The Key Challenges of Youth in Ethiopia

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The economic performance of a country is mainly depending on the labour of youth population. Energetic, courageous and qualified youth can make changes to the social economic development if they are well utilized and managed. Investing in youth (ages 14 to 29) now will lay the groundwork for Ethiopia’s future. Strategies to continue progress toward harnessing the potential of its youth will help Ethiopia attain a demographic dividend and foster sustainable development. However, migration, unemployment, drug addiction, unfavorable policy environment and high population growth are the major problems of youth in the country. The overall objective of this paper is to review the current key challenges of youth in Ethiopia. Particularly the paper tries to: Review youth migration, youth unemployment and health and addiction related to youth and finally it suggested the possible solution for the challenges. The data collected, interpreted and evaluated all came from secondary data sources from country Central statistical agency, empirical study, country profile, different authors and researchers have written on the issue of youth; and other reports on youth related reports in Ethiopia. Finally, suggestions are made to overcome the challenges.

Key words: Challenges, Ethiopia; migration; unemployment; youth.

INTRODUCTION

The economic performance of a country is mainly depending on the labour of youth population. The ability of youth to engage in productive activities has both social and economic consequences for an economy (O’Higgins, 2017; UNDP, 2018). Energetic, courageous and qualified youth can make changes to the social economic development if they are well utilized and managed (Msigwa & Kipesha, 2013). Around the world, there is growing recognition of the need to strengthen policies and investments involving young people. Youth can determine whether this era moves toward greater peril or more positive change (ILO, 2012).

Investing in young people (ages 14 to 29) now will lay the groundwork for Ethiopia’s future. Strategies to continue progress toward harnessing the potential of its youth will help Ethiopia attain a demographic dividend and foster sustainable development. Ethiopia plans to become a middle-income country by 2025. Ensuring participation of youth in all aspect of development activity is the basic concern of the country to achieve the goal. However, Ethiopia youth are affected with multifaceted problems (Nzinga & Tsegay, 2012).

Lack of job creation skill, lack of a culture of work ethic, lack of knowledge and skill to perform jobs, rural urban migration, corruption, rapid population growth and quantity oriented educational policy are the major challenges of youth in the country (Asalfew, 2011)). Unemployment which is the major obstacle of youth, results substantial crises in psychological, social and economic perspectives, some of them are: increasing crime rates and violence, dependence on family, low self-esteem, poor social adaptation, depression and loss of confidence, vicious circle of civil war and instability, poverty, food insecurity and poor social, economic and environmental resilient (Hiruy, 2012).

The overall objective of this paper is to review the current key challenges of youth in Ethiopia. Particularly the paper tries to: review youth migration, youth unemployment and health and addiction related to youth and finally it suggested the possible solution to the challenges. The data collected, interpreted and evaluated are from secondary data sources from country Central statistical agency, empirical study, country profile, different authors and researchers have written on the issue of youth; and other reports on youth related reports in Ethiopia.
DISCUSSION

General Basic Terms and Definitions

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), youth refer to people aged between 15 and 24 years inclusive and are characterized by unique physical, psychological, social, and emotional changes that put their life at high risk. According to O'Higgins (2001), this definition may vary according to the cultural and social characteristics differences across countries. As indicated, there is a difference assumption among the developed and developing countries on the issues of youth because of the level of development and others factors. In Ethiopia definition, youth is those persons between the ages of 15 and 29 years (Ministry of youth, sports and culture, 2004). According to ILO unemployment defined as: the numbers of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost jobs and those who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 2007).

According to international migration for organization (2005), migration is the movement of people from one place to another place due to economic, social, political and environmental reasons. The economical migration is related with moving to another place to find work or peruse a particular career. Social migration is to be closer to families or friends for a better quality of life. While political migration is moving to another place to escape war or political persuasion and environmental migration which occurs as a result of nature disasters like earth quake.

Major Challenges of Youth in Ethiopia

The current main challenges of youth in Ethiopia are unemployment, migration, drug addiction and health, unfavorable policy environment and high population growth with imbalance of job opportunity. Thus, all are the challenges are reviewed and discussed as follows:

1. Unemployment

Creating gainful employment for the country's large youth population is a major challenge. Youth employment presents a particular challenge to Ethiopia. The country's population aged between 0-29 years will reach about 73% of the total population. Approximately three million young enter the labour force every year in Ethiopia. The National unemployment rate is more than 6%; urban unemployment is 6.5%, and rural unemployment is 2.5%. Urban youth unemployment among groups aged 20–24 and 25–29 is significantly high at 30.2% and 24.2%, respectively (African Development Bank Group, 2017). The problem of chronic youth unemployment is very evident in Ethiopia. Every year thousands of graduates are turn out for whom there are no jobs.

Studies from Ethiopia indicate that the potential causes of unemployment include increasing number of youth labor force, the rising internal migration, literacy rate, poor to modest macroeconomic performance, low level of job creation and low level of aggregate demand in the economy (Getinet, 2003; WB, 2007). Youth unemployment is the outcome of different socio-economic and demographic factors at macro and micro level. The micro level factors are directly associated to individuals' demographic and socioeconomic attributes while the macro level factors are related to the national issues (Toit, 2003). Many researchers found cause of unemployment at micro level. Asalffew (2011) found micro level factors that are sex, migration, education, social network, job preferences and access to business advisory services significantly determine youth unemployment in Debre Birhan town. Similarly, Dejene et al. (2016) found micro level factors such as demographic variables, age of the respondents and migration status, human capital variables, education and health status of the respondents, economic determinants household income, access to credit and saving services. Access to job information and psycho-social factors were the two social capital variables that were significantly related to youth unemployment.

According to Hiruy (2012), macro level factors that cause unemployment are absence of land justice, legal and policy problems as well as perceptions thereof preventing the rural youth population from effectively engaging in activities other than agriculture; misguided educational policy, capital intensive technologies, nepotism and corruption. Asmare and Mulatie (2014) stated the major factors supposed to be affecting youth unemployment, particularly graduates from higher institutions. These were: lack of good governance (nepotism, corruption, bias and discrimination), lack of social networks, divergence between skills and the labor market and low-quality educational policy and system.

2. Health and Drug Addiction

Drug addiction is a condition which characterized by an overwhelming desire to continue taking drug through which one has become habituated for repeated consumption. At present, drug addiction is one of the serious problems which affect not only the addicted people but also the society as a whole. This problem becomes common in Ethiopia recently which resulted in different socio-economic problems (Sebsibie, 2018).

In Ethiopia, reports of young people’s lives disturbed by alcohol and drugs are rampant. The youth including students are especially vulnerable by peer pressure; media influence poor guidance and role modeling. The problem has taken root in communities and learning institutions leading to the high number of schools drop outs in secondary, preparatory and in university students (FDRE, 2011; Sebsibie; 2018). The problem of drug addiction now becomes a major problem in Ethiopia. This addiction tradition is often associated with the over growth of night clubs, bars and multiple sexual partnerships in...
Ethiopia (Semeet et al., 2005). Although Ethiopia has made significant progress on the access to basic health facilities, young people still face a number of health challenges, including inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health information/services, malnutrition, and prevalence of HIV/AIDS.

3. Migration

Migration can be seen in two perspectives both internal migrations mainly occurred as rural urban migration and external migration (cross country). Nowadays, in Ethiopia both types of migration are common problems for youth (Abhra, 2017). Currently rural urban migration becomes common in Ethiopia. This is particularly true for the highlands of Ethiopia where population densities have become very high. A recent study on rural youth livelihoods shows that the increase in farmland scarcity in the highlands of Ethiopia coupled with lack of non-farm employment opportunities in the rural areas have pushed youth away from their agricultural livelihoods and rural villages (Bezu & Holden, 2014; Sosina & Stein, 2014). Normally this migration occurred due to pull and push factors. Pull factors brought about the rapid expansion of urban centers with better education, technology, and other basic social services, attracts youth to towns and cities in search for better livelihoods. The later come about as a result of absence of fair land distribution, poor infrastructure and poor health service in rural area.

Even though urbanization in Ethiopia is very low and accounts for about 16% which is lower than by almost half for average Sub-Saharan Africa which is 34 percent (UN, 2014). However, its rate of urbanization is one of the highest in the world, 4.1 percent. Migration causes excessive urbanization, unemployment, income inequalities, ecological stress and population mal-distribution; on the other hand, migration is a necessary part of economic growth, equilibrating tendencies, facilitating industrialization, improving income distribution and introducing technological change in agriculture, migration is the human right ensuring choosing one’s destination to improve welfare and economic benefit (Habtamu, 2015). External migration is also common in Ethiopian. Youth are migrating to aboard, especially to the western countries and United Arab Emirates countries like Kuwait, Dubai through facing so many problems and challenges from every corner of the countries.

4. Policy Environment

Over the last years, the issues of youth have received greater attention in Ethiopia and the government has started to implement policies to support young people. The National Youth Policy of Ethiopia marks a major step in recognizing and promoting the rights of young people in the country (UNICEF, 2013). Established in 2004, the policy aims “to bring about the active participation of youth in the building of a democratic system and good governance as well as in the economic, social and cultural activities and to enable them to fairly benefit from the results (National youth policy, 2004). However, the government still faces some challenges implementing the National Youth Policy, such as weak monitoring and evaluation tools, lack of inter-sectoral cooperation, limited financial resources and absence of a clear strategy at the different territorial levels.

5. High population growth

With estimated population of about 100 million, Ethiopia is the second populous country in the continent. Growing at 2.5 percent per annum Ethiopia’s population will reach 112 million by 2025 and 137 million by 2037 (CSA, 2013). Moreover, Ethiopia is a country of young population with over 70 percent of the total population below the age of 30 and about 45 percent of the population below 15 years of age.

Ethiopia’s growing population risks is jeopardizing the tremendous social and economic gains that have been achieved over the past decade. The high population rate will place increasing pressures on the country’s natural resource base and significantly expand the numbers of young Ethiopians needing educational services and basic health care, not to mention straining the labour market which already fails to provide the young with sufficient employment opportunities. Thus, reducing fertility rates and expanding contraceptive coverage to more Ethiopian women in socially responsible ways should be a high priority of the government. In order to reap the demographic dividend, there is a need to create a favorable policy environment in human capital development through strengthening educational and skills development creating decent jobs, investing in infrastructure that promotes labor productivity, enabling economic efficiency and accumulation of physical capital.

Suggested Solutions

To overcome the problems of youth, the following suggestions are made;

▪ Strengthening Health Programs: Improvement in health, particularly increasing access to family planning services, will reduce fertility and maternal and child mortality, and foster the development of a population that is ready to contribute to economic growth. Moreover, extending and providing youth sport recreational cites is essential to reduce youth drug addiction.

▪ Expanding Educational Opportunity: Improvements in school completion, particularly for girls, and the quality of education will delay first pregnancy and prepare young people to move into formal-sector jobs, earn higher wages, and promote a demographic dividend.

▪ Having higher access of social network and information increases the chance of getting new job opportunities available in the residential areas as well.
as outside the area. In order to increase the social networks access and information chain; educate youth to bring change in their social communication habits using public and private media, social media and encourage them to use and access internet, mobile telephone; participate in youth related activities, visit and consult private employment agencies, friends, and relatives are suggested.

- Ensuring access to rural land for the unemployed youth, creating job opportunities for fresh graduates, using labour intensive technologies, revisiting educational curricula, giving trainings to prospective graduates targeted in equipping them with basic skills in implementing their theoretical knowledge and arranging forums between universities and potential employers of graduates are the possible suggestion to overcome the problem of unemployment in Ethiopia.

- Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) and supporting them with finance/credit/ and training for that unemployment. Increasing investment in training institution and linking the training institution to labour market, putting more effort on rehabilitated young offenders and drug addictive and promoting youth enterprises development and self-employment are important to reduce unemployment.

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Abebaw Abebe received his BSc. degree in Agricultural Economics from Jimma University since 2015. Soon after, he attended Haramaya University where he obtained his MSc degree in Agricultural Information and Communication Management in 2017. He is a senior lecturer at Raya University till date.

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