

Youth Perspectives on Migration, Poverty and the Precarious Future of Farming in Rural Ethiopia

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Youth Migration and Farming

Push Factors

- Erratic rainfall
- Poor soil
- Volatile market prices
- Declining land sizes
- Population growth

(Rahmato, 2007; Cochrane et al., 2019)

Pull Factors

- Availability of education and other services
- Better paying and higher status jobs

Neoliberalism and trade globalization benefit urban areas leads to increased migration (Bernstein, 2010)

Youth Migration and Farming in Ethiopia

Ethiopia has lower urban population (below 20%)

Urbanization – 3.8% to 5.4%
(triple over next 20 years)

Smallholder farmers make up 90%
- most are rain fed

Although 8% to 12% annual GDP
growth, malnutrition and chronic
poverty has been highest in rural
areas for over a decade



Our Study

Migration literature tends to focus on push factors, not decisions made by youth

Development discourse tends to focus on pull factors, blaming young people (Sumberg and Okali, 2013)

Goal – To understand how gender, class, location and age help to explain why youth migrate out

and migration impacts on farming livelihoods and access to food in a rural area of southern Ethiopia.



Methodology – Participatory Mixed Research

- Focus groups that informed the,
- Household Survey ($N=450$) and,
- Interviews

Emphasize perspectives of different people

- Skilled / unskilled; Young / old;
Male / female

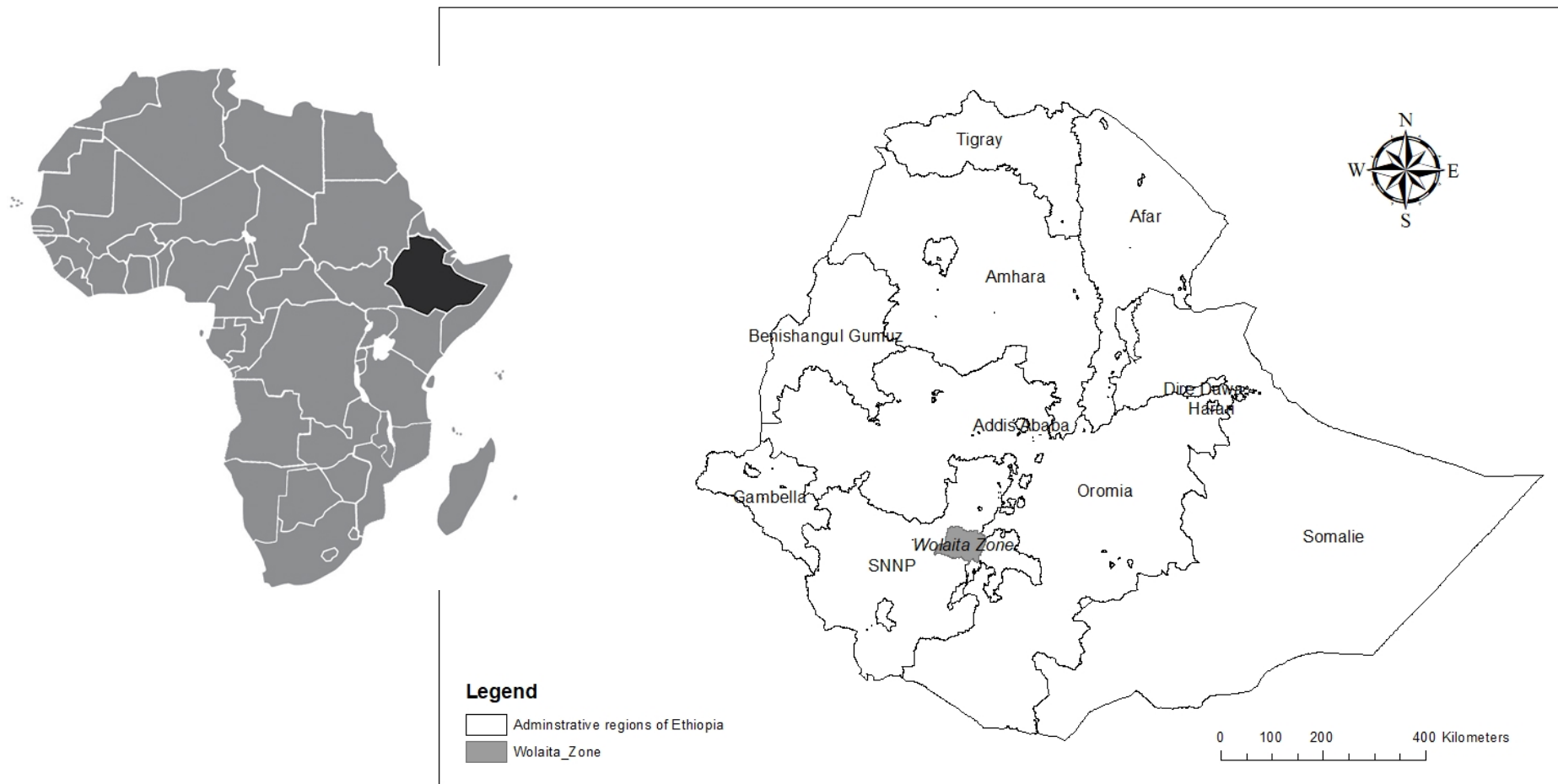
Comparison of different rural communities:

A) Near a town B) Remote area C) with Irrigation



Case Study Context

Wolaita Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region



Findings – Types of Migration

One quarter to one half of households have someone who has migrated

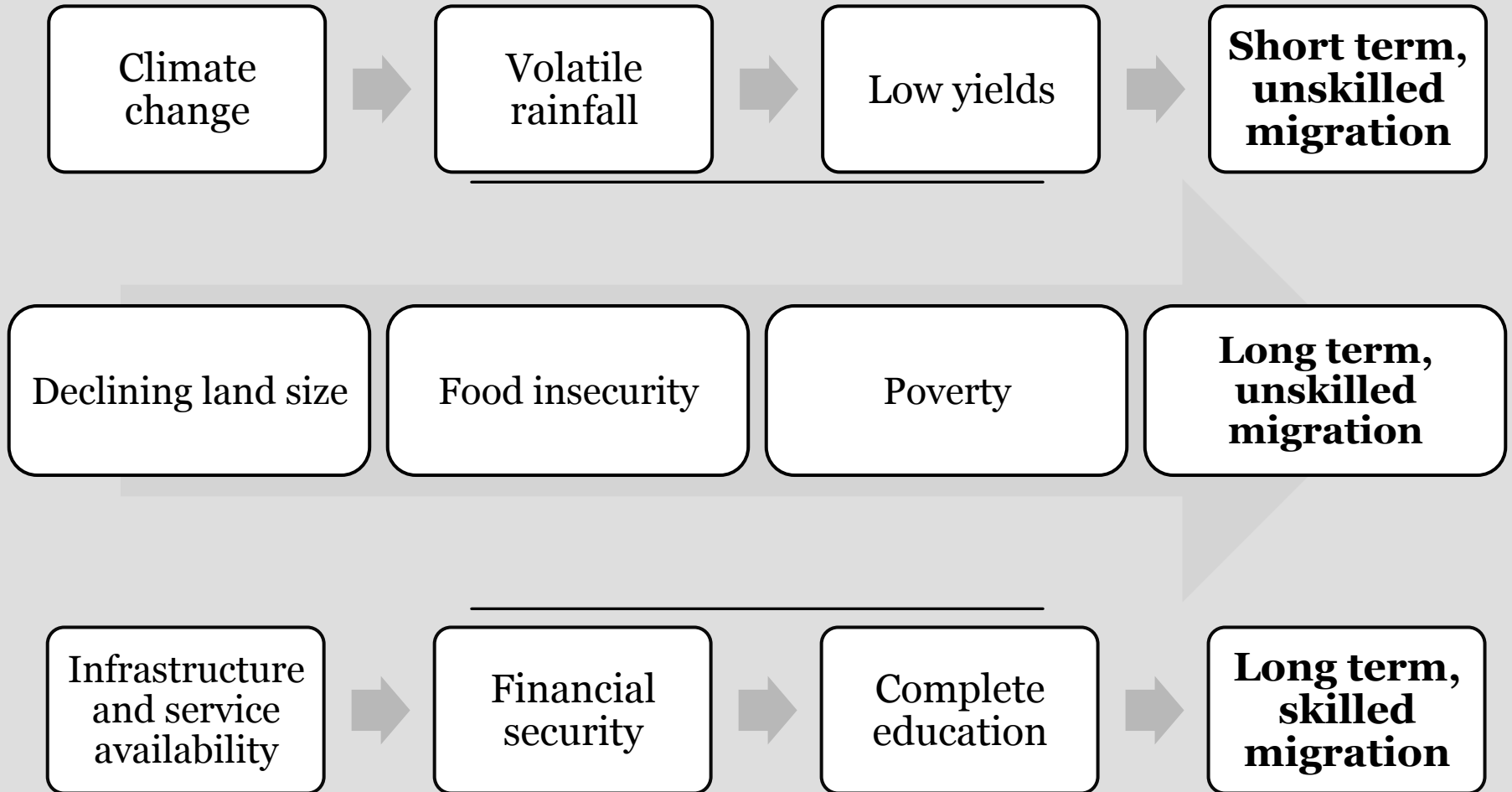
Low wage, unskilled

- Construction (Male)
- Plantation (Male)
- Domestic work (Female)
- Food Service (Female)

Skilled, often permanent

- Government
- Teaching
- Health care

MIGRATION FACTORS



FINDINGS

	Village - Remote	Village – Near Town	Village – Irrigation
% of HH with one or more migrants	50%	28%	35%
% of migrants going for skilled labor	21%	16%	43%
% able to afford to send all children to school	47%	38%	61%
Months of Food Insecurity	4.3	4	3.5
% selling to the market	54%	58%	90%

Findings - Main Factors

Those with **food insecurity** strongly correlated with having more unskilled migrants ($r = 0.84$)

Those with food insecurity was weakly and negatively correlated ($r=-0.13$) with skilled migrants

Land shortage

- Households had only 0.25ha on average but need 0.5ha

Gender Differences

- Women/girls particularly excluded as make up only 3% of land holders & only 6% bequeathing to daughters (Bezu and Holden, 2014)

Findings - Noteworthy

Where there are viable agricultural livelihoods there is less unskilled migration. Greater proportion of skilled migration is due to investment in education



Irrigation Dam

Findings – Life After Migration

Youth who migrate for unskilled labour struggle to meet sufficient basic daily needs.

Poverty and Hunger

- 26 year old female migrant complained of low pay and that employers “*force them to work more hours*”

Gender Differences

- Male youth survive through inconsistent, short term work
- Female youth has more regular positions

Discussion – Impact on Rural Life

Youth migration places **additional burden upon the elderly** to care for children and the farm

Elders left behind:

- *“The elders do not have the capacity to work”*
- *“We do not know what the future will be...we miss their labor [because] it affects our yield.”*

Youth who left:

- *“Us leaving reduced some burden from them because there are less mouths to feed”*

Conclusion

Unskilled migration is not because youth do not want to farm

Choice to leave is a family decision: land and food access
- not all rural areas are the same

Gendered and skills-based differences of migrants
– not all youth are the same

Forced migration- choice stems from both challenges of farming that do not lead to basic food security or surplus

Recommendation—start with rural livelihood development

Thank you – Any Questions?

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