Youth empowerment as an educational incentive in Ethiopian rural areas

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Abstract

With a tremendous demographic boom and the high importance of the youth population, Ethiopia is currently dealing with critical challenges to ensure sustainable development within the country. The recent appointment of Abiy Ahmed as prime minister has brought new hope for Ethiopian liberalisation and the improvement of former political systems. Positively impacting the non-governmental sector, concrete measures taken by the federal government are still lacking whereas time is running on the youth generation. Quality education and enrolment rates in schools remain low which has high consequences on the participation of youths in the labour market. Lacking basic skills, youth are not provided with opportunities and trust that are essential for favouring their self-development. Conducted in parts of Ethiopia’s rural areas, this research aims to understand, discuss and elaborate on different youth empowerment methods for educational incentives to contribute to the overall improvement of youth conditions. In collaboration with local and international stakeholders working on policy and field level in the country, this research provides the reader with a clear understanding of the Ethiopian youth sector situation and the need for improvement in order to ensure meaningful youth participation and empowerment towards inclusive sustainable change. The role of the government has been discussed in extent in order to provide the reader with concrete recommendations for policy-making and other issues related to skills-mismatching, access to resources, training, and data, as well as cross-collaboration between youth and other stakeholders to increase awareness about challenges faced. The study concludes with giving clear guidance on youth empowerment in Ethiopia and future research on the overall topic.

Keywords: Youth participation, Empowerment, Education, Ethiopia, Rural development, Community engagement, Cross-collaboration, Policies and implementation
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Introduction

Tremendous economic growth in Ethiopia averaged around 10.5 percent per year between 2003 and 2017 (UN, 2018) which allowed the government to invest in social services and poverty eradication. This major investment provided inhabitants with state support which remains insufficient in order to improve the situation for the population and, especially the rural ones. Ethiopia has a population growing at a fast rate of 2.3 percent a year (UNDP, 2018) with more than 105 million of inhabitants in 2019. With a very diverse population including more than 80 ethnic groups all over its land, the country counts over 63.4 percent of youth below the age of 24 years old (Cia.gov, 2019). Currently starting its demographic transition that will lead to a massive working age group, the country is facing important poverty, resulting in a relatively low educational level of many children especially in Ethiopia’s rural areas (World Bank, 2019). The country is struggling with an educational bottleneck in terms of school enrolment of children, having an even lower percentage of students enrolled in secondary school (EDHS, 2016). This situation compromises sustainable education providing children with basic knowledge for future employment.

The start of Abiy Ahmed mandate as Ethiopian Prime Minister on the 2nd of April 2018 brought a lot of hope for the local populations and the international community in terms of human development, freedom of expression and liberalisation. Appointed after the resignation of Haile Mariam Dessalegn, previous prime minister of Ethiopia, Abiy Ahmed embodies the novelty as young leader and by being the first prime minister from the Oromo ethnic group. Ahmed shows confidence, hope, resilience, and optimism (Luthans and Avolio, 2003) inspiring most of the Ethiopian population to follow the new achievements and support the hope of all nation. Due to these psychological aspects, the prime minister can be considered as an authentic leader who benefit from self-knowledge, self-regulation, and self-concept (Blanchard, 1985). The president exhibits genuine leadership, convictions and original ideas to reform the country through massive changes for its evolution.

Fast demographic development obliged Ethiopia to create appropriate policies towards sustainable youth development through education. Youth represent a tremendous chance for the country to unleash its potential, anchor its role as major international economic stakeholder and build a new generation of new leaders. Youth empowerment, defined as the processes and experiences that emphasize youth strengths instead of weaknesses and that enable active participation and greater influence in their activity settings (Wiley and Rappaport, 2000), reveals to be an efficient method for Ethiopian youth in such a context. By bringing youth together regardless of origins and social situations, the Ethiopian government could develop mutual understanding among youth coming from different ethnic groups and provide them with personal development skills.

In relation to the change that youth empowerment could bring to foster the sustainable development of the country, inclusive education could be one of the driving forces allowing youth to develop their autonomy and participation in country’s development. Inclusive education allows every child regardless of his or her background and situation to enrol in educational activities. Often excluded due to poor housing conditions and poverty, youth living in rural areas remain aside the educational system. More than 29 percent of the uneducated youth living in rural areas are Not in Education, Employment, Training (NEET), as well as facing employment issues (World Bank, 2017). Considered as a priority by the World Bank, improved basic education in rural areas is crucial to train youth communities to diversify knowledge and non-farming activities in other sectors like industry and services. Indeed, agriculture constitutes the main labour sector in the country with 72 percent of the population being employed in this sector (UNDP, 2013) and the

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1 The Oromo people are one of the most numerous ethnic group located in central and south Ethiopia and represents 34.4 percent of the whole population (Cia.gov, 2019)
diversification of knowledge could be a key determinant for sustainable economic development. Policy reforms and local programs are not sufficient enough to provide a sustainable educational framework for the populations, and the necessity to act is confirmed by all international stakeholders (UNDP, 2018).

Previous research in the field of empowerment has mostly been focusing on adults’ issues and in the western societies’ context looking at participation and social work (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989; Zimmerman, 2000; Rappaport, 2000). The use of empowerment as an educational incentive in this context is also brings a new perspective promoting meaningful actions to increase knowledge development in rural areas. Even though the two concepts of empowerment and active learning are closely related, it is difficult to find cross-concept studies in the African context. Education theories have been a major field of study for the last decades. The studies include the development of diverse concepts about the role of active learning for children and describe it as a crucial part of the knowledge creation (Von Glassersfeld, 1989; Dewey, 1933; Sterling, 1996). Nevertheless, no educational theories have emerged including empowerment. Moreover, the clear correlation between poverty and exclusion has been studied and demonstrated as impacting the school enrolment (Storey and Chamberlain, 2001; Granville et al., 2006).

The purpose of this research is to explore how national and regional Ethiopian stakeholders could foster the inclusiveness of educational activities through better policy making and implementation to encourage the leadership of youth leaders towards the socio-economic development of the country. Social and economic deprivations in Ethiopian rural areas have to be eradicated to stop chronic poverty transmitted from generation to generation over decades already and in the future. With almost one-fourth of the population being considered as poor in Ethiopia, children are the most vulnerable individuals. Deprived of their rights of benefiting from education at school, children are often lacking knowledge impacting their lives as future workers. In order for these affected children to grow up in healthy and inclusive situations, empowerment of the children dropping out of school seems to be the viable solution in order to leverage their potential, as well as create and develop employment opportunities. By improving education enrolment through innovative empowering solutions and offering better access to students, education standards could be enhanced. This improvement could be a chance for a tremendous national change towards skills development. Education policies and programs implemented in developing countries that succeed in reaching and teaching youth from chronically poor backgrounds are correlated with inclusive and cohesive societies, social transformation, as well as quicker and more equitable economic growth (Education Policy Guide, 2012).

Bringing sustainable human development at the heart of stakeholders’ work has to be considered in order to achieve better educational standards, fostering better access for all citizens to participate in civil society opportunities. Indeed, accessibility is crucial in education to offer similar opportunities to all youth to attend school and pursue their personal development. The weak coordination among various sectors to build resilience for vulnerable communities (Ethiopian Development Research Institute, 2018) is an important factor that needs to be addressed in relation to the achievements of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs, 2015). Resilience depicts the capacity for vulnerable individuals, in this case at risk of harm regarding important issues related to poverty and education, to recover from difficulties and problems faced. If the government wants to pursue its goal to attract foreign development investment, the educational standards have to be improved by new policies and concrete implementation. The above-mentioned purposes lead to the following research questions that are aimed to be answered throughout the thesis.

What significant role do stakeholders and empowerment play to drive sustainable change in policies towards activity implementation in Ethiopian rural areas?
How could youth empowerment impact educational incentives and personal development of youth in rural areas of Ethiopia?

The layout of the thesis is divided into the following chapters. Chapter 1 presents and questions theories on empowerment, education, social inclusion and social change which have been utilized to identify and better understand the concepts used in our research. Chapter 2 concentrates on the research methods used in order to frame and rectify the importance and impact on the topic of the thesis. Qualitative and semi-structured interviews with relevant individuals and organisations have been conducted, as well as focus groups led, and best practices identified in the problem areas of rural Southern Ethiopia. Chapter 3 presents the objects of study and tackles different relevant topics such as poverty, education, youth empowerment and culture in relation to the current situation and issues that children are facing in rural Ethiopia through presenting two organizations working in this field. Chapter 4 consults and analyses findings from primary and secondary research data in order to explore solutions for the research problem and questions stated. The fifth chapter utilizes findings and solutions from the previous analysis part to nurture discussions in local perspectives, as well as provide regional and national recommendations to conclude the study.

1. Theories towards youth empowerment

In this theory chapter, we will draw upon concepts and theories from the literature on youth empowerment in order to show the relations between poverty, social change, and community building. This further leads towards the aim of the research to understand, discuss and elaborate on different youth empowerment methods for educational incentives to contribute to the overall improvement of youth conditions. Following sub-chapters are displaying the interrelation between the theories, consequently funnelling down to the research topic of youth empowerment in order to give a holistic theoretical overview to be utilized in the analysis part of the thesis.

1.1. The impact of poverty on opportunities

Poverty can have many shapes, forms and reasons, not merely related to lack of financial resources, but still impacting millions of people and children likewise around the world. It can be defined as “a condition that results in an absence of the freedom to choose arising from a lack of […] the capability to function effectively in society” (van der Berg, 2008, p.1). According to its definition, poverty has severe implications on the way individuals are able to function in society, taking away life choices and opportunities to act freely. Mentioned opportunities are key to the empowerment of youth since they enable them to develop in a more independent way. Poverty can paralyze affected individuals and families and therefore minimize their opportunities. However, different types of poverty have to be distinguished first, such as absolute and relative, chronic and transient, as well as rural poverty and its effects on children, to understand poverty and its overall impact on youth.

Absolute poverty is determined by a poverty line that groups people based on their level of income dependant on the country’s economic conditions, as well as being fixed over time (van der Berg, 2008). Living below this line implies being unable to maintain a certain standard of living and meeting standard needs. Relative poverty is determined by the people’s society itself, meaning that people living in relative poverty are not able to receive the same standards as other average households in terms of access to different resources, favouring exclusion from society (van der Berg, 2008). However, both absolute and relative poverty are relevant factors to consider for education and social inclusion (van der Berg, 2008). Apart from absolute and relative poverty,
chronic poverty poses another form of poverty, also being highly stretched around Sub-Saharan countries, such as Ethiopia. “The chronic poor experience severe deprivation(s) for extended periods of their lives or throughout the entire course of their lives. Commonly they are victims of intergenerational poverty, coming from poor households and producing offspring who grow up into poverty.” (Bird et al., 2002, p.4). Chronic poverty can be split into individual, household, socio-economic group or spatial region, however, a focus on the rural areas of Ethiopia favours selecting the spatial region level of chronic poverty. Rural areas and their inter-related higher level of poverty, compared to urban areas, can be partially explained by their remoteness, lacking access to markets, information, opportunities, and economic and social services. In short, different forms of poverty and lack of accessibility to social services exclude and marginalize individuals from society and the services provided (Bird et al., 2002). Therefore, poverty often result in social exclusion, making these two terms interconnected. The concept of social exclusion was first introduced around the end of the 1980s, however, it needs to be distinguished from poverty. Social exclusion itself holds a more holistic meaning, tackling multidimensional disadvantages and its dynamic reasons while taking broader economic and social contexts into consideration (Commins, 2004).

“It involves the lack or denial of resources, rights, goods and services, and the inability to participate in the normal relationships and activities, available to the majority of people in a society, whether in economic, social, cultural or political arenas. It affects both the quality of life of individuals and the equity and cohesion of society as a whole.” (Levitas et al., 2007, p.9).

Complementary to this, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016, p.20) defines social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.” Both definitions outline the importance of society and an individual’s ability to act freely and function well in it. Additionally, both definitions have in common the accessibility to resources, as well as to act out their equal rights in terms of limiting elements.

Education has one of the severest impacts on social inclusion. It is often associated with the terms access to and equity in education for disadvantaged groups of society in terms of their “socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, religion, age, [dis]ability or location” (International Association of Universities, 2008, p.1), as well as poverty and criminality. For instance, disadvantaged groups tend to lack financial resources in order to attend school, as well as getting teased for being different, stimulating exclusion from classmates. Sub-policies for existing education policies need to be aligned in order to not just include disadvantaged groups, but also make them feel comfortable and engage in the educational system well (Gidley et al., 2010).

Gidley et al. (2010) identified three steps towards broader social inclusion in the education sector, the first one being access to education has already been introduced above, however, access is only the first step towards better education and social inclusion. Participation/engagement and success through empowerment form the other two degrees of social inclusion in school.

Access to education narrowly focuses on economic growth as a driver for higher economic and hence social inclusion. Disadvantaged people will benefit from the overall global economic liberalisation of trade and followed wealth by having benefits trickle-down from top to bottom of society. Hence, people in general are supposed to profit from the improvement of the country’s economy by better access to educational facilities and materials if the country decides to invest in it. This first step towards broader social inclusion only covers mentioned access, but not the quality of education, participation, and success of children in school (Gidley et al., 2010).

The participation step is looked at through a more human level lens, rather than economic aspects, it further identifies fairness, human rights and dignity as crucial for social inclusion and full participation in society, utilizing social justice ideology. To achieve social justice and equal rights
for all, participatory dialogues between interest parties are required, especially welcoming partnerships between schools and their communities through complex integrations (Gidley et al., 2010).

Success puts emphasis on empowerment and holistic integration of socially excluded and disadvantaged people. Ethical inclusion sees marginalised people as part of a diverse, multi-dimensional society and complex humanity with their own interests and needs apart from their economic role. In terms of social inclusion, success therefore comes from encouraging and empowering diversity, transformation, learning and acknowledging the potential of all human beings, while access and participation need to be given as well (Gidley et al., 2010). Overall, poverty and social exclusion can only be eradicated if people work closely together, rather than marginalizing each other and certain groups of people. Instead, establishing trust and well-functioning communities can be proposed as a method to act against mentioned grievances which will be discussed in the following.

1.2. Establishing trust through community building

The previous section outlined the interrelation of poverty and social exclusion. In order to socially include children, especially in the education sector, well-functioning communities are crucial for the integration of the students. “Community building” is the first action towards more empowering communities and can be defined as “a process that people in a community engage in themselves” (Minkler, 1998, p.32), for instance through self-empowerment and awareness-raising towards social change. Additionally, community building puts emphasis on community strength by identifying shared values and striving to achieve shared goals, as well as engaging people by putting a centered focus on the community (Minkler, 1998). It allows youth to be recognised as proactive leaders towards sustainable change, thanks to the trust offered by their peers.

A way of building community and sharing experiences and knowledge towards improvement and social change are “Communities of Practice”. Communities of practice can be described as a group of individuals that share a certain passion or interest that they want to improve together (Wenger, 2004). For the community to work, it needs a “domain”, described as an area of knowledge that brings people together, as well as the “community” for which the domain is for, and finally, “practices” as the body of knowledge in form of methods, tools, cases, etc. that the community continues to share and develop together in order to find solutions for different challenges (Wenger, 2004). Twelvetrees (1991, p.1) defined the term “community work” as “the process of assisting ordinary people to improve their own communities by undertaking collective action”. For effective community work, people need to be democratically involved in services that have an impact on their well-being, building a feeling of belonging to the community as well as supporting community planning. Beck and Purcell (2010) pointed out that participation in learning needs to be a voluntary process to ensure the effectiveness and longevity of the community work where youth are at the core. Also, the practices need to respect its participants in terms of self-worth and encouragement to ensure empowerment, while criticism is still welcomed. Collaboration, leadership and distribution of facilitation roles are therefore imperatives for successful community groups and building (Beck and Purcell, 2010). People going through personal change are encouraged to work in a cooperative frame together. It is important to ensure practicality by different collaborative activities, analyses and reflections, as well as educational and relative encounters that transmit beliefs and ideologies, so participants critically reflect on the value of the community work. Consequently, the aim of community work is to create empowered, self-directed, proactive and engaging people and groups that are more resilient to external impacts (Beck and Purcell, 2010). Also, the leader-member exchange theory (LMX) can be applied, for instance, to make groups more resilient and self-directed. It describes dyadic relationships between leaders and group members. While engaging only on a formal basis with “out-group” people, persons in the “in-group” tend to have a closer relationship and role responsibilities with
each other and their leaders, hence strengthening the group’s cohesion (Erdogan and Bauer, 2015). Empowering youth and giving them trust is crucial in order to integrate them in the “in-group” with their peers.

Coming back to community building, it plays a crucial role when striving for social change in society through community practice and work (Lazarus, Seedat and Naidoo, 2017). Social change moves individuals and societies towards a new balanced order, distributing social power more evenly, hence empowering people who have been marginalised (Beck and Purcell, 2010). Lewin (1947) describes change in a social perspective within three steps. First, a mental unfreezing of the current situation and state needs to take place, such as discarding old habits and envisioning new social orders. As a second step, values, especially for groups and communities, are to be practically changed to move into the last action. Re-freezing the changed state at a new level is crucial as the third and final step to manifest to change in mindset and value of social constructs. In order for social change to be achieved, critical thinking and collective actions are required, reshaping community structures and individual perspectives. Moreover, certain criteria need to be met, equal opportunities for people exposed to the change have to be given, as well as security in terms of livelihood and physical well-being. Additionally, participation and solidarity play an important role in social change, needing people to be part of change and development with empathy and cooperation. In terms of individual behaviour, one needs to consider a cycle of self-reflection, vision, planning and action (Beck and Purcell, 2010). Also, according to Beck and Purcell (2010), community building and work additionally build higher “social capital”, which can strengthen the community itself. Social capital is expressed by participation in and support of local communities, as well as a feeling of belonging to it, while still welcoming outsiders.

Social capital can be created by bonding, bridging and linking. “Bonding” naturally occurs within similar groups of people, such as families, ethnicity or age. These people share a social identity and hence are prone to cooperate with and trust each other. On the contrary, “bridging” is defined by social capital between different groups, e.g. in terms of ethnicity, however, their relation consists out of respect and mutuality. “Linking” can be described as closing gaps between asymmetric social classes such as the lower class (low income) and middle class (medium income). People are interacting through rather formal but respectful networks (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). Utilizing community building, as well as social change and social capital can therefore have a meaningful impact on closing mentioned gaps between communities and on fostering social inclusion of groups and individuals. However, restraining factors remain, such as the impact of education on youth and the quality of obtained skills towards their personal development.

1.3. Education and skills as motivation tools for youth

Research has permitted the field of education to evolve and experiment new forms of learning. Originally focusing on formal education, corresponding to a systematic, organized, administered and structured model with a rigid curriculum as regards to objectives, content and methodology (Zaki Dib, 1988), theories have been updated focusing on more flexible types of education improving youth interest. Therefore, the concepts of non-formal and informal education are nowadays part of the existing methods used by practitioners. These methods are involving active learning theories conceptualized by Dewey and Von Glassersfeld and insisting on the need for learners to actively take part in the learning processes. Dewey (1933) criticized traditional education for being passive and receptive learning because learners receive knowledge from a teacher and this knowledge is assumed to be perfectly right. By challenging traditional education, Dewey proposed a progressive alternative called ‘active learning’ where youth learners are using active principles allowing them to be more participative
and be a part of the knowledge. In line with participatory approaches allowing empowerment, this theory of ‘active learning’ supports the interaction between learners and their environment and promotes a more democratic system where students can learn by experience (Dewey, 1933). Dewey (1938) insisted on three main components of active learning: knowledge, learning, and teaching. According to Dewey’s theory, active learning knowledge is an individual experience constructed through learning. Learning is considered as the acquisition of knowledge and skills through experiences from the outside world. Teaching is then described as the facilitation of the learning environment for learners to acquire knowledge through active participation and involvement. Further on Dewey’s theory, Von Glassersfeld (1989) argues that knowledge is actively built up by the cognizing subject who is learning. Von Glassersfeld’s theory relates to the constructivism theory initiated by Piaget (1966) and focusing on the role of humans developing meaning in regard to their aspirations and experiences. Von Glassersfeld describes the function of cognition as adaptive and helping to serve the organisation of the experiential world. Thus, the author supports the idea that acquiring knowledge is an active, individual, personal process that is based on previous constructed knowledge. Another aspect of the constructivism theory is related to the adaptation of cognitive processes in regard to the reality of our experiential world. Learners create interpretations of their environment based on their interactions and experiences with their peers and communities. By involving learners, active learning promotes a more sustainable form of education including all individuals towards sustainable knowledge.

These theories of active learning involving a major focus on effective and impactful long-lasting education lead to the concept of Education for Sustainability (Sterling, 1996). Given the importance of sustainable development aiming to meet the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987), active learning can also integrate a sustainable perspective. Sterling affirmed that education is proclaimed at high levels as the key to a more sustainable society and yet it daily plays a part in reproducing an unsustainable society. If it is to fulfil its potential as an agent of change towards a more sustainable society, sufficient attention must be given to education as the subject of change itself (Sterling, 1996). By criticizing the education traditional model, Sterling suggests that Education for Sustainability (EfS) could be the basis of a new paradigm for education. However, in order for that to arise, he argues that educators have to clarify the meaning and significance of EfS (Sterling, 1996). Education for Sustainability is defined as an educational practice that enhances human well-being, expands individual agency, capabilities and participation in democratic dialogue for the existing and future generations (Landorf, Doscher and Rocco, 2008). Education for Sustainability aims to use education to achieve sustainable development goals. Public awareness, community education and training are the three key components of this concept empowering people of all ages towards sustainable change. This notion of empowerment lies with the role of communities to bring individuals together and share knowledge.

Built on the idea that community plays a major role for individuals to gain knowledge, tacit and explicit knowledge are key elements to explain educational processes (Sanchez, 2004). Communities of practice, defined as a group sharing similar interests and purposes, convert explicit and tacit knowledge to create a new type of learnings within a social process between individuals. Explicit knowledge includes desk research, databases and evidence-based findings and is often used in formal education. Nevertheless, tacit knowledge is much more valuable when it comes to active learning and gathers all individual’s personal knowledge. As tacit, the knowledge shared relates to experiences, contexts and practices (Sanchez, 2004) and can help youth growing. In the case of poor communities’ resilience, tacit knowledge is crucial to ensure cooperation toward sustainable change. The role of tacit knowledge and informal education needs to be recognized. Also supported by different authors for the past years (Gloria et al., 2014; Petrescu, Gorghiu and Lupu, 2015), it is important to recognize the efforts made by the formal and non-formal organizations to strengthen the development of social movement by bridging the community and organizations (Noguchi, Guevara and Yorozu, 2015). Indeed, these innovative
educational methods are providing youth with community-centred activities to develop strong advocacy social movement leveraging sustainable change through empowerment.

1.4. Empowerment supporting vulnerable youth

The concept of empowerment has been introduced into the field of psychology as a useful paradigm fostering understanding on how to promote psychological wellness (Rappaport, 1981). Considered as an ‘intentional ongoing process’ (Cornell, 1989) centred in local communities, empowerment involves critical reflection, mutual respect, caring and group participation. This process helps vulnerable individuals who lack an equal share of resources to gain access and control on those resources. By doing so, democratic participation in the life of the community is encouraged, supported and promoted through the needs of the underserved (Rappaport, 1987). Moreover, empowerment plays a major role on individuals’ critical understanding of their environment in regard to their community. (Zimmerman et al., 1992).

Occurring in multiple dimensions, empowerment has different possible analysis: individual, organizational and community level (Zimmerman, 2000). Individual empowerment enhances the sense of personal control, efficacy expectations, competency, and consciousness factors towards an individual goal (Kieffer, 1984). Meaningful participation opportunities including volunteering and self-help are important settings for individuals’ empowerment. At the organizational level, the concept of empowerment is observed in advocacy activities and group cooperation to acquire resources, collaborate with other organisations and influence public policies through their actions (Fawcett, Seekins, Whang, Muiu and Suarez de Balcazar, 1984). Last but not least, community empowerment completes the two previous levels by promoting organised community coalitions that share work and resources through leadership reflecting various interests. It includes resident activities and shared decision making to improve the quality of life.

Depicted both as an outcome and a process, empowerment and its theories have evolved throughout time and are now used in diverse human development programs. On the one hand, as an outcome, empowerment refers to people’s participation in determining matters that are important to them by developing skills, confidence, opportunities and awareness (Rivera and Seidman, 2005). In the individual level, it is the result of experiences and knowledge gain helping individuals to be fully recognised as part of society. In an organizational level, the outcomes rely to the development of organizational networks, organizational growth and policy leverage (Zimmerman, 2000). When it comes to communities, it reflects the cohesion and unity created by internal processes permitting better results for the group and better recognition as individuals being part of the group. On the other hand, as a process, empowerment leads to individual ‘participatory competence’ (Zimmerman, 1992) in community organisations where individuals are, firstly, facing a conflict or issue that requires action and, secondly, developing a dynamic reflection and action to overcome the issue. At the organizational level, empowering processes include collective decisions making and shared leadership including collective action to access resources (Zimmerman, 1992). This process developing abilities and insights, enable people to participate more actively in their own self-determination and in affecting change in their environments (Kieffer, 1984). Then, it suggests that individual participation through a group or community to achieve goals are basic components of the construct including efforts to gain access to resources and a critical understanding of the socio-political environment. More than a collection of empowered individuals, organizational and community, empowerment refers to collective actions where groups of individuals gather to achieve a common goal.

Although most of the literature focused on adults (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989; Zimmerman, 2000; Rappaport, 2000), the concept of empowerment is also applied to youngsters’ needs and characteristics to build a new generation of leaders. Youth empowerment is commonly used to describe processes and experiences that emphasize youth strengths instead of weaknesses and that enable active participation and greater influence in their activity settings (Wiley and
Rappaport, 2000). Often used to foster problems behaviours prevention and negative outcomes, empowerment of youth for civic participation research is lacking. Potentially perceived as the qualitative accounts of youth programs, youth empowerment demonstrates a higher and broader number of opportunities for individuals in diverse social, political and out-of-school activities. It has also been recognised having a key role in modern societies to allow youngsters to develop their skills, create opportunities and build trust in their communities (Curtis, 2008). Skills, opportunities and trust are the three pillars of empowerment identified by Curtis (2008). Skills are part of the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired by youngsters to be equipped with basic resources allowing them to be self-independent. Often related to their personal experiences, this pillar highlights the importance of experiencing new situations and gaining soft skills. Opportunities point out the need for youth to have the chance to actively take part in society by having the chance to participate. It can include political decisions, cultural events and always involve the decision of organisations and stakeholders to open their processes to the participation of youngsters. Last but not least, the trust pillar insists on the importance of offering support to youth in order to develop their confidence and increase their personal motivation. This last pillar involves the community, the family and the environment where the youth are growing up and represents the base of their development (Curtis, 2008). Youth empowerment encourages participatory competencies, critical awareness, increased skills, high level of self-determination, self-confidence, self-efficacy, sense of control and shared decision making (Rivera and Seidman, 2005). It also reduces the level of hopelessness, alienation and problem behaviours among participants (Rivera and Seidman, 2005). Through meaningful participation, youth are recognised to develop critical awareness in order to interact with their environment and peers (Rivera and Seidman, 2005). Their empowerment progresses allows them to benefit from strong leadership skills developed throughout the empowering process including ‘the big five’ individual characteristics conceptualised by Digman (1990), the main qualities that youth acquire while learning from empowerment methods: Extraversion, conscientiousness, emotional stability, cooperativeness and intellect. Leadership is at the core of the empowering methods with a preference for high supportive management and low directive objectives. In order to support youth, a flexible framework is necessary to keep their motivation to keep their commitment. By not giving strict and discouraging rules, youth are encouraged to take initiatives and try new experiences. This relates to the supportive approach of the situational leadership model developed by Hersay and Blanchard (1985). Insisting on the importance of supporting stakeholders to achieve long-lasting achievement, Hersay and Blanchard underline the behaviours adopted by leaders to promote involvement of their partners, citizens. Youth benefit from social and emotional support to feel comfortable in their environment in order to achieve bigger goals in a long-term perspective.

2. Methods

The study has an inductive approach to allow the researchers to look for patterns in the findings using theories based on observations and data analysis results (Bryman and Bell, 2013). The data collected in the field allowed the research to further connect comprehensive and adequate theories supporting the findings. Therefore, Curtis’ theory (2008) on youth empowerment, emphasizing skills, opportunities and trust as the three pillars of empowerment, has been utilized to structure the thesis development including the theory, analysis, and discussion part. The data collected is based on qualitative methods and has an explorative purpose. According to Bellamy (2012), Hart (2014), Brown (2006), and Silverman (2015), the qualitative method is a suitable solution to get a deeper understanding of the situation of individuals on the field. In the case of developing countries as Ethiopia, qualitative methods are important to collect testimonies and listen to
individuals’ needs. The use of an explorative purpose has been relevant to have a better understanding of the rural situation. The development of semi-structured interviews with practitioners, youth, and organizations’ representatives in Addis Ababa and the countryside permitted to dig deeper into the topic of youth empowerment projects, methods and impact. According to Bryman and Bell (2013), the semi-structured interview implies that the researcher uses a completed interview guide with specific themes to be discussed or predetermined discussion questions that should be asked. This method using open-ended questions gave a chance to the respondent to elaborate on their priorities and highlight their needs.

The research aims to understand, discuss and elaborate on different youth empowerment methods for educational incentives to contribute to the overall improvement of youth conditions in rural areas of Ethiopia and consequently give recommendations for concrete actions. In this study, both primary and secondary data have been used. Even though there is already existing secondary research gathered by the country’s ministries, as well as several organisations and NGOs, the data, especially in the field of youth and children, is not always accountable and has to be considered carefully. Conducting primary research, in this case, allows getting deeper insights into the research problem and thematic, leading to extended and holistic recommendations, solutions and conclusions. Understanding the issue of youth empowerment, education and social inclusion in a complex country with many different cultures such as rural Ethiopia require first-hand knowledge and experience sharing in terms of primary data with stakeholders involved in this process. According to Bryman and Bell (2013), this knowledge has to be collected in connection to the specific purpose for the study. In this study, it has been gathered from numerous interviews and two independent case studies.

Contacts with organisations have been established by several emails and phone calls prior to the study visit to Ethiopia in order to arrange meetings, interviews and field visits. Opportunities to interview local stakeholders aroused during the field visit and permitted to collect extra testimonies. First interviews have been led in the capital, Addis Ababa, due to the high density of organisations and NGOs working on education and children, and in the two project sites South of Ethiopia, in Kersa and Durame. Selection criteria for interview partners in Addis Ababa were based on the size of the organizations, their experience as well as their outreach and impact in the country.

For the first field research, the organisation “Roots Ethiopia” has been identified as a relevant and suitable programme to support data gathering, mainly focusing on improving quality education for primary and secondary school children, as well as promoting social inclusion. Due to project and programme areas it will serve as a case study for the thesis research. A case study is meaningful in a sense that it helps to understand theoretical problems in practical manners, often unravelling hidden research issues with greater clarity and in-depth understanding, as well as to predict future trends for the research topic (USC Libraries, 2019). Regarding the second case study, “Harmee Education for Development Association” (HEfDA) in Southern Ethiopia (city of Kersa) has been chosen as a best practice example due to its special education system in practical skill training for practical skills learning. This innovative program represents a very interesting case for further recommendations and options to empower youth dropping out of school. Focus groups were developed in order to bring diverse individuals together and collect their feedback and reactions in relation to some guided predetermined questions. This method helped for this research with the use of the interviewee situation in order to extend the perspective to their belonging communities. This practice requested participants to share their beliefs, feelings, opinions and attitudes towards development services, such as social and humanitarian work. Different limitations related to the research are important to mention. Due to the size of the country’s population as well as the number of ethnic groups and languages, even if this research portrays the global trend in Ethiopia, it cannot be exactly representative for all Ethiopian regions but mostly for the Oromia and Southern Northern Nationalities Peoples’ Region. The country inhabits over 105 million people (Cia.gov, 2019), around 86 languages, numerous ethnicities and
cultures (Eberhard, Simons and Fenning, 2019). Two organisations operating in specific regions mentioned previously have been selected to fit our purpose and research questions. Moreover, the lack of reliable data due to poor accountability and very old census systems and results made the analysis of the primary data sometimes difficult. Indeed, the only solution to confirm the trend of the data has been to compare the different sources of data from external bodies with the ones from the government and to discuss it with interviewees to get insights about the situation in their field of work. Additionally, the focus groups with students and teachers in the rural areas have been translated by locals speaking both English and the local language. This translation may have caused slight distortion in participants’ testimonies. Furthermore, in the context of children and youth discussion in the framework of the research asking them about their main issues and achievements, the testimony of some individuals was not elaborated enough to be fully taken into consideration. Last but not least, as European researchers embodying western values and cultures, the perception of local populations may have influenced their behaviours and answers during the research.

Concerning the reliability of the data gathered, biases only have limited implications on the thesis research since several different secondary and especially primary sources have been consulted to minimize misleading information and ensure its reliability. However, figures and data related to youth differ from ministries to organisations and NGOs. Either being too ambitious, vague or specific on regions, the lack of reliable data has been pointed out by different organisations like UNICEF (UNICEF, 2019). Therefore, the decision was made to go to the field and project sites in order to gain a deeper understanding of needs and solutions for the youth in the rural areas of Ethiopia.

3. Presentation of the Object of Study

As introduced in the method section above, two local NGOs operating on the field, called “Harmee Education for Development Association” (HEfDA) and “Roots Ethiopia” (Roots) have been selected as objects of our study, to better understand the numerous issues related to empowerment, education and social inclusion in Ethiopia’s south rural areas with a specific focus on the Oromia and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region. These two NGOs are working towards two different goals achieving Technical and Vocational Education and training (HEfDA) and providing schools and students with support (Roots). The first field study, with HEfDA, took place in the “Oromia” region since it inhabits the biggest ethnic group in Ethiopia with around 35 million people (Cia.gov, 2019), hence, providing relevant research which findings will be later used for future recommendations. Moreover, Roots Ethiopia and its project sites have been chosen due to the region’s diversity and rurality, having 93% of the population living in the countryside (Government of Ethiopia, 2019). The “Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region” and city of Durame are therefore fitting for the purpose of studying educational relations of school children. Moreover, including field research, focus groups and semi-structured
interviews, the analysis of these two organisations’ activities aims to provide a deeper understanding of the local situation in southern Ethiopian rural areas.

3.1. Harmee Education for Development Association

Harmee Education for Development Association (HEfDA) is a non-governmental, not for profit making and secular development organization. With 82 local employees, 6 projects currently running and more than 10 donors’ stakeholders including foreign ministries, HEfDA deals with promoting the welfare of the poor and marginalized people, particularly children, youth, women, girls and disabled individuals. HEfDA was established in 2006 by a voluntary and humanitarian group of Ethiopians committed to addressing the causes of poverty. The organization is based on two major believes: people are the foundation of the development and they have the potential to build on their potential and assets. In this regard, the organization works closely with the rural population on the following topics: eradicate illiteracy, promote functional/basic and development education, support public schools to improve education quality, improve the skills of the rural communities to improve productivity and living quality, improve social services and infrastructure, encourage and support people with disabilities, enhance social relations and ensure technical and economic empowerment of the people at grassroots level.

Harmee Education for Development Association (HEfDA) focuses on some key objectives for its projects including the support of most marginalized youth, children, men and women, the improvement of communities’ participation in social and development work, and the enhancement of skills for youth dropping out of school. In order to run its programs, the organisation created a centre on land given by the government. The centre is located in the south of Ethiopia in the city of Kersa. The town is 220 kilometres far from Addis Ababa and inhabits more than 20,000 inhabitants. Counting more than 5 schools, the town is difficult to reach and access to drinkable water as well as electricity is reduced. HEfDA currently runs 6 projects targeting youth in order to foster gender equality, education, support of marginalized children, agriculture methods, water access, skills development and economic empowerment through group savings. Often segregated at school due to different reasons mentioned later in this case study, more than 16,250 children had benefited from the organisation programs for the last years. Coming to get new practical skills and a new chance in life, those individuals are motivated youth willing to start working towards future employment in different sectors. Invited to develop their skills in agriculture, manufacturing, hairdressing, metalwork, the students are offered to study for two years to get their level 4 diploma. Every six months, the students have the opportunity to get one level diploma if they succeed in the exam. Called Technical Vocational Education Training or TVET, this diploma is recognised by local and regional companies and institutions. After getting the most prestigious diploma, level 4, the students have the opportunity to either go to university or start working in their focus field.

Figure 2: HEfDA centre for youth in Kersa, Ethiopia
3.2. Roots Ethiopia

Roots Ethiopia is a non-profit organisation that is incorporated under the Wisconsin Statutes in the United States of America. Its current 3-year project that is running until the 30th of August 2020, holds the title “Supporting community identified solutions for job creation and education”. The project focuses on providing support to the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples’ Region (SNNPR) of Ethiopia’s southern rural areas. For the case study, Kembata Tembaro was chosen as the representative zone of the region. Kembata Tembaro inhabits roughly 800,000 people and is known for its coffee plantations, high rurality and ethical diversity. The overall objective of the project is to improve the situation of primary school students living in the SNNPR, especially in terms of access to and quality of education (Roots Ethiopia, 2017). Even though the gross enrolment rate and the number of schools have been increasing over the past decades in Ethiopia, the educational sector is still lacking resources to provide sufficient education to every child yet (UNICEF, 2019). Issues are for instance the low quality of education, poor internal efficiency and accessibility to and enrolment in secondary education, as well as high dropout rates. Moreover, families need their children to work or cannot afford to send them to school in rural areas, while malnutrition and access to health services also hinder children to grow and develop properly. Other hardships that school students are facing are for instance books-to-student ratios, being 3.3:1 in SNNPR, meaning that every student has only access to 3 subject books only (Roots Ethiopia, 2017). Also, only 8% of students with special needs were enrolled in a secondary school in 2015, outlining another issue in the education sector of Ethiopia. Roots Ethiopia also supports refresher training for teachers, which enables them to provide children with a higher quality of education. Improving the quality of education and internal efficiency to achieve higher equity in access to education and adult literacy are therefore key priorities in the education system that are also in line with the GTP II, Universal Primary Education plan and UN SDGs (Roots Ethiopia, 2017).

The budget for the project implementation amounts to $ 1 million. For its organisational structure, the country director for Ethiopia reports to US Board of Directors, while the field office and main office in the capital report to the country director. Hierarchically, the project manager is followed by the project officers for every region, then the community facilitators and lastly the beneficiaries. An infographic on the organisational structure can be found in the appendix (Appendix 3). Roots Ethiopia and the government work closely together on the project, therefore the NGO needs to receive approval for their project implementation from governmental bodies first, such as the Bureau of Finance and Economic Development, Bureau of Education and the Bureau of Women Children and Youth Affairs in Hawassa, SNNPR (Roots Ethiopia, 2017). In the scope of the project, three main activities have been developed to facilitate improvements. The “Learning Resource Program” (LRP) has been designed to improve the learning environment for students, supplying essential educational resources, as well as building school facilities. The “School Sponsorship Program” (SSP) provides struggling students with resources, such as nutrition, medication, school supplies, as well as yearly sponsorships. The “Self-Help Groups” (SHG) activity aims to empower poor families by giving them grants and skills-trainings to build and secure capital in order to use it for educating their children. Concerning the target groups, the project aims to reach “socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, groups and institutions in the intervention region” (Roots Ethiopia, 2017). Hence, it includes primary students lacking educational resources and facilities, poor families, talented youth missing opportunities, adolescent school girls and women who need to take care of the household, as well as people with disabilities and ones living with HIV. Direct beneficiaries include 25 schools for the LRP, 600 students for the SSP and 16 groups for the SHG program, impacting over 31,500 lives, but also household members and communities indirectly. Additionally, libraries and sanitation facilities will be built, classrooms furnished, Special Education classrooms and school-based sports clubs
established and books, teaching tools, science lab supplies and hygiene products provided (Roots Ethiopia, 2017).

![Image: Teachers working in the Kembata Region, Ethiopia.](image)

4. Analysis

Data gathered in the field with the participation of local and international organisations as well as students and workers has allowed the study to get a deeper understanding of the rural reality including challenges and opportunities for stakeholders. The current challenges of the rural areas in terms of youth empowerment and education are huge, and the testimonies highlight key concerns for the sustainable development of the country and its youth population in the years to come. Based on Curtis’ youth empowerment theory (Curtis, 2008), the data comparison has shown convergences in the different levels of expertise and in different areas of action. Conceptualized with three main pillars, the youth empowerment theory developed by Curtis insists on the role of skills, opportunities and trust has been chosen to structure the analysis. The theory relevance has been confirmed by the testimonies of individuals working in the field of youth development and the youth interviewed. Mentioned by the youth in focus groups, skills, opportunities and trust have been at the core of their concerns. Skills refer to the knowledge acquired by youth in formal and non-formal contexts including soft skills, opportunities underline the need for youth to actively participate, while trust highlight the need for youth to be supported. Coherent with the situation in rural Ethiopian areas, this theory has been applied to the main findings of this research.

4.1. Skills

In order to empower youth, local stakeholders are working to find new methods offering youth with appropriate and long-lasting skills. Skills can be defined as “the consistent production of goal-oriented movements, which are learned and specific to the task.” (McMorris, 2008, p.2). Therefore, learning processes and education are crucial elements in order to develop them. Youth, at the early stages of their life, need to be equipped with appropriate skills to elevate themselves, become independent and successful in the long-term as well as to have decent jobs in the future. This equipping state of skills, mostly of practical nature, can start as early as in pre- or primary school. Since there is no mandatory pre-school system established in Ethiopia, primary school is normally the first starting point for children to acquire those skills.
4.1.1. Resources and constraints: the educational system in rural Ethiopia

The acquisition of skills is first often hindered by the lack of specific resources, namely financial resources, basic resources and motivation resources. Due to a lack of financial resources, practical materials and lectures cannot be offered to students, so that theoretical subjects, which do not provide enough skills for daily life and the working environment, are mostly taught in schools. Poverty within the country, community or family can be a limiting factor for the development of the students’ skills. Societal issues, as well as overall limited access to services and resources heavily jeopardizes the youth’s integration into society. For instance, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) rooms with working computers are often missing, so students are not able to learn computer lessons practically but only theoretically with books or experiences of teachers. Fundamental understandings of how to use a computer, the internet and technology itself cannot be taught by the teachers if the materials are missing. Students therefore not just only miss opportunities connected to ICT knowledge, such as online job advertisements, but also are poorly prepared for a working environment today that is led by basic technological advancements such as computer work. The mentioned issue has implications on the general skill development of the students, but also major effects on the development of technology and economy of the country if this generation is not taught well to keep up with today’s technological advancements and its social and economic importance in the world. The same issue goes for laboratories and the science sector, for instance in physics classes where materials cannot be afforded due to budget restrictions. In terms of acquiring soft skills like communication skills or supporting creativity by “learning by doing”, students in rural Ethiopia lack certain tools to learn in a stimulating educational environment.

“They say they’re lacking soft skills. But also, also technical skills are hard skills as well. But mainly, it's the soft skills that they're complaining about. So, for example, in terms of work ethic and discipline, and through this communication, skills, like language problems” (Interviewee 1).

Soft skills are of importance to acquire through experiences since they complement hard skills like professional competences. Indeed, as introduced by the constructivist theory of Piaget (1966), humans are actively learning by experiencing new situations. Experiences comprise personal values, properties, abilities and social competences (Lies, 2018). As discussed in the theory part of the thesis, poverty in terms of lacking access to resources and services can lead to a marginalization of certain groups or individuals from society (van der Berg, 2008). However, the Ethiopian National Qualification Framework (ENQF)\(^2\) has been introduced by the Ministry of Education in 2007 to strengthen the quality of education in the country by several strategies. One of them involves promoting skill development, recognizing several forms of education, like formal, non-formal and informal, as well as putting emphasis on the improvement of Ethiopia’s Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) that will be further discussed in the next sub-chapter (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013).

Aside from mentioned issues, there are other pressing ones that prevent students from acquiring skills, for instance, early school drop-outs. Several reasons for this issue to happen will be mentioned as part of the second pillar, opportunities. However, the lack of support and encouragement from teachers and family can be named as one of the reasons for school dropout.

\(^2\) The ENQF aims to improve educational standards and establish a national framework for the education of youth. Its purpose is to raise the quality of educational programmes, make Ethiopian qualifications more relevant to industry and the labour market, promote equity and access to education, provide mechanisms for the recognition of learning gained in formal, non-formal and informal settings, harmonize the three sub-sectors (general, TVET and higher education) by setting out common standards. (UNESCO, 2016)
For instance, teachers have been described as very tough with students when they were mistaken. Some of the female students interviewed also complained about the lack of respect addressed to girls and female teachers during classes, which demotivated most of them to pursue education and actively participate in class, neglecting school attendance and desired skills learning. Often, it is not just the lack of materials and resources missing to teach and educate children properly, but also a combination of mentioned issues and the skill level of teachers and principals themselves. During the field visit to one of the rural schools, Roots Ethiopia announced another year of financing for the skill development program for teachers. The program aims to further educate and update teachers in their professional field, so they can refresh their knowledge and simultaneously feel valued as important part and entity of the school, which significantly increased performance and motivation of the teachers involved in the previous year’s program. At the same time, students also benefit from new skills and motivated teaching styles when teachers are being empowered and equipped with appropriate skills.

When it comes to language skills, students are often challenged by the sheer number of languages spoken in the country. Hence, students start learning their own, local dialect and alphabet from grade 1, while studying the official language and alphabet of “Amharic” in grade 3 onwards. Often, English is being introduced in grade 4 or 5 with another alphabet for the students to comprehend. Interviewees (principals, a school in Kembata region) mentioned and complained that students are overstrained, which is also caused by insufficient school materials (e.g. on local dialect books) and lack of knowledge of the teachers, leading to students that are unable to speak either one of the languages properly. “So, people speak a different language and there's no one who can teach the students, or they are forced to stick with the language they are not able to speak properly” (Interviewee 2). This has major implications on the people and their ability to develop, as well as economic ones since they are unable to communicate or work for instance in a different region than their hometown where the official language or English is required.

4.1.2. Alternative solutions

Alternative solutions for developing practical skills are various. Harmee Education for Development Association, for instance, provides young school drop-outs with practical training since most of the youngsters were not able to pass the exam to enter the second cycle of secondary school (11. and 12. grade) and therefore decided to participate in the programme. Before waiting to retake the exam in the following year, most of the students rather chose the program to learn practical skills in different sectors, like handicrafts, IT, agriculture, horticulture, and metalwork. Interviewees during the field study with HEfDA mentioned the importance of acquiring practical skills to be more useful and handier nowadays, instead of only learning theoretical matters by the books. Additionally, they experienced graduates not finding a job, which discouraged them to pursue their educational career. During an interview conducted with a staff member of a research institute in Addis Ababa, the current need for skilled workers in the industry sector was outlined. According to the Growth Transformation Plan II (GTP II)³, Ethiopia is trying to expand its industrial sector rapidly. However, “those industrial parks are struggling to find workers with the right skills and also, they are struggling with high labour turnover” (Interviewee 1), since the sector still is not fully developed and therefore is not able to pay and grow well, while on the other hand long working hours and strict work ethics are a requirement that discourages people to engage in the industry sector. However, Technical Vocational Education Trainings (TVETs) and

³ Ethiopia’s Growth and Transformation Plan II (GTP II) aims to foster economic structural transformation and sustain accelerated growth towards the realization of the national strategy to become a low middle-income country by 2025. GTP II focuses on ensuring rapid, sustainable, and broad-based growth by enhancing the productivity of the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, improving the quality of production, and stimulating competition within the economy. (Green Growth Knowledge, 2019)
certifications for proven levels of skill are supposed to eradicate this issue as challenged by the previously mentioned Ethiopian National Qualifications Framework. However, the TVET system in Ethiopia, developed in 2006, is struggling and therefore in dire need of restructuring and support by the government. Firstly, the demand of TVET far exceeds the supply of training provided, having them offered to only 3% of the relevant age group in the country, which is also due to underfunding of qualified TVET teachers and instructors. Secondly, courses of the training often do not match the content and requirements needed in the certain industry, for instance, the industrial sector, leaving graduates unable to find a job in a field that highly demands workers. Additionally, employers are not involved in the planning or execution of the training, leading to an absence of communication in terms of needs between the employer and employee. Lastly, assessment and graduate certification mechanisms are out of place, contributing to the overall unawareness of the actual benefits of the TVET (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2013).

Due to the TVET system’s current condition and lack of prestige in Ethiopia, there is a certain issue of the so-called “skills-mismatch”. During an interview, the member of an Ethiopian research institute outlined the problem of graduates being unable to get jobs in their educational field, as well as being either over- or underqualified for the jobs they find. Students “are preferring like informal sort of jobs, because the manufacturing requires discipline” (Interviewee 1) and this issue influences school enrolment. The first issue can be reasoned by the unavailability of higher numbers of jobs, while also leading to the second issue, causing the mismatching of skills. Especially in the manufacturing sector, employees lack technical and soft skills that result in low labour productivity, consequently weakening the sector and wage conditions in it (Berhe and Tsegaye, 2018). As stated by the interviewee, youngsters with a high certified skill level are positioned in a low wage job since people who lack a certain level of skill do not have the work ethics to properly work in a scheduled work environment and company. Being overqualified or underqualified (skill-wise or educational level) is identified as vertical skill-mismatch, while horizontal skill-mismatch means that the workers’ qualifications are different from the job offered.

“Most of the students because of prestige issues, they want to do the higher level of TVETs, for example, like level three, level four, and then those that are three and four, you’re looking for kind of better salary and things like that. But it’s very difficult to compete with the informal sector” (Interviewee 1).

Both lead to the skilled workers’ own choice of resignation due to frustration, while less skilled workers are not fit for the job, which further weakens the industry sector and employment rates in Ethiopia (Berhe and Tsegaye, 2018). The youngsters participating in HEfDA’s program are aware of the difficulties and rather want to open up their own business and be self-employed after finishing the training. Self-employment, even with a higher risk of failure, means a certain stability, independence from family support and feeling of possession to the young people, which is often linked to success and higher income. Especially the importance of independence from family support has been mentioned by the focus groups at HEfDA, since they do not want to be a financial burden to their family and parents. Since jobs are scarce, people need to find ways to earn income differently, for instance by opening their own business or resort to informal work. A participant in the HEfDA focus group mentioned: “I just want to open my own business; I can’t find a formal job anyways and can’t rely on my parents anymore”. However, other young adults that follow the same path often lack skills in how to run a business which consequently weakens their opportunity to be successful in their field. Moreover, informal work can often be more profitable in terms of income than pursuing an educational career, making it difficult for young people to choose one, which mostly happens to be an informal work choice. The nation-wide informal shoe-shining business was frequently mentioned by interview partners, as well as personally observed during the country visit. Due to the overall scarcity of formal jobs, people were bound to create new, informal job ideas in the past in order to earn at least some little money,
which turned out later to be even better paid than many other formal positions. As for the shoe-shining, often children start this business in their early years of age since it only requires shoe polish, a brush and water to start working. It is the simplicity and relatively high income for a work that does not require a degree pushing youth towards this type of job choice. While many youth work in the shoe-shining to save money and later use it for a smaller business or education, others remain in this business cycle by being able to pay their own expenses. However, shoe-shining and informal work create another vicious cycle since informal work does not empower youth to work in a formal job in the future due to its absence of legitimacy.

While providing youngsters with practical skills appears to be quite helpful in terms of bringing youth back into the educational loop after dropping out, the government still needs to provide the population with basic needs, materials and resources. Consequently, youth would be able to take advantage of opportunities such as finding jobs and less likely to drop out in the first place. Interviewees conjointly mentioned the lack of financial resources, school materials and available jobs as their major constraints to gain solid ground in the labour market, step out of poverty and exclusion, as well as to reach financial independence from their families. The condition of opportunities within the country to tackle those issues will be discussed in the following.

4.2. Opportunities

The second pillar of the empowerment theory developed by Curtis (2008), opportunities, represents all the forms of engagement offered to young individuals to actively participate in society. These activities can include different levels of involvement from the family to the community level and encompass formal and non-formal activities like education, sport, and culture also considered as active learning activities (Dewey, 1933; Von Glassersfeld, 1989). In the context of rural areas in Ethiopia, the opportunities are limited and poverty constraints are reducing the chances for youth to be recognised as actors for change in the country (International Association of Universities, 2008). The absence of emphasis on the importance of their participation is jeopardizing the youth development. Limited in terms of opportunities, these youth are impacted by different factors related to existing governmental systems, financial situations as well as social norms and cultural practices existing for centuries. Given the numerous issues faced by youth in rural areas, the role played by Non-Governmental Organisations is important to mention aiming to develop innovative empowerment solutions and foster social change.

4.2.1. School participation and limitations in the context of rural areas

Most of the key issues faced by youngsters in order to be empowered and determined to join schools and benefit from the programs have clearly been stated during the interviews of youth and experts in the field of education. Ethiopia is still a developing country and lacks basic need solutions to provide rural areas’ inhabitants with clean, drinkable water, and electricity. This situation, where financial issues are at the core of citizens’ and government’s preoccupations, highly affect households’ economic situation as well as the funding offered to school by the federal government. Household poverty is high in rural areas which increases the difficulties for individuals to be part of the educational system. Testimonies have emphasised the correlation between low financial resources and low school enrolment of youth. As aforementioned, poverty has severe implications on access to education, which often leads individuals to further exclusion from other services and resources, widening the gap between the ones includes and the ones who are not (Levitas et al., 2007). Interviewed children have explained to be dependent on minimal funding and money available to attend school and ensure their future education. The poor households are most of the time not able to afford basic materials and clothes to send their children to school. Impacting individuals, nutrition quality is very low and does not fulfil the minimum
physical requirements of children to get enough energy to attend classes. Consequently, children skip classes, are too exhausted after walking and skipping breakfast or are not equipped well enough to properly attend classes. Mentioned issues related to financial instability highly impact their participation and chances of success in the long-term and are often the cause for dropout.

In regard to schools funding and the role of the government, students pointed out the scarcity of reference books. Since students only learn from materials selected by the government but do not have the opportunity to consult other sources and books, it is necessary for them to get additional references. Therefore, books and libraries are a big concern for students. Very often depicted as a major issue, libraries are sometimes closed and books sold informally by teachers to make extra money on top of their salary. Moreover, washing facilities for girls and in general are missing and the ratio of toilets for children if very low compared to the number of students. The scarcity of sanitation services and educational facilities, their difficult accessibility and the quality of education provided are not supporting youth with sufficient conditions. Basic resources like running water are also reported as missing by teachers and principals. The water, sanitation and hygiene programs (WaSH) are crucial in developing countries, especially in Ethiopia, to teach children and prevent waterborne diseases. In the case of rural schools, it often cannot be properly taught to the kids due to water scarcity. The lack of practical materials and resources therefore not just limit the children’s abilities and potentials to perform well in school, but can be life-threatening at the same time as well, for instance through waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea.

In Ethiopia, the Oromia region and SNNPR, where we conducted our research, are the regions with the lowest availability of water, both being under the national average. Therefore, water is not just a scarce resource, but it is also difficult to retrieve (due to distances and yearly droughts) and hence most likely to spread diseases since one does not have the luxury of choice if there is only a little water in the area (We are water Foundation, 2011). Over 600,000 children under the age of 5 are threatened by diseases from water and sanitation in Ethiopia (WHO, 2016), while 22 percent of them lose their lives due to diarrheal infections (Rainbow for the Future, 2019). Consequently, water scarcity and its contamination still pose a serious danger and limiting factor to the overall population and youth of Ethiopia, especially in the rural part of Oromia and SNNPR. Already impacted by the distance between schools and households which is sometimes too consequent to ensure attendance, youth are most of the time very tired in classes. Most of the time walking five to ten kilometres per day to join their schools, youth are not encouraged to attend classes. Additionally, already tired, children are most of the time not able to sit in classrooms. The classes are described as “overcrowded with often more than 80 children in rooms having a capacity to host 40 individuals” (Interviewee 2). This situation does not favour quality education for students attending classes and most of the time creates rivalry and exclusion. The teacher-to-student ratio in the primary schools visited is 1:70, in secondary school it is 1:60, while gender parity exists with a slight majority of female students. Hence, due to the overwhelming size of students, one of the main concerns of school staff is the lack of classrooms and quality of education to assure attending to every child in the class. Individual empowerment is not ensured due to the lack of teacher and it impacts the sense of personal control, efficacy expectations, competency, and consciousness factors towards the achievement of their personal goals (Kieffer, 1984). While the government and ministry of education promote a ratio of 1:50, reality often looks differently as for these schools. Given this situation, systems were created to create students’ cooperation during classes with well-performing students gathered with four students facing issues to solve exercises or learn. This system allows teachers to increase their efficiency by having more time to help specific students and encourage students to learn actively (Dewey, 1933). Considered as useful and benefiting students by teachers and principals, this methodology aims to foster learning.

As mentioned previously, the total of teachers is very low compared to the number of students. Managed by the regional bureaux of the regions, the budget allocation for new professors highly depends on the cooperation of the bureaux deciding how to allocate their budget. Depicted as
“non-transparent and a long process” by the principal of a school in the SNNPR region, the problem of teachers’ selection is very impactful for the rural schools. Complaints from students about teachers have been issued mainly regarding discouraging behaviours and not finishing the teaching schedule in time to prepare students for the annual exams due to sickness or low motivation. This situation does not provide youth with an appropriate framework to be educated in the long-term and often transmit discouraging feelings to them diminishing their self-confidence (Rappaport, 1987). Students mentioned being demotivated by teachers missing or not attending most of the classes. Not enough confident nor skilled to succeed in national examinations, the conditions often lead to early school dropouts. National organisations confirmed this while working in the field. One of the educational specialists of the biggest intergovernmental agency working for children in the world mentioned as well the “absence of accountability of the teachers and principals to reach minimal results for their students at national exams” (Interview 2). This practice is putting education in danger when it comes to sustainable change in the country aiming at improving enrolment rates (Sterling, 1996). This situation jeopardizes the enrolment of youth, their personal development, and their motivation to pursue their studies. This puts the future of the youth generation in Ethiopia in danger when it comes to employment and empowerment. It has also been described as a potential driver increasing poverty trap and differences for the youth generation.

Culture creates divisions within the country and its regions with very high levels of social exclusion and competition between children. Cultural practices are anchored at the core of each ethnic group and can influence school attendance of the youth. Differences between ethnicities are part of the country’s culture but encourage discrimination between youth. Even if the two regions visited were not the most conflictual in the country, harmful traditional practices and discrimination still persist in regard to poverty and disabled youth individuals having very difficult times in rural areas. Mostly affecting girls, some harmful traditional practices like genital mutilations or early marriage are forcing young girls to stay home and deprive them of school opportunities. More than this, girls are sometimes escaping their home to migrate to other countries putting their lives in danger to access freedom. These practices are still representing an important issue in Ethiopian rural areas that is still difficult to eradicate for the government. Even if a legal framework is existing to punish aggressors, its implementation is described as weak by different professionals working on the field. For this reason, awareness campaigns are supported by NGOs to change perceptions and attitudes. Programs are also supporting youth who are excluded or at risk of exclusions by getting financial support to attend school and benefit from free materials. Most of these students were empowered by now getting access to education and even scored in the top 3 of their class. One of the beneficiary children stated that students “are equal now as long as they keep attending school”, referring to the distinction of “rich” and “poor” children. A strong wish for belonging and social inclusion has been mentioned by many other students as well, stating their ability to “sit and learn with the rich kids” as well as not having the “feeling to be poor anymore”. Described as relative poverty, these children are marginalized from their peers since their own less than the other average households in their community. Communities need to “link” these individuals as a form of establishing social capital in order to close the gap between these two social classes of rich and poor (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). Other interviewees outlined feeling part of their peers’ groups thanks to “new clothes” and school supplies. The local NGO interviewee mentioned their ability “to stand up proud and talk proudly about their ideas” (Interview 4). More than the exclusion of poor children, disabled youth are also facing very difficult situations not only at school but also with their families. Disabled youth explained that they have been facing harsh practices in the past and being totally excluded from the rest of their family and village. Hidden and locked up by their parents in separate rooms, most of the interviewees described their childhood as psychological trauma. Mental disabilities, often neglected, are still a major issue as well in the regions where awareness campaigns are needed. Perceived as a sin and religious punishment by most of the parents, disabilities are not well
understood and cause a lot of prejudices for youth. Their lack of self-esteem and confidence were often a huge issue in their personal development process which impacted their access and enrolment in education (Zimmerman, 2000). When these individuals had the chance to go to school, their disabilities were not accepted by their peers who always laughed and disrespect them. Even if the students interviewed were often on the top of class ranking, their peers’ behaviours combined with the shortage of teachers’ support have been described as discouraging to pursue studies and develop strengths. Due to the lack of financial resources and knowledge, parents also often refuse surgeries when childhood accidents occur which increases the disabilities and does not permit solutions for youth to have access to health services.

4.2.2. Need for political change and policy implementation

The recent appointment of Abiy Ahmed has permitted political changes allowing the non-governmental and youth sector to grow. First, with the introduction of a revised Charities and Societies Proclamation ("Proclamation No. 1113/2019", 2019), the government made a decisive step allowing organisations to register with an easiest and more transparent process as well as benefit from international funding in the topic of human rights. Moreover, the recent new challenges appeared in the last fifteen years and the recent political change also impacted the strategy undertaken by the government towards youth. For this reason, the ministry of Youth is currently working on addressing recommendations to the Prime minister in order to release a new youth policy by the end of 2019.

Despite this work undertaken by the ministry of youth and sport which focuses on youth mobilization, entrepreneurship, youth personality development, youth volunteerism, youth centres and youth association, the ministry is facing major issues. Described by the interviewee as a governmental failure, he insisted that “Youths are not happy with what is happening right now in the country, because the government failed to meet their needs” (Interviewee 3). The testimony of an individual working at a high level of expertise on youth and in relation to the federal authorities mentioned important issues faced by the youth sector in a national level for the last decade and jeopardizing the empowerment and participation of youth individuals. The structure and sectors included in the ministry are changing frequently, including in the past culture and nowadays sport which does not allow the ministry to have a sustainable focus on youth. This issue raised the question of the budget and the importance given to this topic and its programs. In a country where the youth population represent a vast majority, the budget of the ministry in 2018 was about 1.6 million Ethiopian Birr which represents approximately 53 300 euros. Based on the interviewee testimony, “finances are a challenge compared to other ministries in the country, in this ministry, finances are way below the need given the number of the youth in Ethiopia” (Interviewee 3). This budget is very low compared to other ministries having more than “four times this amount of money to run their ministry” (Interviewee 3). Moreover, as presented before, the absence of support from the house of representative to ratify international youth charters and agreements compromise the work of the ministry in its official objectives. This point relates to the “government rhetoric” depicted by this interviewee as “only promises without any real support” (Interviewee 3). The change planned and promoted for the past years has never happened in the rural areas and the “youth are not benefiting from national policies” (Interviewee 3). For this interviewee, the time has been too long and it is now time to act “in favour of youth with concrete implementation plans” (Interviewee 3). This issue shows once more the lack of policy implementation and the real absence of youth mainstream encouraging and helping youngsters to actively take part in policy development with the national authorities. Even if the cooperation between ministries is ensured at a policy level, the implementation of programs framed for youth needs is described as completely non-existent. Indeed, there is no other ministry using age categories to differentiate priorities between the youth and the rest of society. This problem arises
the universality of policies and the missing components for decision-makers to consider youth generation and its challenges during policy development. Given that the problem is already at a policy level, it explains why the implementation is not ensured and does not have any impact. The difficulties in terms of communication between the federal government and its regional bureaux are also creating gaps in terms of reporting and information flows. Depicted as the main issue by the interviewee, the consultation of youth by the prime minister are lacking. Abiy Ahmed planned to meet with youth to exchange ideas and debate about the national policies but these meetings have always been cancelled by the prime minister. According to the interviewee, “most of the Ethiopian politicians do not want to face young people and fear them” (Interviewee 3). Youth participation in determining matters are important for them to develop skills, confidence, opportunities and awareness (Rivera and Seidman, 2005). The cancellation of structured dialogue with youth is putting the trust and reputation of the government in danger and discredit part of the work done towards youth mobilization.

The recent strategy and changes announced by Abiy Ahmed about the progressive liberalisation of the country represents a potential opportunity for youth to benefit from foreign direct investments and job creation in the different sectors. Mostly focusing on agriculture for the past century, experts in economy and employment affirmed that the country needs to change its priorities and work towards the development of the manufacturing sector. Today, higher education mainly focuses on training civil engineers and only scarce opportunities are offered for youth to be trained in other sectors like manufacturing. The Growth Transformation Plan II planned from 2015 to 2020 aims to achieve high performance in the field of economic and productivity development but the shift between sectors is not yet done and needs to be accelerated to ensure job creation and better economic conditions for the country. This delay in implementing changes results in low productivity and high turnovers in factories where the level of expertise is low and the labour conditions are below international standards.

Despite the reforms undertaken by the federal government of Ethiopia, the importance given to the culture in the country represents an important parameter when it comes to empowerment opportunities, participation and support from peers, family and communities. Youth are closely affected by the opportunities but also support, encouragements and trust of the individuals surrounding them. In order to ensure the sustainable development of policies and their implementation, it is important to understand and analyse the level of trust offered to them in each opportunity.

4.3. Trust

Trust is a crucial component of youth to be empowered and develop their personalities. By being trusted, youth benefits from psychological support from their peers, parents, community or society which can transform them. A crucial element of individuals’ personal development, trust can benefit youth with confidence allowing them to achieve great change in their personal as well as others’ lives. In the case of Ethiopia, the youth reported a lack of support and encouragement in their studies and personal endeavours. Often explained to the scarcity of resources, the risks are taken by the youth to do activities or take initiatives is often perceived as negative. This general atmosphere developed by the lack of trust weakens youngsters who lose self-confidence and hope for their future. The trust in the Ethiopian rural context is often taking three dimensions including different circles of individuals: the family, the community and the society as a whole.

4.3.1. Family support in rural areas

Family plays a major role in the construction of youth personalities to ensure personal and intellectual development. Starting for early childhood, family support and trust help children to develop self-confidence, self-independence and self-motivation which will build up their life path.
The first thousand days of life of every individual represents a unique period to develop the foundations of health, growth and neurodevelopment (Walker, 2007). Due to poverty and malnutrition in developing countries like Ethiopia, the children’s development is sometimes compromised. In order to ensure the enrolment of youth in education with a sufficient level of personal development, the trust offered by family members is essential.

The high level of households’ poverty and the lack of accessible resources make the situation of families difficult and impact directly the education of children. The lack of financial resources has been depicted by the youth interviewees as very impacting in the support that they received from their parents. Often unable to afford classes’ materials and clothes, parents are unable to financially support their children. This indirect support is highly affecting the empowerment of youngsters who are suffering from scarce basic needs resources and are diminished when they attend school. Given the high number of children per households, youth are part of large families which reduce the level of attention offered to each of the siblings. Even if it differs from family backgrounds, the situation in the Oromia and SNNPR regions in regard to valuing education seems to be similar in the majority of households where labour is often part of children daily life. Parents are mostly counting on their children to participate in the family duties and domestic tasks like cooking, fetching water, taking care of herds and harvesting. Most of the youth affirmed that they had to work and study in the meantime. Having school in the morning, youth are free in the afternoon and most of the time support their family needs. Helping their parents to sustain their household and take care of their siblings was for some of them a priority. This situation, being part of the culture and social norms for decades, often deprive children to access school in good conditions. Nevertheless, as mentioned by some interviewees, giving responsibilities such as “managing herds for very young individuals is already a trustful attitude” (Interview 4). The price of animals in Ethiopia is very high for rural citizens and represents most of the time the main source of income. It represents leadership responsibilities for youth who are already taking care of their families’ resources at a young age. Participants in the focus groups said that it was sometimes difficult for them to attend school with proper conditions to succeed. Related to this issue, the absence of moral support and trust have been described by the youth as a very difficult situation with parents not always being aware of the educational value. Sometimes having parents who did not attend school, this generation of youngsters often has to struggle to get to school. This situation can create incomprehension between family members and the priorities of children are different than the ones from their parents. It also relates to the informal education described as “missing” by interviewees working for international NGOs (Interviewee 4). Not supported by parents at home about their homework or work at school, it creates complexity for youth to be encouraged to study and have monitoring from their parents making sure that they attend classes and get good results. In this situation, youth are living in two parallel environments where priorities of their parents are not fitting with their daily life and commitment at school.

4.3.2. Role of community for empowerment

The role of community in Ethiopian rural area, where people share land and cohabit in remote areas, is very important and represents a crucial pillar for youth to get inspired by leaders and peers. Defined as a group having characteristics in common, the perspective used for this research focuses on Ethiopian communities existing in villages. Cultural and religious leaders are considered as role models and their actions, words and perceptions are very often listened by the youth. Community resilience is necessary when poor living conditions affect the whole community. Having cultural roots in sharing and supporting each other, Ethiopians promote cooperation and support between community members. The creation of newly established communities in the field of practical work and the interview of the members have shown the importance that community take in every member personal life. Described as the base of their
motivation, aspirations and achievements, the communities in rural areas permitted youth individuals to benefit from a solid collective base. In terms of a theoretical approach, community building and work are essential to maintain a certain degree of self-empowerment and awareness-raising within it and hence desired as the process of assisting ordinary people to improve their own communities by undertaking collective action (Twelvetrees, 1991). By creating social capital in terms of participation in and support of local communities, as well as a feeling of belonging and “bonding” with other members of the community, communities move closer together.

To solve this issue, saving groups have been created by local organisations explaining the importance of youth and families’ self-independence to participate in education costs. Those saving groups tutored by local and international NGOs offer the opportunity to parents and children to get an education on the importance of saving and the methods to do so. Building those saving groups within small groups of community members, this strategy creates trust and foster relationships between the individuals. Communities of practice are another helpful method to establish groups of same interest to work conjointly on the extension of knowledge and improvement of certain issues (Wenger, 2004), as of the saving group. After acquiring some money, the community has an agreement with the organisations to spend a part of it in the education of their children. Explaining the process, one of the project coordinators of an international NGO working on development described the categorisation of individuals between “destitute” who are the very poor families, “strugglers” who are family with not enough income, and “ready to grow” who are the families able to finance basic needs of their children. Mostly involving women, these projects have a recognised impact and offer a sustainable solution for empowering families and youth. Indeed, support by family and community has been mentioned by the students and interviewees. “So, as a community, depending on the awareness, they are very much encouraged and motivated to support us, for example, you can find areas where communities would race and fund even through their labour, build schools” (Interviewee 2). Hence, communities and families try to contribute financially to schools, but often school contributions are even too high for families to take. One student mentioned being discouraged to ask his parents to provide him with additional readings and books for his education after facing the same answers and rejections. With this method of group savings, new opportunities are offered to children offering them trust in their studies.

Due to a low level of educational standards, especially in rural areas of Ethiopia, communities often lack the understanding and awareness of issues related to education and youth. “Majority of Ethiopian communities, particularly who are living in the rural areas, they are not educated” (Interviewee 2). However, to raise awareness is crucial in a well-functioning community. One that often discourages youth to get educated, it is difficult to pursue your goals and gain new skills, especially because of the heavy influence it has on forming the future careers of its youngsters. Methods of support by school staff and community are multifaceted. For instance, interviewed teachers at schools in the Kembata region mentioned motivating and encouraging students through practical methods to higher their interest in their subject. This strategy adopted to give more practical tasks to students is in line with active learning theories developed by Dewey and Von Glassersfeld. Due to the size of classes, a 1 to 5 structure of tutoring exists, meaning that one high performing student helps to teach five medium performing students, while 1 medium performing student can consult 5 low performing students. Teachers check attendance regularly, once in the morning and once in the afternoon. An attendance system subsists that informs the father of the child if it does not attend school for one day, asking the parent to state the reason by meeting with the teacher. After 3 consecutive days of absence, the dropout committee will be informed to follow up on the student. Discussions about the results and reasons for missing school will be held and facilitated. The mentioned mechanism is special for this school in order to assure attendance and low dropout rates. For another primary school, the principal facilitated a monthly meeting for teachers, students and parents of the entire community to exchange thoughts and create a platform.
for improvements. This situation combined with the lack of respect offered to the youth makes them unconfident and discouraged. Therefore, to be respected in a community it takes a lot of effort, while on the other hand it can be easily lost as soon as unconventional ways that a less educated community would not or is not able to pursue, such as acquiring higher degrees of education, turn out to be less successful. Vice versa, empowered youth that was successful are well respected and encouraged to go further in their personal career if they find a job for instance. Therefore, the pressure to succeed from the community is very high on youth if you choose the unconventional way, so that youngsters that have the opportunity to choose often prefer starting their own business to acquire practical skills that can be used in real-life situations. The community takes a big part to be considered in the overall decision-making processes of young people. “They expect that the child might get a good job and will support them, but if this doesn’t happen then they might have some kind of reservations towards education” (Interviewee 2). Hence, trust can be a quite fragile construct between the community and its youth, often only working if one does as the community expects of them, as well as if one then succeeds in their career. If you do not, support, trust and opportunities are only partly provide. Only with a change of mindset towards social change, these communities can regain their trust and support since it moves towards a new balanced order, distributing social power more evenly, hence empowering people who have been marginalised (Beck and Purcell, 2010).

4.3.3. Societal impact on youth development

Society plays an important role in Ethiopia, especially for youth, their development and perceptions. Maciver and Page (Maciver and Page, 1959, p.5) defined it as “a system of usages and procedures, of authority and mutual aid, of many groupings and divisions”. Not necessarily like-minded but interconnected through certain relations that differ from others, it unites larger groups of individuals into one mutual structure of a shared society (Hossain and All, 2014). According to an interviewee, in Ethiopia, society is partly shaped by the differences and conflicts between the many ethnic groups in the country. Often triggered by arguments about settlements, land ownership and differences in culture, these conflicts show the other side of the coin of Ethiopia’s deeply rooted hospitality towards friends and strangers. Mentioned issues, to some extent, lead to a general state of mistrust between and isolation of certain ethnic groups, favouring exclusion, marginalisation, and conflicts. In the past and still today, Ethiopia society and government is struggling to master this situation. This struggle contributes to a high degree of political instability that is caused by conflicts. For a country and its society to live and work closely together, disparities need to be straightened first in order to establish opportunities and trust without prejudices, especially for youth to grow up in a change of mindset type of environment. Interviewed youth outlined the importance and current hope towards change due to the new political order. The new president, Abiy Ahmed, is seen by many in society to bring new opportunities for the Ethiopian population. Especially young people regain hope and trust from the current president’s actions. Considering the interconnectedness of skills, opportunities and trust, the first two need to be a given in order to establish a new level of trust in Ethiopia’s society. In the past, people’s trust has been abused in many ways, most heavily by the lack of political transparency and resource allocation that did not benefit the people, but itself and the politicians involved.

Mentioned by another interviewee (programme officer, 42 years, male), the pressing issue of not finding jobs has been initiated by a non-transparent government that selected employees by contacts and status, rather than skills and education, putting in place people that are not fit for their positions, leaving skilled workers aside. Currently, the sheer size of the country’s population increases the burden of the government to establish sufficient job opportunities for the steadily growing society. The current economic situation is majorly affecting youth who are often left
behind even after university graduation. Depicted as an issue, work represents a real identity for youth who are categorised by their family and community depending on their jobs and the money that they earn. This social pressure has been described by students as very negative and harmful for them to start and experience new professional activities. This categorisation negatively impacts youngsters who are discouraged to pursue their objectives. Therefore, the government needs to find ways to regain society’s trust again after many years of corruption by preferably providing the population with new opportunities and jobs as soon as possible.

The above-mentioned tension and mistrust between society and government reflects directly the way Ethiopian society usually treats its youth population. Due to lacking trust in the government and its system, society also lacks trust in its children and young adults, since the majority is unable to build their own careers and futures with the little resources provided by the government. These issues can be easily described by a vicious cycle of lack of skills and opportunities, the first two pillars of youth empowerment. As outlined in the previous paragraphs, youth are lacking educational opportunities as well as proper job placements. An interviewee during the field study with Roots Ethiopia described the situation as an educational bottleneck, explaining that out of 100 University graduates only 2 find a job in the area they studied in. Others that are unable to find a job in their field need to revert to jobs that they are either unskilled to perform in or jobs that are heavily underpaid for the time students spend in terms of years in college and money to afford higher education. The overall pressing issue starts when society begins then to question the value of higher education if most of the graduates are unable to find a good job or any job at all. Several interviewees explained the relatively common picture of graduates returning to their home city/town, unable to find a job, and depending on their families’ financial support again. Society not just loses trust in the government and the value of education, but also in their own children and youth, partly blaming them for not staying to work in the family business, but rather pursuing an educational career that leaves them behind jobless. Returning graduates are therefore less respected, discouraged and sneered at by society, making them question their decisions and worth. Often, they end up as hopeless and jobless drunks in their hometowns. Finally, they lose their trust in the educational system that indirectly promised them to live a better life after achieving a degree, leading to them not recommending others to continue their education, which closes the vicious cycle of mistrust between youth and society.

5. Discussion and Recommendations

5.1. Discussion

Despite significant improvements in a policy level allowing the development sector to perform and support the local population, the current political instability with the approaching elections in May 2020\(^4\) are jeopardizing the sustainability of the country’s youth policies and its implementation. Major stakeholders, including the federal government, international agencies, and NGOs, are today working in the field of empowerment with collaboration schemes. Even though partnerships exist, policies are missing important elements fostering youth empowerment such as the right to education and school participation incentives. Whereas partnerships are existing at a policy level, a tremendous gap subsist when it comes to activities implementation.

In regard to the research questions, stakeholders’ role to drive sustainable changes in policies towards activity implementation is central in order to empower Ethiopian youth in rural areas. In

\(^4\) Even if the official date for the national election is May 2020, the vote could be postponed for diverse political reasons.
the context of Ethiopia’s rural areas, the personal development of youngsters is lacking which compromises their future opportunities. Empowerment of youth could positively drive youngsters to participate in educational activities and develop their personalities. Incentives put in place by stakeholders such as non-governmental organisations are useful to drive sustainable change and offer meaningful participation of youth in educational, political and non-formal activities. Showcased by the two case studies focusing on the work carried by HEfDA and Roots Ethiopia, incentives through role modelling, personal support, and non-formal education opportunities has revealed the importance of such mechanisms to encourage and influence youth towards education enrolment.

The reality in the field highlights the lack of communication, resources, and directives formulated by regional governments supporting national injunctions to ensure adequate youth development. The mentioned gap in skills and opportunities for youth is putting individuals, especially vulnerable ones, in danger with a lack of concrete actions benefiting them. In the context of high uncertainty in the labour market, the youth generation suffers from low employment and high rural divide excluding them from opportunities. The change expected by the government in the upcoming years with the liberalisation of the country represents a crucial step for actors in all levels to find a common answer to the main challenges faced by youth. Not supported by the lack of reliable data, the information flows and their lack of transparency does not favour at any point the achievement of efficient activity implementation in a local level and the communication between the federal government and its regional bureaux represents a central issue for the practical application of national policies.

Youth empowerment is still a comparatively new topic to the country of Ethiopia, even though the majority of the population is composed of young people. National challenges related to that topic have only been superficially tackled before due to lacking resources and other political priorities. In the case of rural areas, the issue of offering youth with skills, opportunities, and trust is urging in order to favour their personal development. Focusing on enrolment for the past years, the Ethiopian federal government did not prioritize the quality of education which is today far below the international standards. Despite this enrolment priority, the lack of reliable data did not permit the governmental institutions to make sure that strategies were effective. Given this situation, drop-out rates of primary and secondary school students still remain high and fragilize the education of youth in the long-term. Innovative methods offered by Non-Governmental Organisations and local associations like Technical and Vocational Education and Training or tutorial classes have shown promising results in providing youth with trust and personal development achievements. Rather than only helping vulnerable youth individuals to gain confidence and skills, these opportunities provide them with a framework supporting them through community resilience and mutual understanding.

Theories on youth empowerment have been integrated into existing theories on poverty, community building, education and empowerment, in order to provide a solid framework for the country and its leaders to consider and realize sustainable change. This study provides its readers with novel perspectives on youth empowerment in the African continent context since previous research about youth empowerment in the context of Ethiopia is relatively low in extent. Following recommendations contribute to improvements on a policy and field level and according to steps to take in order to better youth conditions in Ethiopia.

5.2. Recommendations

In relation to the observations and the testimonies of local stakeholders, some appropriate major changes seem necessary to improve the living conditions of youth citizens in Ethiopia. For that
purpose, recommendations for actions will be given for the different stakeholders involved in the empowerment and development process of Ethiopia’s youth.

5.2.1. Actions for the Ethiopian government

On a political level, the recognised importance of youth needs has to be prioritized and taken into consideration by all ministries. This involves strict procedures that should include youth through consultations in every strategy designed by the ministries with a priority given to the creation of an independent youth ministry with a consequent budget to ensure sustainable youth development in the country. These consultations have failed until now with many withdrawals from politicians, including the prime minister. The commitment of the government to offer open debates and discussions could be a driver to foster trust and progress. Increasing the number of volunteerism opportunities for youth in the activities of the government would enhance the cooperation between decision makers and youth leaders. Even if the youth policy will soon be updated using diverse stakeholders’ inputs, it is important to insist on the need for the Federal Ethiopian government to respect the Youth African Union or Colombo charters in order to implement concrete and impactful changes. Concerned by the absence of education mentioned as a basic human right in the Ethiopian constitution, the Federal government is highly encouraged to proceed with this update. In order to favour better communication and cooperation between the ministries and the regional bureaux, information systems and adapted strategic plans for each region have to be clearly discussed and applied. The commitment inconsistency of the different regions can no longer be accepted by the federal government which has to elaborate on stricter rules to ensure transparent information flows, accountability, and efficient policy implementation. This also applies to schools’ employees who should be accountable for their work and their level of success at the National exams. Some targets in terms of exam ratio success should be determined and sanctions should be applied to teachers and principals who are not reaching these objectives. The implementation of an accountability system for school workers should be accompanied by a shift in learning expectations in order to train youth for the jobs of tomorrow. For this, the use and promotion of the existing Ethiopian National Qualification Framework are highly recommended to ensure skills-match between educational content and job opportunities. The blatant lack of reliable data in the country jeopardises the development of long-term strategies and their evaluation in the field of education and youth. To resolve this major issue, the creation of an independent centre for data collection equipped with advanced data collection methods and experts could fill the existing gap in censuses. The transparency and accountability of this centre should be ensured through open mechanisms allowing ministries, non-governmental organisations and informal groups to have access to the data collected. Another educational incentive for empowering school students before entering school could be to establish mandatory pre-primary school classes, as well as extending the existing drop-out committees in schools for vulnerable youth facing personal issues and cultural duties.

5.2.2. Actions for Non-Governmental Organizations

One of the most important tasks for NGOs and other organisations should be the promotion of inclusion and awareness-spreading for children lacking knowledge or having disabilities. Awareness-spreading needs to be executed by disabled individuals themselves to promote their abilities and worth in society as a role-model for others. Additionally, handicapped accessible facilities, tailored courses, local discussion groups and TVETs for the disabled need to be established. NGOs can contribute heavily to the improvement of the situation through their pilot projects and best practices that encourage governmental policy reforms. Establishing saving groups, for instance, has proven to be rather successful. However, individuals and schools should never be dependent on the financial help of organisations. In general, an additional budget for the
education sector needs to be provided. The obvious lack and high demand for reference books, well-equipped libraries, computer rooms and practical school materials are eminent, as much as the desire for close-by secondary schools. Moreover, schools are missing private facilities for females, as well as appealing youth centres and exercises attuned for them. Aside from school materials, teachers and principals need to be trained frequently and recreational centres built, and wages raised to improve quality and value of education. Also, the vast gap between private and other school forms needs to be narrowed, as well as student centred methods of teaching applied, and tutorial classes provided to elevate motivation of students and mentioned quality of education.

5.2.3. Need for cross-collaborations

When it comes to cross-collaboration between sectors and institutions, improvements are needed to promote youth interests, participation and commitment. Youth needs to engage themselves in politics but also be allowed, respected, and empowered to speak out, especially in a local and regional level. Therefore, youth councils should be established by local and regional authorities to exchange information, needs and ideas from youth. More than the participation of the youth, it is recommended to offer a decision power to the youth leaders by giving them the right to vote for political decisions and local change. The development of youth councils will contribute to foster the empowerment of young leaders and role models to inspire their peers and community. By involving diverse influencers including youth leaders, spiritual, and community leaders, the local authorities will benefit from more influence and a better understanding of people’s needs. It will also develop better trust and more motivation for youngsters to get engaged in politics or in organisations helping for the future of the country. Additionally, cooperation between universities, their students and businesses need to be improved and strengthened in the country. Better communication between educational and business institutions would allow a better understanding of the current training needs of the country for future employment and allow universities to adapt their courses based on the skills needed in the labour market. Encouraged to be fully transparent, this discussion should be promoted for the youth to be able to choose their field of expertise and motivate them with accessible opportunities. The results would be promoted through successful youth workers and entrepreneurs who graduated and would now be fully independent. This cooperation could also benefit youth with more transparent job offers listed and fully available for all Ethiopian citizens using the Ethiopian National Qualification Framework to describe the expectations of the recruiters.

6. Conclusion

Ethiopia is at a momentous milestone of its history with the opportunity for the country and its youth population to progress quickly towards development and accessible opportunities for all. With more than 63.4 percent of youth below the age of 24 years old (Cia.gov, 2019), the country is nowadays dealing with the urging issue of offering education, jobs and decent lives to its youth generation. This shift requires all stakeholders involved to ensure a smooth and sustainable transition towards solving national issues, positively impacting all individuals for the interest of the country.

Given the recent changes implemented by the prime minister since his appointment in 2018, the direction currently taken by the government seems to include positive impacts for the opening of the development sector. Nevertheless, some key concerns still remain in regard to the political instability, top-down decision making, growing population, and education objectives towards employability. For this, meaningful participation of youth in democratic and transparent processes
in collaboration with all stakeholders has to be promoted in order to safeguard socioeconomic rights and future of young individuals. Empowering the Ethiopian youth has to be prioritized to ensure the sustainable development of the country, ensuring the human development transition and the national objective of becoming a middle-income country by 2025 (World Bank, 2019). Curtis’ (2008) three pillars of youth empowerment (skills, opportunities, and trust) should hence be strived for and realized by the stakeholders involved.

Moreover, the study contributes with its numerous recommendations to findings, also applicable to other states on a national level, including governmental actions, and other countries that are facing similar issues. Youth are in direct need of government support by the implementation of concrete action plans and policies favouring youth empowerment and job creation. Data collection needs to be reliable through transparent and independent processes to ensure that needs can be identified and acted on through mentioned policies. Poverty eradication, social inclusion and training for marginalized individuals have to be the core of focus and followed-up with adequate resource allocation including financial backing. Elaborated skills-mismatch of graduates and trainees ought to be communicated by the government in order to prevent high job turnovers. In terms of communication, further cross-collaborations between all stakeholders (federal bodies, NGOs, companies, universities, training facilities and local communities) and youth need to be established, nurtured and extended. In addition to that, youth networks should be formed to provide them with a platform to higher their political voice and spread awareness about needs, such as for disabled children. Quality education needs to be sustained by providing students with practical learning materials and lessons, skilled teachers, and appropriate training opportunities.

Concerning future research, one should consider other regions of Ethiopia to obtain a more holistic perspective of the country’s and regions’ differences. Moreover, it should include the exchange of best practices from neighbouring countries to provide stakeholders with new viewpoints and perspectives. Future research could also focus more deeply on the role and required actions of the Ethiopian government after its future steps towards liberalisation. Drawing connections between urban and rural unemployment, as well as the increasing importance of the manufacturing sector and informal work can be of interest for future research to understand interrelated challenges of the Ethiopian youth and upcoming generations.
Appendix

Appendix 1: Meaningful youth participation flower by the Talent Youth Association, 2018.

![Meaningful youth participation flower](image)


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENQF Level</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>General and Higher Education</th>
<th>TVET</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Master’s Degree (240 Credits)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma (120 Credits)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree (360 Credits)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Diploma (120 Credits)</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma (120 Credits)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>12 Higher Education Entrance Examination Certificate (120 Credits)</td>
<td>Diploma (120 Credits)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>11 Level 4 Certificate (120 Credits)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10 General Education Certificate (120 Credits)</td>
<td>Level 3 Certificate (120 Credits)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8 Level 2 Certificate</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Access</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-4 Including Adult Basic Education</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Pictures of the Roots Ethiopia case study realised in the SNNPR region, Kembata, Ethiopia, 2019.

Figure 4: Focus group participants, Durame, Ethiopia, 2019

Figure 5: School attendance list in the SNNPR region, Ethiopia, 2019

Figure 6: Classroom in a school located in the SNNPR region, Ethiopia, 2019
Appendix 7: Organigram of Roots Ethiopia program, Roots Ethiopia, 2017.

Appendix 5: Group of disabled youth interviewed for the HefDA case study realised in the Oromia region, Kersa, Ethiopia, 2019.

Interview Guide:

The organisation
- Aim of the organisation & main objectives
- Position

Ethiopian situation
- What are the main issues in general, especially related to children and youth
demographic and youth population
- school enrolment, primary/secondary school
- poverty (Reasons and evolution
- low education (reasons: eg. accessibility, quality, low enrolment…)
- inclusion/ exclusion (reasons, e.g. cultural heritage, social norms, extra-curricular activities)
- urban/ rural divide
- interrelatedness of above mentioned
- biggest barriers and limitations (e.g. corruption, …)

- Importance and impact of empowerment
- personal definition (priority…)
- evolution and improvements
- gaps, need for better achievements

- Role of stakeholders
- empowerment
- organisations/NGOs
- government (policies, framework offered for change, governmental change, )
- role model (youth) leaders
- cross-collaborations

Project implementation and monitoring
Scale, aim and strategy within projects implementation
- current related ones
- motivation/drivers
- cooperation and local support
- which values are promoted
- collection and share of good practices
- funding, resources allocated/needed

Project evaluation and future perspectives
Sustainability and self-independence of projects
- outcomes
- tools for evaluation
- change in mindset
- role played by empowerment to create new opportunities
- framework offered to sustain poverty eradication
Appendix 7: Samples of four of the most relevant interviews.

Research institute – Researcher (Interviewee 1)

Interviewer: What is your role and how was the institute established?

Interviewee: One is EDRI, a development research institute and then we were merged it with another research Institute, which is called policy studies and research centre, RSRC. So, both of them are government research institutes. EDRI is more about rigorous research, more academic, more quantitative. RSRC does more exploratory research and more policy work. So, I don't exactly know why they are merged, but we were told that because they do similar work, then it's better to, to merge them to PSI. Now, for PSI, we will focus on government demand projects. So instead of choosing like a topic that you want to explore, the government will say we have this needs and topics for studying. So, I am a research fellow here. But I'm also coordinating the new research centre, that at the moment I'm only one in their data centre, because there's a new structure. So, we have four clusters. One of the clusters is called macro economy and finance, the other one is social policy. The other one is the economic sectors and the last one is governance. So, I am in the social policy cluster.

Interviewer: So how would you describe your work in relation to youth?

Interviewee: So, women, youth and the rest of society, they are our sort of focus of study. By forming policies, identifying the challenges and recommending solutions, that's how our institute would help. So, at the moment, in my opinion, the main challenge in both rural and urban, for the youth is youth employment. So, in urban areas, there is high unemployment, the average urban unemployment is about 17%, one, seven, in the country. But in bigger cities like this (Addis Ababa), it's more like 30%. And for the youth, it's even higher. Even those who are employed, they earn very little, so they are also underemployed basically. This is in cities, in rural areas that employment seems lower like 5 to 6%, but this is very misleading, because they earn very, very low, and they just are highly underemployed. So maybe in a year, maybe they work a few weeks or a few months, during rainy season. And then they earn very low but are considered employed. So, so there is a problem of low earning, in both, rural and urban areas, and there is high unemployment.

Interviewer: How do you propose solution in relation the unemployment issue?

Interviewee: So, we do research on for example, skills-mismatch. So, if what the country is producing in terms of skill does not match what the economy needs, then you will have unemployment. At the same time, you will have firms looking for workers and then on the other hand, you have this skill-mismatch. So, we do research on these issues. For example, we have one big challenge in the country in the industrial parks, the new industrial parks, you probably heard of them. But in the country where there is a lot of youth, a lot of unemployment, those industrial parks are struggling to find workers with the right skills and also, they are struggling with high labour turnover. So, people are preferring like informal sort of jobs, because the manufacturing requires discipline. And we are very agricultural, still kind of agricultural country. So, in agriculture, the work requires less discipline because if you want to plow land tomorrow, you can do or maybe the next day. But in manufacturing, you're working with other people and it's a line of production. So, it requires, like, you have to stand for hours, and you have to be there on time. So, this, because we are not used to this kind of discipline, many youths leave manufacturing immediately. But also, they also complaining about low earning in
the manufacturing sector, you know, the firms coming to Ethiopia are looking for cheap labour but then the firm's they are saying because it's very low productivity, we cannot pay them.

**Interviewer:** So, what are they lacking? Is it only soft skills, like being on time, not focusing on productivity, for example? And also, I assume most of the hard skills, but then what kind of hard skills is it that they are lacking as well?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, mostly, they say they're lacking soft skills. But also, also technical skills are hard skills as well. But mainly, it's the soft skills that they're complaining about. So, for example, in terms of work ethic and discipline, and through this communication, skills, like language problems, and we have lots of social engagements, our culture in general for weddings, workers are away for days, you know, these sort of things. Technical skills, actually, the manufacturing sector wants some sort of trainable, with some basic skills, workers, so that they can train them very specialized by themselves. So, I mean, actually, there's lots of teachers in the country. But of course, there's lots of complaints about the quality of training, professional training and education. So, there's those who are graduates from the TVETs, so the first thing is, they didn't have like practical experience. It's very theoretical education based, there is very low apprenticeship, and the firms are not willing to give the students internship opportunities, because they say that they're going to destroy the machines.

**Interviewer:** So, there's less interaction at the moment. There is also the country, lacking some basic, not necessarily universities, but also educational trainings for the manufacturing sector. It also lacking for example how the universities are set up?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, it's mostly economic, financing, public service and social service education but the majority is construction. So, even though the government wanted to train as many interests as possible, the economy cannot absorb it, this is the issue. So, we have lots of engineers without jobs, unfortunately. And one of the criticisms of this policy is you have to take the time; you have to see the skill demand in the economy and adjust accordingly. So there's one year, two year, three year training, in more specialized sort of vocational things, but the problem is that the quality of education is bad and also like you we were saying earlier, the manufacturing sector, once somebody who's ready to be trained, somebody with basic skills, and then the firms can train them, it is very specific skills. But most of the students because of prestige issues, they want to do the higher level of TVETs, for example, like level three, level four, and then those that are three and four, you're looking for kind of better salary and things like that. But it’s very difficult to compete with the informal sector, for example, it's much, much better to work, because like party, informal work, you know, they don't have any license or anything. We are just sitting there, and you go park there, they watch your car, and you give them some money. So, this is the thing, they earn better than those who are working in manufacturing sector, which is dirtier and tougher. So, such employment is also better. So, this is the challenge we have now.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any policy recommendations on this? And what is your personal opinion?

**Interviewee:** I think this can work partly is to make incentives, right? Just make the manufacturing sector competitive, competitive to the service sector, for example.

**Interviewer:** And you were mentioning before like, about social and cultural learning starting from school? What is your opinion, what is for you the role of children at school? Or can we use them or educate them and in a way that could fit for the future needs? Because as you say, needs
are like shifting, it's something that changes every year or several months? So, how would you propose, like better education for kids? What could be included in relation to the GDP as well? Because I know that it's running until 2020 and there will be another one. So, how would you relate, like children's education, and like the GDP, for instance, and this shifting in terms of sectors?

**Interviewee:** I think in terms of the children education, it has to include like work ethic, and things like that, you know, like soft skills, communication, but our education system is more focused on very technical stuff. And students are taking exams, but not really learning. And we don't, in school we don't really learn, for example, creativity. If, you know, if you're wrong in school, I remember, the teacher would like insult you. So, you don’t want to take risks, you don’t think on your own. You're always saying what has the teacher taught me, this sort of thing. Instead teachers should be teaching creativity, confidence, trying, you know, making errors is okay, sort of. Also, if we tell the people who go to TVET that if we tell them, actually there is more demand for level one, the basic TVET, instead of three, the people would go there. But now what people see is the certificate now, what looks better in the paper is number three than number one, so they will strive for level three. Nobody's informing them about these issues, so, the labour market information system needs to be corrected.

**Interviewer:** So, what recommendation could you have in terms of policy, to influence the kids that are living most of the time in poor condition and social exclusion from the society to bring them again into the system? Because the government will need them, and they will be the government.

**Interviewee:** I think we should have like compulsory primary school for everyone, without regard to their income, because some kids drop out of school since their parents need them to work. A system needs to be established to ensure that those kids stay in school, because many don’t choose to drop out. And also, for those that sort of lack information, we were talking about this, make this information accessible. Help them in like job centres, even at woreda level, you know, at district level, and trying to have job centres connect those who are looking for your work with the companies even. Yeah, I think government was focusing more on giving access, for example, in education. Now schools, expansion in schools has been very successful in the country, health facilities as well. So, the focus has been more on quantity. We talked about this before, mostly about quantity to quality shift of education. But yeah, it was just constant first and then now, we already are suffering from health problems and skill, education and everything. So now, government is talking about quantity. But already affected people, they have nowhere to go, no institution that sort of helps them with this. So, you're completely left on your own once you graduate.

**Interviewer:**
What do you think and what could be your main recommendations in terms of implementation, either for government, but also for organizations collaborating and helping population?

**Interviewee:**
But sometimes, some of the policies become too ambitious. So, they fail despite having a very strong framework. The government remains still too unstructured. Maybe it is too early too judge, because elections have only recently been held, but they don’t have the answers on the questions yet, how could they? We will need to see what the elections bring next year.
**International intergovernmental organisation in the field of Children protection – Education specialist (Interviewee 2)**

**Interviewer:** We would like to ask you first to describe your role or position in the organisation and telling us a bit more about your background.

**Interviewee:** Actually, I was working for the Ministry of Education and for UK Department for International Development. While working for the Minister of Education, I was management information system team leader focusing on the collection and analysis of data from schools specifically. And also, I was managing projects focusing more on quality which includes data management, monitoring program supports, generation issue. I was also supporting the government in the generation of data, capacity building and controlling.

**Interviewer:** Okay, I would like to ask you, you mentioned the word like based on your position, but also based on like the corporation with the governments. We've seen your last reports in 2019, about the lack of reliable data. Could you tell us a bit more about this report, because we read it, we understood that the conclusion was that the data is not reliable, and that there is not enough investment from the government yet to have reliable data and that it's needed for the future, if they want to improve the situation. Could you give us like kind of an insight of you work on this report or how you manage to analyze the data, but also what would you recommend for this?

**Interviewee:** First of all, it depends on you know, how much our people like, some people who are working in the different levels of the government structure, see the importance of data or use data, for the planning of their decisions. So, basically, it starts from for example if you try to gather data from different regions, it depends on the commitment and awareness of maybe the Regional Education bureau head or, I don't know, the planning head. So, those regions which we know very well, people who are much aware and committed to value data and strive for completeness, they are producing the data on time and structure it well. There are regions which just, you know, keep a person, a single person in one corner, and that person can be considered the person who supposedly is in charge of all data, you know. How is the data to generate information? Because, what the data is asking, what does it mean for us, what needs to be taken first, what needs to be a priority, all these things need to be linked with the data you are receiving. So, I think, first of all the awareness and secondly, the structure, you know. Second, the reliability of data, since there is no independent quality control today, it's just a government who collects the data. There are no certain parties, which go into those and check on them if data is correct. So, if you're forced, no one will be accountable. No corrective measure will be taken. So, that, for example, if you try to ask government on other important data, you see, like. For example, last year, it might be 14%. And this year, it might go up like 70%, you'd be surprised. So, what is the reason, why is this going to happen? What have we done to improve from 14 to 70%, that needs to be asked. So, normally you will go and trace back, you know, if the data is correctly informing, informing us what's happening in the education system. So, there is no such kind of system. Basically, I say that it should be or can be quite a commitment issue, you know, accountability, issue, awareness issue, financial issues, also as a number of data, and other thing as the population, the census itself. So, there are a number of challenges. Yeah, and in addition to that, because the country is so big, there are about 40,000 schools all over the country. That's also another challenge because you're bringing data from 40,000 schools, or families, more than 20 million students, you know, more than 500,000 teachers, you know.
**Interviewer:** We talked quite a lot about policy level, could you talk about like project implementation, about innovative, educational activities that you may have implemented? Could you like describe or like showcase some good practices, or good examples of projects that you implemented in relation to a new form of education or environments for children?

**Interviewee:** For example, so the education policy program was a huge project, like 400 million US$ over four years supported by the World Bank, UK, a number of donors, it’s called a pool partner project. So, the project started in 2009, where the learning outcomes of students were, you know, going down. There is a national learning assessment which is done on every grade four, 8, 9 and 12. So, as the results of the students were going down, the government was very much shocked, because they were just focusing on access, expanding services on education. So, after four years, I saw like, for example, the result that have been going down have now been stabilized. And in the second phase, you know, the learning outcome of students was to raise again. So, the intervention, it is actually a huge investment, I saw the thread of the teacher training, you know, the textbook production, the textbook development that they are, you know, the curriculum was revised, new textbooks have been printed. More than 100 million textbooks, very attractive, and, you know, activity driven, kind of textbooks have been developed. Local teachers have been trained, because, you know, there were unqualified teachers who are teaching students at the primary level, so the government was known to deconstruct, you know, improving the capacity of the teacher. So, I really saw that the result was established, instead of going down, it stabilized.

**Interviewer:** Could you talk a bit more about the role of communities because what we’ve seen in the field is that there is a lack sometimes of support from the family or from the community and also from the teachers, which is another thing. But could you tell us like what is for you the most important, coming from the community, for children to be encouraged to go to school, to attend school to continue and to go to university, and to keep, like, this hope to get a job after university as well?

**Interviewee:** The most important thing you know, even the most important thing of course for education is that our mental development starts in the first 1000 days after birth. You know, the health and nutrition specialist to say it is a mother, it is a sister, the father and you know, the neighbours, community who know and form the child first. So, the actual education part will come at the age of four, because according to policy, a child has to join three primary school at the age of four. A child has been nurtured by his father, his mother, his brothers and sisters will have a better future, definitely, when you send that child to school. So, the community is critical but majority of Ethiopian communities, particularly who are living in the rural areas, they are not educated. So, as a community, depending on the awareness, they are very much encouraged and motivated to support us, for example, you can find areas where communities would race and fund even through their labour, build schools, you know, support the school system. For the community support, if there are, you know, children who need special support, children who dropout, the key members will go out and see what the problem is. Why don't you send your child to school? So, they will try to address the challenge families are facing. They're doing things depending on that awareness, you know, because they are educated. But even that is not the case, they very much motivated and supportive for the school system. But the problem is, after graduation students don’t find job, so there are certain kinds of these reservations. For example, why should I send my child to school, for example, most of the secondary schools might be far from the place where the children are living. So sometimes, before, you know, in early times, I might say I might sell my cattle or my horse or anything, and for my child to join the secondary school. But these days, the graduates are not getting specialized well enough to find a job. They expect that the child might get a good job and will
support them, but if this doesn’t happen then they might have some kind of reservations towards education.

**Interviewer:** Yes, this is definitely what we heard, like from many students dropping out from school explaining that. So, is there anything related to education that you would see important to mention? Like, do you see any, like specificity in relation to education, and the main issue happening in this region that you think it's important to mention?

**Interviewee:** There are only few people who can speak the language and who can also become a teacher, who can develop your writing, and also learning material. So that's, that's more challenging, because it is mixed in the regions. That's what I don't know how that's going to be addressed. So, people speak a different language and there's no one who can teach the students, or they are forced to stick with the language they are not able to speak properly.

**Interviewer:** The last question is concerning the future perspectives, and what you think should be changed in the future and how the future could be more prosperous for children and in terms of education as well?

**Interviewee:** The problem is how strategies and policies are implemented at the lower level, it's a challenge. So, I think it needs to be, you know, the government needs to give attention to what's happening, particularly in the classroom, at the school level, you know, what's working, what's not working? So, for example, it's not the kind of uniform solution for the difference challenges we have. So, depending on the context, we have to address and try to address the challenges. And for me, the first big thing is the government has to ask what's happening at the classroom level, not at the school level, what is the teacher doing? How is a teacher, you know, delivering the teaching process? How are the students receiving, so that should one thing. In addition to that, there should be some kind of accountability. If I'm a school principal, if I have 600 students, and if 300 of them sit, for example, for the regional examination, and if the majority of them fails, there's no question asked. Nobody will be asked. So why? Why are the 300 students who are not passing? What are the teachers doing? So, it's kind of a competence that teachers themselves, they should be accountable for it.

**Federal agency – Director of the main office on youth (Interviewee 3)**

**Interviewer:** Could you please introduce yourself?

**Interviewee:** I am the director for youth mobilization and participation at the federal agency. I worked in this position for the past 10 years.

**Interviewer:** Could you tell us more about data collection and the methods used to ensure its reliability?

**Interviewee:** Yeah, actually, the main thing for data collection is really to have a working relation with regional governments. We do have nine regions and the two city administration's in each region and city administration. So we plan together, we just have a working relationship, we just cascade our workers to the government. And then we follow the activities undertaken. We do have three data collection methods. One is to reporting. The other one is supervision. And performance uses to certain circumstances, we just collect data through telephone. When we encounter hectic schedules, we just give a call to regional bureaus. So they just give us the data. After receiving that data, we have a mechanism to verify the data, whether they are valid or
invalid, and also, in some instances figure inflated, because we sort of have bureaus and sometimes they just give an inflated data to benefit from more funding. Because while we are supervising them to be afraid, they're not working properly. So to escape from this, they just send inflated data. So is that instance we just sent delegates technical experts, especially with just some in most instances, which is the same expert check the validity of this data. In some instances, we just confirm whether the data is valid or invalid, we just asked the Regional Bureau head. He is the responsible person for administering the original data. So we just give them a call. If there is an appeal or confirm, in some instance we accept it. In other situations, if we have hesitation we ask for additives data, we just sent expert. This is it just to validate information. The segments of the population left behind are often difficult to include, we do not have a consolidated data with regards to education.

**Interviewer:** How do you collaborate with the different regional offices?

**Interviewee:** At the federal level, we orchestrate activities undertaken at regional level. So we do have the same report, the same law, common law, common report mechanism. Each quarter, they are responsible to send us a report of their regional activity. This is a vertical hierarchy; we give guidelines to them that they have to execute.

**Interviewer:** you talked about NGOs, for instance, could you explain like, How do you collaborate with other stakeholders and organisations?

**Interviewee:** collaboration is key for us, at the end of the year, we just sit and plan together, we do have common plan, and take actions according to that plan. To get the answers and results we have relation with projects in the program, program articulation, we do have proper declination in some programmatic area, as they just express their interest and collaborate with them to work is indeed easier. We organise common events like Africa Tuesday, Voluntunteerism day.

**Interviewer:** what are the main challenges that your agency is facing in the field of youth in the country? What are the main barriers of your daily work when you want to create policies?

**Interviewee:** The first one is the structure. For the past 10 years, the structure of our ministry was unstable. In some instances, our work was added to the ministry of women and children, in circumstances use sport, and in some years, use a sport in the culture. So this is structure is too unstable. It has a negative influence focusing and working towards the youth. Finances is a challenge compared to other ministries in the country, in this ministry, finances are way below the need given the number of the youth in Ethiopia. It is a huge number in our country. That is a huge number compared to other African countries probably use just equal with three or four African countries. So our budget is low compared to the number of young people. Youths are not happy with what is happening right now in the country, because government failed to meet their needs. Most of our young people are unemployed, do not get jobs or got deceptive job, and also basic personality development centres to scan and share with their personality are not good. Apart from keeping the promise, there is not more support for the young people, even when we are now having a new government, in new political atmosphere. But there's nothing change in terms of the young people. So this is a very serious issue for the country. Most of the politicians do not want to face the and people honestly speaking in our country, we are the one who are barely facing, interacting with the young people. But most of the politicians feel fear to have a discussion with young people even for the past year. This year, we just have planned to have a conference with the Prime Minister. Due to many reasons the Prime Minister still did not get in touch with the youths.
Most of the politicians are not happy to face the people because if they know it is young people, they may raise lots of issues. Youth are not afraid to speak out. There is this problem with the politicians who may be disappointed. So they don't want to have set humiliation in front of people.

Other issue, the government is not working on international youth agreements such as the Youth African Union charter or Colombo declaration. Our government just ratified these agreements but is not it's not yet approved by the House of Representatives. I do not know what's the problem with that but they signed it four years ago, and there is still nothing going on. It's not implemented and the implementation stage is not planned.

Most of the ministries are not mainstreaming people issues. They are just focusing on their ministry program and the project is that we are now asking them to include it in their policies. Why do not they mainstream young people issues, why do not they benefit people? They don't give us a positive response. So it is government slots and responsibility, especially the parliamentarians to follow this issue.

**Interviewer:** How does the cooperation look like between ministries?

**Interviewee:** There is no progress. But practically, why we are going to monitor and track what is working. Especially benefiting the people there is a huge gap if we are just insisting on the need to incorporate young people issues. Most of them to play, it's not our mandate, we're just not responsible to promote health issues or education issues. We just say like this, that program at planning level, there's no problem there. The collaboration between ministries is good. They are just requested to incorporate all segments of the population, they have no age category, like young people. The reports that are released could benefit the segments of the population with accurate data. But we need the segregated data. Because we want to talk how much young people benefited from the programs, the other culture programs and education program. So for this purpose, we need a segregated disaggregated data, let's say don't just collect your data. They don't have a database.

**Interviewer:** What is your opinion about the Ethiopian Youth policy and what could be improved?

**Interviewee:** I think that this policy is a good policy. All the issues were entertaining this policy document. The policy has three sections. One is related to the economic perspective. What's the government do in economy activity, in order to benefit participants and the other one is a special section. The government decided to notice and address the social issues of the young people, and also the good governance, as well as the political sections and participation. It is also clearly stated that young people need to participate in each political endeavor of the country. Also, good governance issue needs to be original and solved, but especially with regards to the young people. So this policy, has good provisions. Having this policy, which is designed like a user development document needs some improvements. This policy needs to be updated, widely undertake National Assessment two years ago, because lots of issues being missed this policy like migration. During the policy writing, migration was not as such a serious issue in our country. But now, migration is a very critical issue. So this issue need to be addressed is a policy. Apart from this is an issue of age in relation to the Youth African Union Charter. The plan is to revise it by the end of this year with the participation of civil society individuals, the government, academics, youth leaders and private sector.

**Interviewer:** What could be the role of decentralization in Ethiopia for the youth and the application of policies?
Interviewee: Yes, I think it will be very important because of the size of the country and its many different regions. It will be, may be helpful to have a more decentralized, more autonomous power for each of the regions, of course, the government needs to see and structure all of the regions, but having some more independently of each region could be great for their autonomy and independency. They have their own budget, they have their own plans and programs, but they just have a working relationship with the federal government. Even if we change our policy we just sent to the regional government directives to just to contextualize a policy to the local region, and maybe just translates a policy document to their language. And also, in some instances, they may add some political issues that are not interested in the policy to local labor.

Interviewer: What could be the impact of Foreign Direct Investments for the youth sector?

Interviewee: Each year, 1000 students graduated from higher education, universities. So the government has lots of problems in accommodating because these youths cannot find appropriate jobs at the end of their studies. So the foreign direct investment will level the burden of the government. Because there are lots of opportunities if there is important investment, lots of opportunities will be created in our country. So if there's a lot of opportunity to say younger people have lots of opportunity to have to engage in different activities.

International Non-Governmental Organisation working in the field of Youth – Project manager (Interviewee 4)

Interviewer: Could you please define your position and role within the organisation as well as its mission?

Interviewee: I'm the Chief of party for us eight building the potential of youth activity. This is a USAID funded five years’ program. This is like a department within the organisation and country office. We are the largest country office actually, within save the children, we have currently about 1900 staff members. And we have current portfolio of about $80 million per year. Save the children is really much focusing on humanitarian and development, where the focus is really much on how to protect and bring up children in a good way. So, therefore, we are working in the sector of health and nutrition. And also like sanitation and hygiene, so called the WAsH. Then, we are working in education, so in regard to the schools focusing on primary schools and teacher education. We have also had project on agriculture but that one is always related to the nutrition.

Interviewer: Could you please describe the main Ethiopian issues when it comes to children and youth?

Interviewee: I think before we talk about children, and you really have to think about the definition of it, you know, like I mean, youth is now here, the focus is from 15 to 29. As the Ministry of youth set it, and then below that one, we have the children. I think over the last, let's say like, so after the communist regime when the current political group came into power, the focus was really much on education and development. And I think that a lot has been done in that regard. I mean, now, we have about to 45 universities or something about 40 universities. There are so many schools and primary secondary schools that really made a great transition. And I mean, now we have about 103 million inhabitants. The Millennium Development Goals, even though they are goals, have been seen and targeted in isolation. So a lot of focus has been given on education. When we look into it particular Germany, the way how is there, we have
then also like the private sector that was growing along, but here in Ethiopia we don't. So now we have a lot of young people, if they're dropping out or not, it doesn't matter. But we don't have enough absorption capacity here from the private sector. Maybe it's also like important to mention that a strong focus is still and was and is agriculture. And again, business, yet, the way how things are organized here is not much value addition. So that means also like even though I'm looking into agribusiness or agriculture, the way the money can be created, jobs can be created as well. And that is actually one of the main issue for me is that a lot of people saying like education is not providing jobs adequately. And so this all doesn't really count for me. Because it's it's everywhere you go. It's education, and the requirements of the labour market can never match. The jobs are today, and the education was developed five years ago. So how is that possible that the youth even who are graduating out of school can be prepared to what you need now?

So the question is more about and I say like, I mean, if you studied biology, or even in school, the focus should not be much on the content, but much more on the process. And if that one is chemistry, biology, or whatsoever, even history, you know, like, they are certain processes, certain ways of learning, I am achieving then the results. And the problem is that that one is a lot of times forgotten. So when we are saying like, for example, we look into history, then we look into is how this happened. So what is the learning from it? So then when we look over the last 500 years. Okay, this one happened, and then you know, and so on. So we are trying to correlate this other to each other. So you learn actually to analyse, and to bring it together. But that one is never seen in the exams. It's like, Okay, what do you know about history? Yeah, the same psychology, the same is physics, mathematics, and so on, you know, like, so what is really there on the tools that you can use?

**Interviewer:** How do you consider skills mismatch? And what is your opinion about practical skills?

**Interviewee:** I think, actually, that the children and us are in the rural areas much more practical than people assume. You know, the focus here, I think is too strong on their academic learning, academic education, what is about the non-formal and informal learning, you know, like the informal education, the informal education you get at home, I always say like, Look, we have a lot of leaders in Ethiopia. And then we will have a lot of leaders. These are the kids who are leading the animals. You know, and when you look, when you travel, also like to the countryside, you will see they are going behind, they're not going in front. So that means they actually learned how do they have to influence my cows, goats and ships. So herds, they call the herds when you have the group of gold and cheap, know how to guide how to lead them, but they are running behind. You know, so there's a lot of understanding, I mean, responsibility, when you look, a cow, one cow cost about 10 to 15,000 birrs. But you have 10 cows, I mean, you have the responsibility of 150,000 birrs. And then people are hurting you like 10 cows, I mean, this is a huge money, which is given as a responsibility. You know, and I think that one, will, then people are not focusing enough on that. You know, like, I mean, even when you're saying like, fetching water, you know, like, you have to go and fetch water. That means as even as a little, you know, you are responsible to get clean water you bring home. You know, like you it's your responsibility that when the people are drinking, or when your family members are drinking, that the water is clean. It's not seeing that way, but it's it's a huge responsibility. You know, and that one is always seen, like, yeah, what have you done in education? What do you ever want to have done? You know, like, at the farm, what, what was your responsibilities? And would you like to harvest today? No, you do? You know, so it's also like, you have not learned to question things, but you have given assignments that you have to do. And if you don't do them, you have to live with the consequence of being beaten up or, or what server or not getting food and, and other things. Now, so the focus for me is a lot of times in these kind of
conversation, people saying like, Okay, what are some academic, what are some academic? But I mean, when you look now into the labor market, you enter into the labor market, you have to talk to people, you have to understand how to teamwork. But where do you learn teamwork? In school at university, I mean, that you are now to Okay, your team now, but in a lot of times, it's not. So also like the education system, there were also some other programs in the way of saying like, Okay, how can we actually transition a bit into student centered learning, but he is still its face to face? You know, like, and that means Actually, no, no power, no generators to started, so maybe it was searching for it.

**Interviewer:** What is the role of education for youth in Ethiopia and the impact of family support in their studies?

**Interviewee:** Because there was always this idea of benefiting from education to get a job, family support is very important. Ok. So now, they studied all the time University, so also the family have expectation, “you have now a bachelor. So you cannot be a bartender. You cannot, you know, like working in a restaurant or whatever, no, because you're well educated.” But then these young people do not get a job. So the thing is like, that, actually, their whole life was a fake dream, you know. So there's also like, the trust between the parents, and then it's also not there, because they were told all the time, you know, like, study hard, study hard, and you get a job. But now you don't have a job. You know, and then they also tend a new and are well educated, you cannot do this job. Even you said, I would like to do it. So it's really like this, this whole dilemma in a way of how can we actually inform the people much better about what is going on? What is really your roles and responsibilities? I heard from someone, actually, she was saying, “I have never seen a country where the parents take so little care about the upbringing of the children.” Which then rather, I mean, it is obvious that the country has done lacking opportunities for jobs, right, in terms of you have well educated youths. But they have trouble finding jobs in rural area. So that in the way of, where do I really learn to get prepared? At home? You are you you a girl? Or boy? Okay, the girl is doing that one, because I just heard you to, you know, like devices. So there's also no team and no communication. So, you know, like, so what is actually then what kind of responsibility could actually do school take here. The other thing is also that people are saying, like, okay, you know, like, I dropped my kids at school, you know, and they have to learn and they do not handle them and check their education. But the school makes no superstar. Yeah. And I mean, she's a principal in the school, and the parents are coming to her, he is my son, I don't know how to handle him. So make him nice. You know, so it's also like, what is really the role here, of the parents of the community of the school.

When we look also, like, into history, communities were raising children. When you are in, in Germany, also, like, in the village, and like, everyone is the uncle, the anti you like, and, and so on. So, if you're not behave, I mean, they would go to the parents, but he has even to the extent, I mean, the the neighbor, they can give you, you know, like, if you don't behave, they can spoil you. And then you say, like, thank you, you know, because we didn't see, but you did it, but now it's not anymore. So and now one becomes more as you come to others, or in the in the kingdom rule in the urban areas. Now, it's like, there is no one anymore. Parents are both working, you know, the kids are bombarded with mobile technology, and whatever. But all of these kind of skills, what you normally have at the farm, that you would learn, it's not there anymore. Parents are saying, like, why should I send my son into a school, when he has to work on the farm anyway, afterwards, they don't get this relation and the value of education. But it's also like, how much I actually include that parents in the school to said, like, Look, this is now what's going on here. That's what we are teaching. That's what you know, that is also like, helpful for here and there. And as far that one is not really there. It's also like a lot of question.
**Interviewer:** How does Save the Children Ethiopia deal with sustainability in order to ensure the long-lasting impact of its projects?

**Interviewee:** Even though I mentioned that word by itself, I really don't like the word sustainability. What I like is relevance, people saying like, okay, that's almost the same, but it's not, you know, like, because when we are working with the youth Centres, and they see that one is relevant, they will take it off. You know, and that one, a lot of times it's missing. So that's also like, why I'm saying like, we should actually really evaluate or like what the region does, evaluate which project components or activity components of relevance for them, you know, not to see this one, I mean, now you're using your word about project, a project by itself should never be sustainable. Project components should be, you know, and maybe that's also like some, just some new ones, but it's really crucial. I mean, in my form, organization, when we worked with it, we started actually, in the planning that we had a budget, and then we said, like, Okay, then in year three, four, and five, this is actually what you have to allocate your budget, you know, like, this is now taken on and, Okay, this one, you're like, Teacher Education, because now it becomes professional, continuous professional development. So this is automatically your budget. So this one will be taken over? So the question is all the time actually, about? How can you bring this one? And how can you blend this one into the policies and strategies, organization and institutional level you don't like? And that is also why we are working, for example, with the Ministry of youth, I mean, in there, too, but you also have to, because otherwise, you cannot implement, but also like, what we have the conversation the last two days with the different regions, and to see like, Okay, what you're taking one. So now, in your upcoming strategy, really take this one into consideration.
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