

[The marriage] was just sudden. It is enough for marriage. As I was a child, I did not hear [about marriage]. (#4)

[I noticed my marriage programme because] people started preparing *T'alla* (local beer) and making *Injera* (local food), etc... Such close [timing] at most one month or so was left [for marriage]. (#18)

## 2) Wives

Regardless of their being in an arranged or a love marriage, their economic relationships with their husbands were quite similar. Husbands provided the main source of income for the household while wives supplemented this with their incomes earned by managing a teahouse or a local beer bar, or through petty trading. None of them are engaged in daily farm labour and 3 out of the 7 wives did not earn any cash income. These three said that they

could not find the time to do daily labour or engage in cash income activities due to childcare and domestic chores. Childcare not only physically but also emotionally hampers their economic activities. One mother told me that she gave up going to school despite her husband's agreement about going to school because she could not trust anyone to take care of her baby (#32).

It is the same situation [even if her neighbour offered to help her with child care]. I would say that she would make me really worried about my child. (#32)

While husbands were making the final decision about the consumption of his income, all the wives claimed that they provided appropriate amount of money based on their wives' requests when purchasing commodities. However, there is some negotiation between them about items of purchase. Wives' incomes in most cases are entrusted to their decision, although they use their money mostly for petty commodities, such as eggs, soap, children's notebooks, and clothes. These consumption patterns were also found in the survey.

When food is necessary, when necessary.....I will ask him [to give money]..... I tell him [that I need] onions. At markets every Saturday, I will ask him for money for onions. I buy coffee, and so on, once a month. (#5, love marriage)

At this point if I say [to my husband] "I will buy [it] so give me money", he will not give [money]. Why? Because He can [say no] if he does not want the goods, or [it is] an unnecessary expense. Here if [the woman] says [her husband] buys everything, it is a lie. But necessary expenses and essential goods are unavoidable, so he will give [money]. But there is a person who does not give [money] to his wife by nature. (#53, love marriage)

He [my husband] buys *T'eff* (main staple in the research area) and I buy women's expenses..... [Regarding the decision-making for household spending] He is..... As I am working all the time, I can [buy]. He does not care about small things. That means minor things. (#25, arranged marriage)

[In response to the question "What if your husband would say to you to buy children's clothes by yourself?"]

I will say [to him], "I cannot buy. Buy [clothes] by yourself. (#25, arranged marriage)

They do not make explicit complaints about their married life. However, this does not mean that they are completely satisfied with their marriage. One Muslim wife who got married at 13 years old said that she was not able to find one good thing except respect as a wife and having children, although she said she had no complaint about her economic situation or her relationship with her husband (#30).

As there is no change (in my life), she (her little sister) does not have to get married..... (#30)

[In answer to the question "Is there anything good about marriage?"]

No, there isn't. ...That means that now I have only one friend [here]. ...Several became students....The relationship is broken. (#30)

The only good thing is the title [as a wife] from our marriage. ....Another good thing is [to have] a child. The child makes me happy. (#30)

### 3) Single household heads

There were various ways in which the interviewees became a female household head (FHH) although marital status before becoming a female household head is a signpost in their life course, whether they are divorced or have never married. Of note, two out of the 5 divorcees in the survey did not form their own households after divorce and went back to their natal households. They currently engage in domestic chores for the households. They are excluded from our analysis in this section.

Considering that marriage usually requires a certain amount of assets or money as a marriage gift from both the wife's side of the family and the husband's<sup>10</sup>, it can be assumed that divorcees have a relatively wealthier household background than never married single women. However, as there are a number of limited choices for economic activity in the research area, there are no big differences in economic activity between the two groups. All of them have engaged in multiple economic activities, such as running a local beer bar, farm/non-farm daily labour, petty trading, and *injera* basket making.

It is difficult to get accurate information about their income and wealth level because their income sources are multiple. While they might be much more eager to generate cash income by themselves than wives who rely on husband, less adult within households might reduce total income of household. Another problem to measure their income level is that some of single household heads received support through extramarital relationship which is socially disrespected. In the interviews, some interviewees explained that they have or had relationships with men and received money as concubines or prostitutes, regardless of their past marital history. However, such extramarital relationships are short-lived and in many cases ended when they had babies.

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<sup>10</sup> Based on my research. The past literature also explains the marriage custom of the Amhara people with both husbands and wives bringing equal assets or money to their newly established households (Women's Affairs Office and World Bank 1998: 15; Hoben 1973: 59) .

One woman (#33) had two children with different men. She had the experience of both men stopping their support after she had their babies.

He [her first child's father] lives in a rural area. [Now] he did not support me at all. He did not support me, so he did not bring [support] for a long time and did not help me. ....He came to [my tea house] at market day. .... After beginning to sell tea, we knew each other. That's enough. ....I know (he had a wife)..... [This is] like love....After having a baby, he did not meet me..... Really troublesome. (#33)

First, he [her second child's father] seemed to be [good] enough. ....He supported us for my first child ....So I thought he would support us if I had his baby. But after that, he quitted! ..... Now, I will not give birth. I bring up only these children. God gave me help... (#33)

However, men's behaviour toward their love children varies. For example, one interviewee's half sister was taken on by her father and was living with her and her family though she was the child of a housemaid of her father's family house. The half-sister also received an education equal to the interviewee. (#24)

As far as examining the daily lives of wives and single-headed households, it is difficult to predict whether the young women in their early 20's at present will adopt the same life course as their seniors. The process of becoming wives or of being a single woman at the head of a household seems to have already been different from the women in their early 20's in terms of the latter's educational opportunities and the life courses to which they aspire because interviewees in their early 20's expressed their aspiration to leave the market place for getting jobs in big cities. Besides,

there is concern about the economic abilities of young men to sustain their households because most young men have left the local market place for employment opportunities and gone to other areas where employment opportunities are better than the research area.

### **Conclusion**

The central result of this research is a complex interaction between the livelihood diversification of households and rapid educational expansion. There are possibilities for young women to financially support parents unlike the past when young women were married off to the other households. This implies a change in the power relationships between young women and their parents who expect financial support from daughters as well as sons. For example, interviews with single women living with parents imply decision making of their marriage has been changing to more emphasis on agreement from interviewees than before.

As it has been commonly understood that higher education provides income opportunities for women as well as for men, young women hope to have a higher education to improve their future income opportunities. Besides, their parents also encourage them to receive a higher education. Although this research did not conduct interviews with the young women's parents, interviews with the young women indicate that parents expect them to contribute income to their households. Young women are also willing to send remittances to their natal households if they find jobs after completing a higher degree of education, such as at a university or a vocational collage.

The data of their siblings showed that the current status of their siblings affect interviewees' life courses, such as education, marriage, and type and place of their economic activities. While the members of households that mainly depend on non-farm income engage in various economic activities at different places, many of them manage to support only themselves especially after getting married regardless of gender, or their contact with their parents just ceased after outmigration. Therefore, households have to

produce income contributors one after another since some of them might leave their natal households to build their own households and another might not be able to earn enough to support their parents.

Educational expansion has affected the course of women's lives. First, educational expansion has increased employment opportunities for young women, especially for government related jobs though it is difficult to measure the actual impact of educational expansion on private employment opportunities for young women as educational expansion has just started in recent years in the research area. Second, considering the long tradition of early marriage among the Amhara people, who are the majority in the research area (Berihun and Aspen 2010; Haile 1994; Tilson and Larsen 2000; Pankhurst 1992), a longer education has physically delayed their entry into the marriage market and changed young women's life courses to a certain extent.

The changes in young women's economic roles in their natal households seem to be a new phenomenon in rural Ethiopia where sons have inherited land from their parents and supported them living next to their houses, while daughters have been sent off to different villages due to the conventional custom of patrilocal marriage in the research area. Interviewees explained that their sisters have sent remittances to their parents like their sons do if they have surplus income. They also commented that they are willing to support their parents if they get a cash income by migrating to urban areas.

The survey results and interviews indicated that quite a lot of interviewees' siblings have left their natal households and never or occasionally send remittances to their parents. Therefore they need their daughters' support to diversify their risks of losing sources of cash income from their children. The role and importance of daughters in households has been changing in rural households in Ethiopia.

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\*Ethiopian names are written in order of the author's name and father's name.

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