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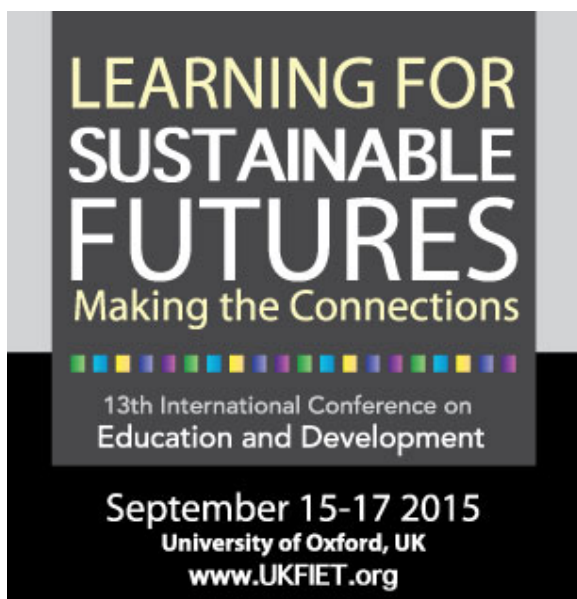


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Understanding how rural youth learn knowledge and skills for improved livelihoods: comparing case studies of mixed farming and pastoralist communities in Ethiopia

1 ABSTRACT

Rural development efforts in Ethiopia are currently focused on agricultural development. As rural youth are the critical labour force in the agriculture sector, the process of how they acquire new knowledge and skills to enable them to efficiently run agricultural activities needs to be better understood. This paper expands the usual focus of the 'Education for All' agenda on formal education, to look at learning that takes place outside schools and training institutions and explore how educational policy could take account of and build on young people's everyday learning and their aspirations for enhanced rural livelihoods. Based on an IFAD-UNESCO research project conducted in 2013-14, the paper discusses ethnographic research conducted in two contrasting communities (pastoralist and mixed farming) and analyses policy implications in the areas of agricultural skill development and adult basic education.

This study investigated the learning process through which rural youth acquire knowledge and skills for improving their livelihoods and to generate understanding on the dynamics of the learning process. Findings revealed that for rural youth in both contexts, informal learning was the dominant mode of learning and that even so-called 'illiterate' young people had learned to use mobile phones and do calculations in the market through interaction with their peers and adapting their own learning strategies. The paper concludes with reflections about how new partnerships between agricultural and educational policy makers and researchers – as was initiated through this project – could point the way towards a broader conception of learning within Sustainable Development.

2 INTRODUCTION

Rural development efforts in Ethiopia are currently focused on agricultural development. However, due to dynamics of changes in socio-culture, economics and ecosystem at local and global levels, ensuring rural development from agricultural sector, both farming and pastoralist communities, needs new knowledge and skills. Although rural youth are recognised as the critical labour force in the agriculture sector, there is still little understanding of the processes through which they acquire new knowledge and skills to enable them to enhance their livelihoods from agriculture. This paper argues that there is an urgent need to look at learning that takes place outside schools and formal educational programmes. Findings from an IFAD-UNESCO research project conducted in two contrasting communities in Ethiopia pointed to ways in which future educational policy could take account of and build on young people's everyday learning, as well as responding to their aspirations for enhanced rural livelihoods.

Within the international policy context, current discussions on the post-2015 education agenda have recognised that learning takes place in non-formal and formal settings. In the 2013 GMR on Youth and Skills (2013), a broader conceptualisation of 'skills' emphasised the links between 'foundational' skills (basic literacy and numeracy) and 'job skills', and the growing importance of transferable skills. However, when it comes to monitoring and formulating future goals, formal education has tended to overshadow the less measurable informal and non-formal learning. With regard to EFA Goal 3 on adult and youth skills, UNESCO (2015) states that the 'most important indicator of progress in opportunities to acquire foundation skills is access to secondary school' and the accompanying graphics (score card) focusing on secondary school enrolment give a strong message that adult and youth learning is dependent on formal schooling. This hierarchical model – where foundation skills acquired in school are assumed to precede vocational and life skill development – has informed much national educational policy.

This common perspective on education and skills for rural livelihoods can be viewed as problematic in valuing the learning that takes place within educational institutions and programmes over informal learning. The dominant linear model of education focuses on the relationship between measurable inputs and outcomes, and conceptualises learning as a hierarchical structure of skills and knowledge, starting with basic literacy and numeracy skills. Robinson-Pant (2015) outlines certain limitations of this dominant paradigm of education and rural development – particularly in positioning young people primarily as students in educational institutions who are being prepared for future citizenship and in failing to take account of the complex relationship between formal and informal learning. This paper sets out to explore a wider perspective on rural youth learning – looking not only at schools and training programmes but also farming, livestock rearing, factories, fields, shops, houses and cafes as important sites of learning – as well as recognising young people as active citizens in the here and now with diverse needs and interests. We see this starting point as essential to developing effective and responsive educational and agricultural policy, as Te Lintelo (2012: 100) argues: 'As long as youth are seen as an undifferentiated and problematic mass that is to be acted upon, to be protected, reformed and directed... agricultural policies are likely to prescribe one-size-fits-all solutions (e.g. modernisation) that are insensitive to the varied needs and instrumental ways in which young people engage in agriculture'.

3 LEARNING KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR IMPROVED LIVELIHOODS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study on which this paper is based was part of a larger collaborative project initiated by UNESCO and IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) that aimed to investigate how young people in rural areas learned knowledge and skills for enhancing their livelihoods. The study was conducted in Cambodia, Egypt and Ethiopia from 2013-14 and the teams in each country collaborated on the design and methodology so that a comparative analysis would be possible¹.

An unusual aspect of the research – at both international and national levels – was the cross-sectoral composition of the research teams and an overarching aim to develop closer communication between researchers and policy makers who had previously worked mainly within their own sector only. At UNESCO headquarters, the project was developed by a team from two different educational departments – basic adult education and literacy joined those in vocational and skill development – as well as agricultural specialists in IFAD Rome. At country level, the research teams consisted of both educational and agricultural specialists. This was a first step towards developing a more holistic perspective on education and learning needed to provide young people with the skills for enhanced livelihoods. Froy and Giguere (2010) pointed to the fragmentation that can occur when a variety of providers offer educational programmes in ‘silos’ or fail to combine basic skills with more specialised occupational skills. Above all, the project aimed to contribute cross-sectoral collaboration and construct knowledge across disciplines.

Rather than conceptualising the relationship between formal, non-formal and informal learning as hierarchical and polarised, the study took Rogers’ (2013: 5) idea of informal and formal learning as ‘lying on a continuum ranging from accidental/incidental learning, through task-conscious learning, through to self-directed learning to non-formal learning and formal learning’. This approach distinguishes between purposeful, structured learning ‘measured by learning’ and informal incidental learning which is ‘measured by task’ (ibid). Thus the research teams set out to investigate how young people learned in different ways in various learning spaces – which included vocational skill development programmes, market places and households.

The concepts of ‘situated learning’ (Lave and Wenger 1991), ‘situated literacies’ (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic 2000) and ‘social literacies’ (Street 1995) also informed the research design. The idea that literacy is always acquired, understood and practised in a specific context and that so-called ‘illiterate’ people also engage with literacy practices meant that the research teams looked at literacy skills as embedded in people’s existing livelihood skills. The research studies aimed to explore how young people engaged with multiple literacy practices and literacies in their everyday lives - how they drew on informal networks and developed their own strategies for learning new skills (including peer learning and support).

The three country studies adopted ethnographic-style approach to researching young people’s learning in everyday contexts, combined with life history interviews and focus group discussion. Through an initial scoping phase of participant observation to investigate informal learning in the community, the research teams moved on later to develop case studies of key

¹ See details on synthesis report here: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-building-blocks/technical-vocational-education-and-training-tvet/learning-knowledge-and-skills-for-agriculture-and-rural-livelihoods/>.

training/educational providers in each area – which included NGOs, private companies, training institutes and schools. The focus was on analysing how such interventions fitted into young people's lives and views of learning. A challenge for all the teams researching informal learning was that people do not always recognise or are able to explain how they learned a particular skill or task and they often did not see this as 'learning'. Conversely, as educated researchers, we also had to see that school may not be necessarily a 'good thing' and could be viewed by some as a contested space. The research findings led to policy-focused workshops at both national and international level.

4 OVERVIEW OF THE ETHIOPIA STUDY: DEVELOPMENT POLICY, AGRICULTURE AND RURAL YOUTH

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, currently numbering more than 86 million populations (CSA, 2013). About 84% of the total population still live in rural areas and their main livelihood is small-scale agriculture. The agricultural sector is the mainstay of national economy; contributing 45% of GDP, 85% employment and 90% total exports (Nederlof et al., 2011; MoARD, 2010). Thus, the agricultural sector has long been targeted as the engine of national development and since 1993, the logo of the current Government of Ethiopia has been 'Agricultural Development–Led Industrialization (ADLI)'. As the GoE stated: ADLI is the 'primary stimulus to generate increased output, employment and income for the people and as the springboard for the development of the other sectors of the economy' (Gebreselassie, 2006).

Ethiopia has become the 12th fastest growing economy in the world (with average annual growth of 10.6% between 2004 and 2011) attributable to implementation of ADLI policy (World Bank, 2013). The current Five Year Growth and Transformation Plan (FYGTP-2010/2011 to 2014/2015) conceives agriculture as the predominant sector that must be transformed to facilitate transition of the country from the category of least developed nation to middle income nation by 2025. To do so, the plan envisions improving agricultural knowledge and skills of the relatively educated rural youth as a critical component of the national agricultural development strategy (Anyidoho et al., 2012). Thus, national policy proposes that at least 70% of rural youth and children should remain in rural areas to transform agricultural sector (Gella, 2013). To this end, the government has devised different strategies: (1) expanding agricultural extension services throughout the country and for this twenty-five Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education Training (ATVET) colleges established and about 60, 000 youth extension agents trained (Davis, 2008; Davis et al., 2010). As a result, the country is now approaching the level of deploying 'roughly one extension agent for every 476 farmers', one of the strongest agent-farmer ratios in the world (Davis et al., 2010). However, Hartl (2009) argues that many ATVET programmes are less accessible to those who have not completed secondary education and who cannot understand English; (2) implementing an Integrated Functional Adult Literacy/Education (IFAL/E) Programme throughout the country. The programme targets 'illiterates', school dropouts/, vulnerable groups of the community, those who live in remote areas (pastoralists), people with disabilities, and poor youth and adults (MoE, 2011) based on the assumption that the 'illiterate' people would slow down development processes and could not pursue non-formal and formal educational and training programmes. The programme aimed to provide literacy skills by integrating these with the day-to-day lives of the people (including agriculture, health, gender, environmental protection, income-generating activities etc). To ensure the concerns of the programme were met, coordinated efforts of all ministry organizations and development partners were required (MoE, 2008).

Despite these interventions, empirical studies indicate that Ethiopian economic development has not sufficiently addressed critical problems such as poverty, unemployment and under-employment of youths. On the one hand, Martins (2013) took Ethiopia as a case and stated that 'strong economic growth has not always delivered corresponding benefits in terms of poverty reduction, partly because it has failed to generate sufficient productive employment (i.e., more and better jobs)'. On the other hand, research shows that the aspiration of schooled Ethiopian rural youth to be a farmer erodes as they grow older, to the extent where being a farmer is perceived as failed aspiration (Tafere and Woldehanna, 2012). Sumberg et al., (2014, 2012) and White (2012) suggest that this relates to the way formal education systems discourage them from pursuing agriculture and/or the perceived limited availability and accessibility of livelihood opportunities in agriculture.

The study team, taking into account past studies, attempted to further investigate concepts of formal education and formal employment, to explore how rural youth in mixed farming and pastoralist communities are learning knowledge and skills improve their livelihood. Accordingly, we selected Basona Werana Woreda² from highland areas and Yabello woreda from pastoralist areas. Basona Werana is characterised by mixed farming systems where crop production is dominant, while in Yabello lowland areas, livestock keeping is a major means of living for pastoralists. Basona Werana is situated in the central highland of Ethiopia, which is only 100 Km away from Addis Ababa to the North. Yabello is found in southern Ethiopia rangeland plateau at a distance of 650 Km to the South.

The specific study location for the case study Goshe Bado Kebele from Basona Werana Woreda and Harboro Kebele from Yabello Woreda. Even though the two kebeles were selected as specific study sites, migrant youths who came from different corners of the Woredas were also included in the study.

5 AGRICULTURE AND RURAL YOUTH LIVELIHOODS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN THE CASE STUDY AREAS

5.1 Basona Werana Woreda

From group discussion and youth life histories, we learned that mixed farming is still prevailing as a culturally valuable means of living for rural youth in Goshe Bado Kebele communities, Basona Werana Woreda. The communities cultivate different crops such as tef, barley, wheat, pulses, sorghum, onion, potato, and oil crops are the dominant means of living. As supplementary livelihood, relatively better-off households in Basona keep livestock such as cattle, small ruminants, chicken, horses and donkeys, and traditional and modern beehives. From fifteen life histories of youths (7 females and 8 males), we found that fortunate young people cultivated their own plot of farmland, which they either inherited from their grandparents or shared from their parents. From fifteen respondents only two male youth had a plot of farmland. The remaining 13 had no chance of having a plot of land and they lived on casual labour either on local farm activities or they migrated to urban areas to find daily labouring jobs. All the young women interviewed engaged in local alcohol making and selling – an occupation which offers little profit and is a risky business in terms of exposing them to sexual harassment and physical assault.

² It is synonymous with 'District'

In terms of opportunities for youth, Basona Werana in particular, and mixed farming highland areas of Ethiopia in general, have relatively better-developed infrastructure such roads, telecommunications, industries, expansion of urban areas and private businesses. We also observed that growing eucalyptus trees for commercial purposes has rapidly become a rising source of income and livelihood for rural youth and families in mixed farming communities of Basona Werana.

In discussions and interviews, the youth and elders in the community articulated that farming is becoming an impossible means of living. They saw the main challenges as: limited access to farmland, diminishing holding size and fertility, climate-related problems, crop diseases and pests, less access to credit services, inability to buy improved farm inputs and inaccessibility/lack of modern agricultural knowledge and required skills. Youth also stressed that doing business in rural areas required electricity and other facilities such as water, better roads etc. which were rarely available in the Woreda.

In sum, all the youth respondents believed that unless there was to be strong support from the government, farming would become a less viable means of living for the people of the woreda. Thus, most youth in the case study area strongly aspired and struggled to find livelihoods out of farming by remaining in formal education and migrating to the urban areas and the Arab world.

5.2 Yabello Woreda Case

Yabello Woreda pastoralist youth and elders interviewed expressed their belief that the pastoralist life style was still second to none. All life histories of fifteen young pastoralists and the focus group discussions were related to livestock keeping. The main livestock are cattle, camels and small ruminants. Most households have one or two donkeys for long distance water fetching and for transporting small items. Traditional beehive production is rarely observed and poultry production is the least popular activity. This was because pastoralists observed that chickens make sounds and call snakes and make animal pens dirty through digging out animal dung to search for worms. Production crops such as maize and pulses have been slowly intensifying, but, pastoralists hardly perceived these as a means of living due to drought risks and farming is socially less prestigious. A few of the young women interviewed engaged in milk sales, petty trades (tea & coffee, sugarcane), and firewood and charcoal selling. Some women also engaged in non-timber forest products sales through the support of NGOs. A few young men interviewed were employed in rural shops; drivers of motorbike and Bajaj (three wheel motor), and fee collectors on bus. Since the pastoralist area is dispersedly populated and means of transportation is rarely available, demand for these means of transportation is very high. Thus, many respondent youth men aspired to buy a bike, Bajaj and car.

Through initial participant observation and informal discussion in the pastoralist areas of Yabello, we perceived the community's strong social capital that enabled trust and mutual support in the pastoralist communities during bad and good times. As a result, the sense of belongingness was very strong. Young men and women expressed that they felt very happy and very confident to make their living the way their ancestors used to live, rather than leaving the community. We observed that the pastoralist community's basic asset is still livestock and that if access to better markets was enhanced that could improve their wellbeing. Last but not least, in interviews, pastoralist respondents revealed that they had a lot of indigenous knowledge and skills - in water and range management, traditional medicines, hygiene, midwifery, climate change, war and

forecasting. This seemed to make young pastoralists value the skills and knowledge of their communities more than the skills and knowledge of outsiders. Illustrating this point, an 'illiterate' older woman respondent called Sake explained the changes that had taken place:

Nowadays pregnant women go to hospital to give birth by ambulance where they deliver through surgery, without labour, as if it was necessary. Then, the child becomes sick repeatedly. I never suffer from surgery when I gave birth to all [eight] of my children. I never saw my children sick. They are all healthy. The modern midwives undermine the traditional ones though they are more skilful and confident. Unlike the traditional birth attendants the modern ones, if there is no equipment, they cannot identify the sex of the foetus, whether it is twin or not, whether the position is normal or abnormal. The so-called traditional midwives are able to do all of these without having any equipment and modern education.

Despite these observations, community respondents recognised that pastoralist livelihoods were under threat. The main challenges mentioned by both youth and elders were limited access to water and pasture, volatile livestock markets, the risk of livestock diseases and conflict among ethnic groups. In relation to water and pasture, were the problems of degradation and depletion of pastures and trees, extremely erratic rainfall and underground water scarcity, which is becoming beyond the capability of the community to dig out. The respondents believed that the combined effects of these challenges have increased the frequency of drought, disabled coping strategies of the community and caused huge mortality and morbidity of their livestock.

6 MODES OF LEARNING: COMPARING HOW YOUNG PEOPLE LEARN LIVELIHOOD SKILLS IN THE MIXED FARMING AND PASTORALIST COMMUNITIES

Respondents (including officials) from both areas believed that learning means 'formal education' and they saw schooling as the best mechanism for achieving better livelihoods. In particular, youth from the mixed farming area strongly believed in the potential of formal schooling as a source of livelihood and employment in formal sector. In this regard, a young female respondent, Tirunesh said: *Since I am uneducated, deaf³, the only fate I have is supporting my family by doing various domestic works (cooking, managing homes), animal rearing and agricultural works.* Even though young people interviewed acquired various knowledge and skills from their everyday lives, they did not value them as learning - they equated learning only with schooling. One of the education officers in Basona Werana gave a strong account equating illiteracy with ignorance, stating that: *if a person is illiterate/mehayim [to mean unschooled], he/she cannot think of his country; nation; he/she is not a person at all. Illiterate person destroys the constructed soil bands; do not understand what is relevant for his/her life, easily twisted by others' ideas. Hence, illiterates should get out of illiteracy/mehayimnet/.* Schooling was considered by many as a key for every closed door and as a vaccine for every disease.

However, practically and in everyday life, we observed that for rural youth in both these contrasting contexts, informal learning was the dominant mode of learning to cope with prevailing livelihood challenges and to make best use of existing opportunities. The main sources of informal learning of knowledge and skill acquisition were parents, neighbours, friends, employers and everyday self-experimentation. We found that informal learning occurred at the market, homes,

³ The term 'deaf' is used to refer to 'illiterate'.

workplaces, cafeteria, hotels, and in the fields - both consciously and unconsciously. Much informal learning of livelihood skills started from their early years as part of their socialisation, so it was difficult for them to distinguish their learning from living.

In the case of pastoralists, both male and female respondents explained that they had learned the knowledge and skills of livestock rearing through starting to keep calves and small ruminants, and then moving onto larger animals such as cattle and camel. As one male youth explained, he became a calves cowboy with older brothers and sisters at five years old, moved onto keeping calves alone at seven and started keeping large animals from eight. A young female pastoralist explained that to become cattle cowgirl, *'it needs skills of knowing the place where the water and fodder is available; it needs alertness; physical endurance to travel distant places and protecting cattle from wild animals attack'*. In addition, since Borana pastoralists have a strong sense of community, youths learned soft skills such as leadership, reciprocity, self-confidence, public speech from their elders and assemblies. There was a gendered dimension here as young women had more limited mobility as they reached adolescence so were unable to participate in public meetings where they would learn such skills.

In both contexts, we observed that the so-called 'illiterate' youth had acquired various skills informally through everyday social practices such as using mobile phones, cooking skills, carpentry, masonry, and keeping accounts. They had learned basic literacy skills and were involved in various literacy and numeracy practices, even though they said they were illiterate. Many of them had learned how to save numbers with contact names on their mobile phones, by copying what their literate friends did and through continual practice. They had a strong motivation to do so, because the mobile phone is becoming a crucial means of communication for every youth and having it has social value. Such remarkable informal learning is widespread in both contexts irrespective of gender. A young 'illiterate' man from Basona Werana explained how he had learned skills such as saving subscriber numbers with a contact name on a cell phone from friends who are literate and through frequent exercise. In Yabello, a young illiterate woman explained how she saved subscribers' contact names by using the inbuilt visuals of Nokia cell phone. Symbols such as a butterfly, ball, dog etc. enabled her to identify to whom she needed to ring and who was calling. She also memorised the last two digits of a number as another way of recognizing a call.

Another young pastoralist woman also demonstrated how she could read numbers up to 5000 correctly on her phone, though she had never attended school and could not write down any numbers. Traditionally, Borana pastoralists teach their children to count number up to at least 100 when they start speaking – so that the children develop the skills of numeracy and can count cattle. Some women from both case study areas also informally acquired traditional midwifery skills from their parents and friends. Both communities also used traditional healers to treat various human and animal diseases, although the practice was particularly strong in pastoralist areas. They learned these skills through transfer from generation to generation, and the skills provided an income for those engaged in this business.



Figure 1: 'Illiterate' women operating a phone



Figure 2: Old lady calculating accounts through mobile mediators

We found that there was also a contrasting perception on literacy/illiteracy. A majority of the interviewed youths equated literacy with schooling and illiteracy was associated with deafness, ignorance and blindness. Even if they were involved in literacy and numeracy practices in their day-to-day lives, they considered themselves to be deaf, ignorant and incapable of doing things. For instance a pastoralist young man Gelgelo explained *'a schooled foolish person is better than an unschooled clever person. Because an illiterate person has no confidence and cannot even explain what they need.'* Young respondents wanted to acquire formal literacy to boost their social status. For instance, an 'illiterate' young female Tirunesh wore a watch that she does not read. When asked why, she said: *I bought it to fool others. If I put a watch on my wrist people consider me as if I am an educated person and they do not even think of cheating me.* Very few respondents contested this idea that a lack of literacy skills was an indicator of ignorance. An exception was an 'illiterate' woman, Sake, who asserted that the inability to read and write should not be considered as a measure of person's knowledge. She said: *Welala (this means ignorant person in local language) is a person who knows little. However, not being able to read and write does not make a person Welala.* She gave an example of what she meant by this: *let us take Abba Gadas⁴. They make so many laws, rules and procedures to rule; let us take the traditional birth attendants; those who make us deliver safe; let us take traditional veterinarians, those who heal our livestock, let us take the current kebele leader who is very successful in effectively leading the community. All of these people cannot read and write, but they are performing all their roles effectively. So, how can we call them Welala?*

Regarding the learning needs of the rural youth, we understood that it is not shaped by government policy and strategy of rural development, but is based on existing crisis and challenges. For instance in Basona Werana, the commercialisation of eucalyptus trees confirms how informal learning unconsciously evolves in the community as a result of a challenge. The eucalyptus was introduced by the NGO (Save the Children/ USA) in 1979. Since then there has been no training or intervention on cultivating the tree. However, almost all farmers have learned how to grow eucalyptus, how and when to harvest it, how to regenerate the stump and so on. The life history of Tsigie also reveals how challenges led to learning. She said: *After the divorce happened [between her mother and father], we were extremely harmed. Because our father as well as we [her sibling] cannot cook, fetch water, make home, clean home... everything became dirty and disordered. Even we were sick due to lack of sanitation. As a result, we were starved.*

⁴ Abba Geda is a democratically elected leader, the Abba Gada, will be in charge of over the system for an eight-year term. Gadaa is no longer in wide practice but remains significant. Abba Gedas have never attended formal school.

Indeed, challenges teach you a lot... we started baking bread (qixa). For the first two days, because it was very hot, the bread became overcooked. But, later we became experienced. The life history accounts of many youth similarly revealed that the community informally learned to cope with livelihood challenges, in this case to generate income, reduce fuel shortages and obtain construction materials.

With regard to the link among the three modes of learning that we set out to investigate (formal, non-formal and formal), we found evidence that the pastoralist communities had tried to base formal and non-formal training on existing traditional knowledge and practices. For instance, traditional midwifery has been strengthened by formal sector interventions implemented by NGOs in Yabello, whereas this practice had been abolished in Basona Werana. Moreover, the traditional support system called *busa gonofa* [a traditional mutual support system in which all tribal members contribute to support a needy person in their community] had been adopted by one of the institutions working on micro-finance and social support in Yabello woreda. Overall, we found that the connection between the three modes of learning was negligible and that a lack of lifelong learning policy in the country had exacerbated this gap.

7 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

Our findings point to the paramount importance of informal learning to sustaining and enhancing the livelihoods of rural youth in particular and larger communities in general. However we found that almost without exception, respondents from both contexts did not consider informal learning as a mode of learning – even those working within educational programmes and institutions. We attribute this to the dominant discursive practices of ‘Education For All’ slogans which reiterate the main source of learning as being formal schooling. The importance of formal schooling in rural areas is undeniable, but our data suggests that informal learning must not be overlooked, especially when formal education is not accessible to and may not fit interests of all youth and children. As we observed in both sites, many youth had dropped out of school and some had never attended formal education. For Basona Werana, the reasons for dropout and/or illiteracy were the family economic status, distance from school, cultural impacts (early marriage, sorcery claims). For Yabello, youth also work as cowboys/girls and it is difficult to attend school due to the labour-intensive and mobile nature of the pastoralist life style, dispersed settlements, and a lack of adequate schools, staff and equipment. For instance, at Harboro FGD in Yabello, out of 22 youths (12 males and 10 females) only 4 (3 males & 1 female) were attending school.

In theory, those dropouts and those who missed attending formal school are expected to attend the Integrated Functional Adult Literacy Program (IFAL). However, the implementation of IFAL Program in both areas appeared to be hampered by inappropriate location and schedule, shortage of materials, lack of staff motivation and weak coordination among sectoral offices. However, the programme was relatively better in the mixed farming community than in pastoralist communities due to literacy textbooks being prepared at the regional level. In both sites, the programme provided ‘school-like’ literacy skills, which were devoid of functional livelihood skills.

Turning to the international context, we are aware that this is a key moment as the post-2015 education agenda is currently being prepared, shaped by the past experiences of Education For All and the proposed Sustainable Development Goals. As mentioned in our introduction, the latest UNESCO Global Monitoring Report has a continued emphasis on formal education, including in the recommendations on how to improve the acquisition of work and life skills among youth and adults: ‘Policy makers should identify and prioritise skills to be acquired by each stage of formal

school'. Although the report is clearly promoting a stronger rights perspective on education than in the Dakar declaration, there seems to be an underlying assumption that formal education is the answer. Turning to the sustainable development agenda, the proposed SDG 4 - 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' – and several of the other seventeen goals indicate an attention to what kind of values and attitudes are promoted through education. There seems potential to adopt a broader understanding of education as encompassing not only vocational and basic skills but also learning for global citizenship and peace.

We believe that this small study in Ethiopia signals the importance of making informal learning more visible within educational and agricultural policy. One of the key lessons drawn from both of our research sites is that exposure of an individual or a household or a community to multiple livelihood challenges coupled with inadequate access to formal education is an experience common to many. In this situation, it is essential to develop a policy strategy that strengthens and capitalises on the informal learning processes that rural young people are engaging in through their search for better livelihood alternatives. We found that at present rural youth were rarely benefiting from agricultural extension programmes since they were not targeted specifically. ATVET programmes also marginalised non-literate youths by setting formal literacy skills as a prerequisite to entry. Rural youth in this study were generally learning agricultural and non-agricultural knowledge and skills informally from their parents, neighbours, employers, and friends.

If we are to work towards the sustainable development goals, and to realise the potential of education within that vision, policy makers will need to take a broader lens on education than schooling and begin to prioritise support for informal and non-formal learning approaches. In the Ethiopian context described here, there is an urgent need for well-resourced alternative basic education, distance extension and evening education and training opportunities outside (as well as within) formal educational institutions.

Acknowledgements

This paper draws on the IFAD-UNESCO project, 'Learning knowledge and skills for agriculture to improve rural livelihoods'. The project was directed by Subbarao Venkata Ilapavuluri, Bohrene Chakroun, Mari Yasunaga, Keith Holmes from UNESCO Paris office; Maria Hartl and Rosemary Vargas-Lundius from IFAD, Rome.

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