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"I started working because I was hungry": the consequences of food insecurity for children's well-being in rural Ethiopia

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Abstract

Food insecurity, the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of safe, nutritious food, is a persistent problem in rural Ethiopia, but little qualitative research has explored how food insecurity affects children over time, from their point of view. What are the effects of economic 'shocks' such as illness, death, loss of livestock, drought and inflation on availability of food, and children's well-being? To what extent do social protection schemes (in this case, the Productive Safety Net Programme) mitigate the long-term effects of food insecurity for children? The paper uses a life-course approach, drawing on analysis of four rounds of qualitative longitudinal research conducted in 2007, 2008, 2011 and 2014, with eight case study children, as part of Young Lives, an ongoing cohort study. Children's descriptions of the importance of food and a varied diet (dietary diversity) in everyday life were expressed in a range of qualitative methods, including interviews, group discussions and creative methods. The paper suggests that while the overall picture of food security in Ethiopia had improved in the past decade, for the poorest rural families, food insecurity remains a major factor influencing decisions about a range of matters – children's time allocation, whether to continue in school, whether to migrate for work, and whether they marry. The paper argues that experiences of food insecurity need to be understood holistically, in relation to other aspects of children's lives, at differing stages of the life-course during childhood. The paper concludes that nutritional support beyond early childhood needs to be a focus of policy and programming.

Key words: food insecurity, children and young people, rural Ethiopia, qualitative longitudinal research

1. Introduction and Background

The Sustainable Development Goals, launched in 2015, aim to 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition'. An additional objective is to monitor the progress of the Goals, with a call for a data revolution to track progress by gender, age and place of residence. During the lifetime of the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015), Ethiopia made progress in reducing malnutrition and food insecurity (Rahmato et al., 2013), and according to FAO, the prevalence of undernourishment (the percent of population estimated to consume fewer than a certain amount of calories that are considered essential to live) effectively halved in Ethiopia between 2000 and 2015 (World Bank, 2016). In order to foster food security and poverty reduction, the Government of Ethiopia introduced the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) in 2005, designed for rural areas, with two components - a public work component that pays daily wages for unskilled labour (either in cash or grain) to people who are chronically food insecure, and a direct support (DS) component that provides food to those unable to work, including people with disabilities, elderly people, pregnant and lactating women (Porter and Goyal, 2016; Tafere and Woldehanna, 2012). A National Nutrition Strategy (NNS) and a National Nutrition Program (NNP) were introduced in 2008, revised in 2013 to emphasise the importance of a holistic, multi-sectoral approach across the Ministries of Health, Education and Agriculture, focussing on the first 1,000 days (Government of Ethiopia, 2013). The most recent Mini Demography and Rural Household Survey showed that levels of malnutrition were high, but trends were improving; however, the rate in rural areas was nearly double that of urban areas (CSA, 2014). Between 2015 and early 2016, Ethiopia experienced the worst drought in 50 years, making children highly vulnerable (UNICEF, 2016) and in 2016, the Government launched a national School Health and Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan 'to improve access and educational achievement of school-age children', with a small-scale school meal programme.

Globally, research has focussed on malnutrition among infants and under five-year olds and this has been vital for policy and programming (Fram et al., 2015). However, the emphasis on the anthropometric consequences of food insecurity 'probably underestimates the extent to which children are negatively impacted by food-related hardships' (Fram et al., 2015 p6). The study of malnutrition has been dominated by cross-sectional and quantitative research (Fram et al., 2015), but this is limited in the insights it can provide into how children in low and middle income countries experience food insecurity on a daily basis, and their responses to the lack of good food and impact on their wellbeing (Aurino and Morrow, 2015). Further, there is growing awareness of the importance of nutrition throughout childhood and into

adolescence, especially for girls (Lancet, 2016; Cordiero et al., 2012; Aurino et al., 2017; Georgiadis et al., 2016).

Hadley, Belachew and colleagues have recently undertaken the *Jimma Longitudinal Family Survey of Youth* with adolescents in Jimma region of South West Ethiopia (Hadley et al., 2008). They analysed two rounds of the survey to explore food insecurity in a period of food price rises, and found that rural young people were most affected; that over time, boys were more likely to become food insecure; and that young people who were food insecure also reported poorer health (Hadley et al., 2009). Belachew et al. (2011) found that 13-17 year olds who were food insecure were significantly more likely to be absent from school. In a later paper, Belachew et al. (2013) explored food-based coping strategies and dietary practices, and found high numbers of young people who reduced the number of meals per day, worried about running out of food, didn't eat all day, asked for food or money to buy food, or begged. Hadley et al. (2012) analysed qualitative data **from adults**, and note that research has focussed more on *who* is affected by food price rises, not *how* they are affected. As Fram et al. (2015) note, existing systems for monitoring household food insecurity

> do not tap children's perspectives on their own lives, nor do they flow from a conceptualization of food insecurity that is grounded in children's experiences, their roles within households, or ways in which they make sense of their environments. (Fram et al., 2015, p.7)

Some qualitative research with children in high income countries explores their experiences of food insecurity (Connell et al., 2005; O'Connell and Brannen, 2016; Ridge, 2007). Connell et al. (2005) undertook research with 11 to 16 year olds in Mississippi, and identified a range of feelings and experiences that children articulated about strategies when facing food shortages, including: implications for well-being, having no choice, about what to eat, feelings of shame, and fear of being labelled poor. There is very little qualitative research exploring children's and young people's experiences of food insecurity in low and middle income countries (Hadley et al., 2009). An important exception is Bernal et al.'s (2012) research with 10-17 year olds in Venezuela, which found that children's experiences of food insecurity differ from those of adults, for a number of reasons, including their dependency on adults, and lack of control over financial resources (see also Aurino and Morrow, 2015 for India). Bernal et al. (2016) also analysed survey data from Venezuela to show that children have strategies for managing lack of food, and that food insecurity is a source of shame. To

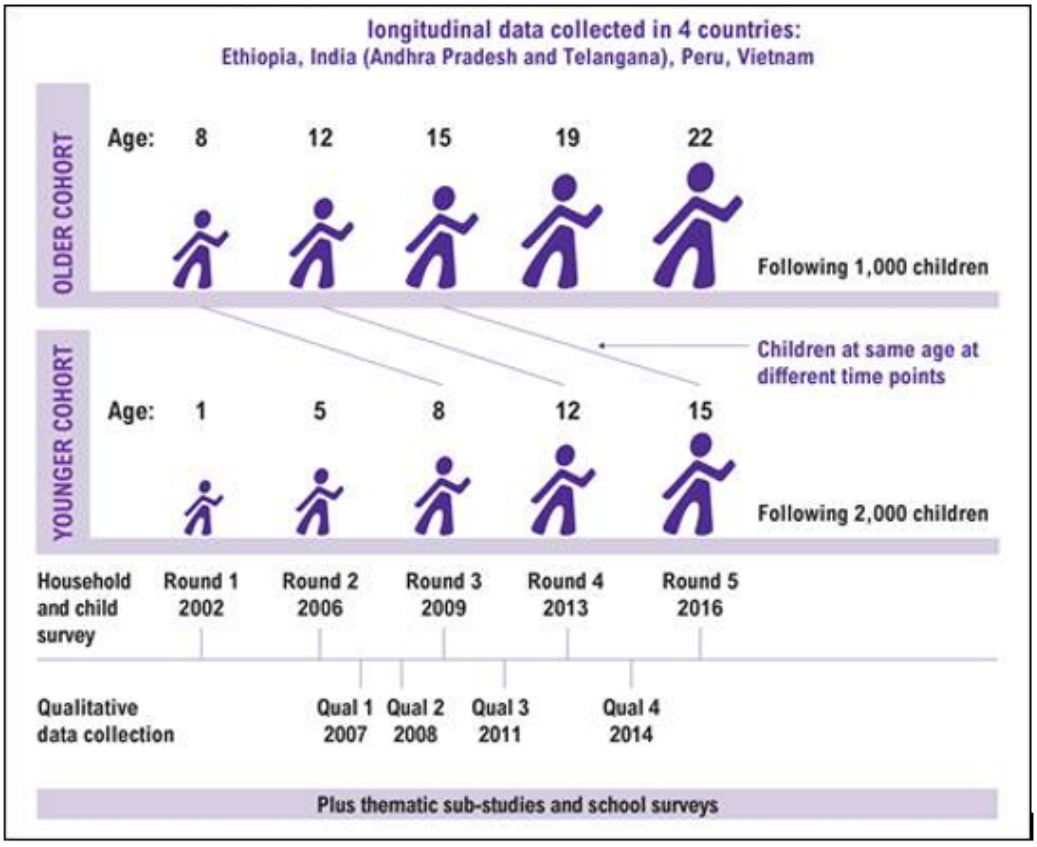
the best of our knowledge, there are no studies of children's experiences of food insecurity based on qualitative **longitudinal** data.

Panter-Brick (1998, p.78) has suggested that 'in-depth and multi-disciplinary information on social and ecological settings **over time**' is needed to illuminate the processes of children's development. This calls for a life-course approach to childhood, enabling a focus on the importance of past experiences for outcomes (Dornan and Woodhead, 2015). Briefly, four themes constitute a life-course approach: **historical time/era,** which connects people's experiences to events at global, national and local levels; the **timing of events** in a person's life – often referred to as 'critical moments' (institutional and social transitions between school, home and work); the **centrality of relationships** – interdependent webs of social ties between family members and others, which influence children's responses to adversity; and children's **agency,** often highly constrained in poverty situations, but crucial in how children respond to difficulties. A life-course analysis emphasises differing demands on households and the impacts of food insecurity in the medium term on children's trajectories. Qualitative longitudinal research adds value because it has the potential to 'address the complexities of poverty dynamics, to identify links between earlier circumstances and later outcomes, to examine the relationships between geographic and social mobility, and to explore when, why, and how inequality emerges in childhood and youth' (Crivello, 2015, p.23). By exploring children's accounts of their experiences, we highlight the effects of food insecurity on children's well-being in Ethiopia, how food insecurity affects crucial decisions over the life course and how these differ by gender; and the importance of sources of support over time.

2. Young Lives – methods, sample, ethics

Young Lives is a study of childhood poverty in four countries, Ethiopia, India (the former state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam, over 15 years, 2002–2017. 12,000 children were selected randomly within 20 sentinel sites, in poor communities (see Barnett et al 2012, Woldehanna and Pankhurst, 2014a, for Ethiopia). Child and household survey data are complemented by four rounds of qualitative data, as well as thematic sub-studies. The qualitative research was nested within the main survey, see Figure 1.

Figure 1. Young Lives survey design



2.1 Qualitative longitudinal research – sampling and case study selection

Qualitative data were gathered in five sites with a sub-sample of 60 vulnerable children (purposively sampled to include equal numbers of boys and girls from both cohorts, together with indicators of vulnerability including orphanhood, access to schooling, involvement in paid work and children who considered their household poorer than others). Fieldwork was conducted in 2007, 2008, 2011, and 2014. Here, we focus on older cohort children from two rural sites, in Tigray and Amhara (all names of places and people are pseudonyms). We selected rural cases because there are higher levels of malnutrition in rural areas than urban areas, and PSNP is targeted at rural areas (Woldehanna and Pankhurst, 2014b). The two sites were:

> Tach-Meret, a *kebele* (local administrative area) in Amhara region, situated on the outskirts of a town, affected by food shortages. Infrastructure developments include electricity, a road, and a health centre. The main livelihood is agriculture. The government has provided seeds, apple trees and a reforestation programme to address food insecurity. Haricot beans are grown as a cash crop and for domestic consumption. The inhabitants are mainly Christian. Children could access all levels of schooling because of proximity to the town.

> Zeytuni, a remote community in Tigray region, affected by protracted drought and food shortages. Children described improvements in the community such as irrigation and government planting schemes. Agriculture is the main livelihood but people also engage in waged work related to stone-crusher plants, animal rearing, poultry, masonry, irrigated farms and petty trading. Children work in stone-crushing plants linked to road-building and construction work. Students who finish primary school travel to towns to continue studying.

Both communities are beneficiaries of PSNP, and in both areas there is growing infrastructure, including roads and communication (mobile phones), but Tach-Meret, being so close to a town, is better positioned in terms of accessing services.

2.2 Methods

A range of methods were used to elicit data, including semi-structured individual interviews, group discussions, and creative methods (Crivello et al., 2013). Fieldwork was conducted by local research teams (led by Yisak Tafere, assisted by Nardos Chuta), in local languages, digitally recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Caregivers and community members (teachers, health workers, community leaders) were interviewed individually, and participated in group discussions. Qualitative research was structured around three themes: (a) children's well-being, (b) transitions in children's lives, and (c) children's experiences of services. Research teams took a flexible approach to enable children to discuss topics that mattered to them. Knowledge, attitudes and practices relating to food were not the explicit focus of research but rather, were what children discussed within these topics.

2.3 Data analysis

Transcripts are first coded by the research teams using Atlas-ti using a shared coding frame (Crivello et al., 2013), to identify cases where children mentioned food-related matters, hunger and so on. Young Lives qualitative longitudinal research is based on thematic and biographical (case-study) analysis to generate broad understandings of phenomena of interest, and to make comparisons. In thematic analysis, data are summarised and themes identified, which then enables descriptions to be generated, which can then be interpreted. Case-level analysis allows 'in-depth, context-specific appreciation of children's and caregivers' lived experiences and the processes shaping those experiences' (Crivello et al., 2013 p.14). Within the theme of well-being, food was frequently mentioned. This needs to be understood in the context of rural Ethiopia, where concepts like 'hunger' and plenty of food are idiomatic (De Waal, 1989), often used as a way of distinguishing between rich and poor (Tafere, 2012).

Food insecurity was frequently mentioned in the first three rounds of qualitative research (2007-2011), less so in 2014, which may reflect that the fact that there had been adequate rainfall in 2012 and 2013, and recent food shortages had been less acute.

2.4 Case study selection

A preliminary reading of all interviews from the third round of qualitative research (2011) with the rural older cohort children was undertaken by Zharkevich, and examples extracted, highlighting topics related to food. Eight cases (see Table 1 below) were selected for in-depth, interpretive analysis to identify trends, patterns, and divergences. Case studies were selected for the following reasons: all children were from households in the poorest wealth tercile, and children's narratives demonstrate the relevance of food insecurity for their trajectories. Cases were purposely chosen to be illustrative, rather than representative. Having identified the eight cases, all four rounds of qualitative longitudinal data for the case study children were then analysed by Morrow, Tafere, and Chuta, to generate case-level biographies. All four authors read the selected materials, discussed and agreed the focus, structure, analysis and interpretation of data, findings and conclusions.

Table 1: Characteristics of case study children, born c. 1994

Pseudonym	Gender	Location	Ever a PSNP recipient	Family situation aged 12/13	Circumstances age 19/20
Kassaye	Male	Tach-Meret	No	Living at home	Living at home, studying but doing poorly at school, working in construction.
Defar	Male	Tach-Meret	Yes	Living at home, Father sick	Left home, working in town, as a porter.
Sefinesh	Female	Tach-Meret	Yes, for a short period in 2008	Living with grandparents. Mother working in Gulf	Moved to Addis Ababa, studying.
Yenealem	Female	Tach-Meret	No	At home with both parents	Living with sister in natal community. Still studying, wants to be a nurse
Mesih	Male	Zeytuni	Used to do PSNP work,– now family are too well-off.	Living with parents.	Still studying, ambitious to go to university, be an entrepreneur or mechanic. Father had died. Living with sister in town.
Mihretu	Male	Zeytuni	Yes, under the emergency list	Living with family	Still living with family, farming, cutting cobblestones. Wages support the family.

Haymanot	Female	Zeytuni	Yes, Direct Support	Lived with mother. Father absent, mother very sick	Married, aged about 15, had a baby, divorced, remarried, second baby. Back living with mother.
Sessen	Female	Zeytuni	No	Living with mother and older siblings, Father died when she was small.	Married, with a baby

2.4 Research ethics

Young Lives has ethics approval from University of Oxford Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC), and follows Save the Children's Child Protection Guidelines (2003). Informed consent was obtained from children and caregivers at each visit, for each activity. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for fieldworkers was developed in collaboration with research teams, setting out basic guidance about procedures and respectful communication. All fieldworkers undergo training in research ethics, and fieldwork manuals contain ethics guidance. Interviews were conducted in homes, fields, in community premises, and occasionally in schools, in private (as far as possible). Fieldworkers were trained to ask questions in a sensitive manner, to stop interviews if the respondent was distressed and offer comfort. Fieldworkers have been engaged over the various rounds of data collection, and have developed a good rapport with children and families.

2.5 Limitations

There are limitations to our approach. First, as Young Lives sample only consists of youth in poverty, it cannot shed light on experiences of wider groups, and we focus on a small sample of vulnerable children, so it would be wrong to generalise. Second, experiences of food security were not the explicit focus of qualitative research, but emerged from general questions about well-being. Third, qualitative longitudinal research inevitably demonstrates variation and complexity in children's lives; nevertheless, the cumulative effects of food insecurity indicate consequences of hunger for children and young people.

3. Findings

A number of topics emerged as central to case study children's narratives, (a) the relationship between food and well-being; (b) the linkages between the gendered nature of children's work and economic shocks, and (c) importance of formal and informal sources of support, including PSNP.

3.1 The importance of food for well-being

For the poorest children, having enough food was a defining component of well-being and what makes for a good life (Camfield and Tafere, 2009). Children drew a distinction between well-off and poor children by describing the food they ate, dietary diversity, and indeed, nutritional status ('not thin'). For example, Kassaye, a young man from Tach-Meret, interviewed in 2008, described a child living a good life as someone who:

> has everything he needs… they are not thin… they are not like us. They eat potato all the time. And they have two cows… Children in rural areas wear almost the same clothes. But the difference is in what we eat. …you know, in months of May and June, we harvest the land but at the same time, they grow root crops and eat them. They also eat vegetables. They eat what they want… they have everything. When they need *shiro* (stew) they get it.

In 2016, aged 16, Kassaye described how the recent harvest had been good: 'God… has given us enough rain, everybody was happy, and we have been eating potatoes.' This had benefitted him 'If I get enough to eat, I can attend my classes properly'. He also said the family's economic situation had improved:

> I am getting enough food, as much as I want. You know, if I get good food and drink, I will do better in my school. I perform well in my classes. But if I feel hungry, I can't attend classes well because my concentration will be on what to eat and drink.

Kassaye's father mentioned that 'we don't eat as much as the rich eat: we reduce the amount of our food consumption so that we can survive'.

Sefnish, a young woman from Tach-Meret, said how having food was vital for leading a good life: 'if someone becomes fat, we suppose he is living a good life'. When she was 12, she described how she enjoyed fetching water, because not only could she play with her friends *en route*, she could snack on fresh peas and beans from farms, and wild berries.

Other children described how, in times of scarcity, families simply reduced the number of meals as well as the size of portions, and this affected well-being. For example, in Zeytuni, Mihretu's household had experienced food insecurity because of drought in 2007 and 2008. In 2007, Mihretu said his life was good because he got *injera* to eat, and that to live well,

children need to get a balanced diet. However, in 2008, whereas the previous year he used to get four meals a day, breakfast, lunch, a snack and dinner, he was only getting lunch and sometimes dinner. He said that the portions of *injera* and *gogo* (a kind of bread) were smaller. By 2014, Mihretu was still living with his family, having left school in Grade 7, because a relative told him he would be better working (cutting cobblestones) to support his family. All his earnings went to his family. He said: "I need no support as long as my family gets food to eat'. He mentioned the blessings his family gave him. The family had constructed two houses and bought a TV.

Haymanot, a young woman in Zeytuni, also mentioned food shortages at each visit. In 2008, she had returned to Zeytuni to care for her mother, and explained: 'my mother used to bake *injera* and fetch water. Now I am doing that...'. She described the family circumstances before her father disappeared: 'we used to have new clothes, chicken, meat … My mother was not sick at that time and she used to work...'. There had been food shortages because of drought: 'We sold [the two cows] and covered the house with an iron sheet and spent the money on food'. This meant the family shared their land with two other families and got half the yield. The number of meals per day had declined, and by 2011, they were eating once a day:

> we don't have much food at home and we have to eat accordingly... [in the past] we had enough food, sometimes *injera* and most of the time bread with *wot* (stew)...[now] sometimes I eat *kolo* all day. [previously] we used to eat bread and tea as breakfast, *injera* with *wot* as lunch, supper after school and then dinner.

In Tach-Meret, irrigation and vegetable farming had made the diet more diverse. By 2011, the family were growing tomatoes, onions, garlic and spinach, to sell. Mihretu said:

> We use that money to buy cooking oil, red pepper, and coffee. We don't buy grain as we got enough from the farmland and now is good season that everybody saved for summer season …Now, we can choose on what we need to eat, like *teff* and other food stuffs. We eat and drink what we want.

Two young people described how good food had helped them recover from illness. Defar, a young man, described food insecurity each time he was interviewed. In 2008, he had been ill for three months (affected by a demon *(likift*), and had been taken to a church for treatment). He also had tonsillitis, and attended a health centre. He described the importance of good food:

> I recovered through home treatment. They provided me with sauce and other important foods and I was able to recover from the illness. My family gave me good care.

In 2007, at age 13, Haymanot described how she had been ill, and had been sent to stay with an aunt in another community, and was given medicine and better food than she got at home, and she had recovered.

These examples illustrate how children are aware of the importance of good diet for health, well-being and education, and are also acutely aware of household strategies to manage food insecurity - indeed, they are part of household strategies for managing resources, in what has been termed 'planned hardship' (De Waal, 1989, p.7). One of these strategies is for children to intersperse school attendance with work, explored below.

3.2 Interplay of food insecurity, children's work and gender

Global policy debates on child labour that construct children's work as a problem to be eliminated are arguably disconnected from the realities of life in rural settings (Bourdillon et al., 2010). That children's work is a key element in family survival is well-documented for Ethiopia (Abebe, 2015, Pankhurst et al., 2015). Children work from a young age, and their work roles are differentiated by gender. Herding livestock is undertaken by boys, domestic work by girls. Ploughing is a high status activity, done by adult men with oxen, and households without men nor oxen have to hire men or lease land in a sharecropping arrangement, in which men plough the land and share the yield (Loveday and Dom, 2016). This in turn means productivity of the household is effectively halved. Gender differences may also affect access to food for young people. In rural Ethiopia, girls' mobility is restricted, and becomes more so the older they are, and they are expected to cook, fetch water and so on. Young men are more likely to move outside their homes, whether herding cattle in uplands where they may forage for food, or to towns where they earn cash to buy food, as we show below.

At each round of fieldwork, Kasaye, in Tach-Meret, explained how eager he was to attend school. He had been entrepreneurial in improving the family livelihood, rearing chickens from the age of 8. In 2008, aged about 13, he described herding cattle, cutting grass for fodder, and cultivating potatoes. He complained that when he was hungry, he could not study well. He said 'because we are children of poor famers, and here things are difficult, we should work to get food'. By 2011, aged 16, Kassaye's poultry business meant he could pay

for his school materials as well as give money to his mother for food. By 2014, aged 19, Kassaye was still enrolled in school (repeating the year, having failed Grade 9). He had a heavy workload helping his father with farming, and he worked in building work. He earnt money for himself, but gave part of his earnings to his parents if they asked. His work had interfered with school in the past, and his aspirations had dwindled– when first interviewed, he had wanted to be a teacher, but he gradually realised this was not possible. He said: 'I am really angry, because my family are not good economically'.

Defar, also in Tach-Meret, explained that his labour was crucial for the household when his father was too ill to work. Defar started working early on, and joined school age 11, at the insistence of his parents. By 13, he was earning cash sorting haricot beans, and collecting stones to sell. He explained that food was scarce during the rainy seasons, when food stocks are depleted. "We are hungry mostly at winter. When we are hungry, my grandmother and me survive selling eucalyptus seed". By 2011, Defar (aged 16) had left school in order seek paid work, because of financial problems:

> Last September when I asked my parents to send me to school, they said that they do not have the economic power, so then I left. I started working because I was hungry. …they were not able to provide me with exercise books ... I realized that my family was very poor...

However, according to Defar's father, Defar started "behaving like a bandit. He goes to the town in search of bread and he rejects our orders". By 2014, aged 20, Defar was living in the nearby town where he worked as porter/messenger. He had fallen out with his father, and walked out: 'My family started asking me to give them money'. However, despite being independent, he explained:

> When I was with my family, I did not think about my food and clothes. My family was responsible for all my needs. My responsibility was only working. But the last three years were very difficult times for me…. After leaving home, I became responsible for all my needs, including food.

He described feeling homesick, and going to visit his family for the holidays and taking food with him (an important custom). Because of conflict with his father, he visited his mother secretly:

> My mother tells me to come and eat when my father is not at home. I sometimes go and eat food when he is not at home. … I visit them during holidays. If I have some money, I buy them oil and peppers. When the feast ends, I return back to town.

When asked whether he preferred to live in the town or countryside, he said 'Life in rural areas is better. Food is available and you can eat any time.' He said he missed food from home. Thus, food insecurity impacted Defar's trajectory and on his decision to leave - in his father's words, Defar (and his siblings) had left home "to work for *their* stomachs only". The cumulative nature of shocks and the family's vulnerability was aggravated by Defar's father's chronic illness. For a while, Defar was supporting his family rather than the other way round – but then he decided to escape to town to provide for himself.

Similar patterns of the interplay between food insecurity and work were evident in Zeytuni. Mesih was from a family of seven children and was attending school in 2007, but he was also herding cattle throughout his childhood. He interrupted schooling for four years to undertake farmwork. The family struggled with the consequences of drought, but took on a loan to raise goats, and repaid it. They also undertook irrigation work. In 2008, Mesih noted an improvement in his diet – the family had started to eat bread. He had enjoyed school more than farming, and his parents encouraged him to study, and hired a boy to herd the cattle in his place. Mesih had also worked at the stone crusher plant in Zeytuni, as did his brother (see Boyden et al., 2016). In 2014, he was still studying.

For girls, gender norms combined with poverty put them at risk of early marriage in parts of Ethiopia (see Pankhurst et al., 2013). For Sessen and Haymanot, two young women in Zeytuni, food insecurity appeared to encourage them to work and marry at a young age. Sessen's father had died when she was small, so there was no one to plough the fields. Her mother looked after her own four children, plus Sessen's cousin, and borrowed money to buy food, but found it hard to repay it. Sessen had hardly any schooling, leaving after Grade 1. She said, "I started working when I was a child, by looking after the livestock, because I was the last born child to my parents, and we didn't have a brother". She worked at the stone crusher plant to support her family, and aged 18, she married a man she met at work. She said that she regretted leaving school but she had no choice, because 'my mother was alone with food shortages'. Sessen got married because she hated the work in the stone-crushing plant. By 2014, she had fallen out with her mother and no longer supported her, because her mother had disapproved of marriage, saying "problems force you to make the wrong decision".

Similarly, Haymanot had hardly attended school, and worked breaking stones, and doing embroidery. Like Sessen, she hated heavy work. In 2011, Haymanot, aged 15, had married (in a family-arranged wedding), and was living with her husband in a good house. This meant

she had a rest from working, and life was better because 'we have enough farm products'. Haymanot now spent her time doing domestic work, and helping her mother. However, by 2014, aged 19, Haymanot was divorced, with a two-year old daughter, and had returned to live with her sister and mother (see also Boyden et al., 2016). It was evident that her mother's illness had been the motivating factor for Haymanot's earlier marriage. Haymanot's sister had paid for food for the wedding ceremony. Haymanot explained that her husband had received two sacks of grain and one cow, but 'after we finished all these grains, we had conflict, and separated'.

In Tach-Meret, Yenealam's mother described how lack of food had affected Yenealem: 'her weight was reduced and sometimes she was not happy when she goes to school without eating breakfast'. Yenealam undertook copious household tasks, including looking after her younger siblings. In 2008, Yenealem's mother explained that the daily wage labour in haricot bean cultivation was crucial for the household, and meant the family could buy food, coffee, clothes and school materials. Yenealem's mother realised that this was hard on Yenealem:

> We are thinking about that, and her father says that she should study and rest. However, I said that she should help me, I say they can study in the evening, because otherwise we will suffer with food shortages and because I will not work alone, then we quarrel on the issue with my husband.

By 2011, Yenealem explained the relationship between food, wage labour, and children's capacity to study. She described how picking beans was tiresome and it negatively impacted her schooling, but she was unable to say 'no' because 'we will starve and I cannot get educational materials'. By 2014, age 19, Yenealem was still at school, and working in haricot bean cultivation. Several of her siblings had left, and she was responsible for the household and her parents.

Having young children in the household may make families susceptible to food insecurity: as children grow up, households report an improvement in livelihoods, partly because there are fewer dependents, and older children may provide for themselves or contribute their labour (see Bevan and Pankhurst, 2007). However, some children and households were more vulnerable than others. For Defar and Haymanot, there was a relationship between needing to work and having enough to eat. Parental ill health in both cases was a factor, as Haymanot struggled to look after her mother, and Defar worked hard when his father was ill.

There are parallels between the two sites, but also some differences, in that the young women in Zeytuni and Tach-Meret had differing outcomes, seemingly related to sources of support from wider kin, discussed in the next section.

3.3 The importance of formal and informal sources of support

Analysis of survey data shows that PSNP provides 'a significant boost to children's growth' (Porter and Goyal, 2016, p.93). However, little qualitative research has explored children's experiences of PSNP (though see Camfield and Tafere, 2009). Defar's family received PSNP support in 2008, at the time of the food price rises. He recalled: 'once when the family was starving, we got one quintal of maize and some birr. We were happy … had my family not got it, I would have starved'. Support from PSNP meant:

> We get some 800 birr within 2 or 3 months, and if we do not have something to eat, we save this money and buy things to eat with it, and also things needed for agricultural purposes. We bought the cow and the donkey with the birr we got from the Safety Net.

However, as noted above, Defar stopped working in PSNP work, which had previously helped the family offset the worst consequences of the food crisis.

Sefinesh had been raised by her grandparents, her mother having left when she was a baby to work in Addis Ababa and latterly the Gulf. Sefinesh's grandmother also spoke positively of PSNP which had provided cash, but the support Sefinesh's mother sent was crucial in enabling the household to cope with food crises and shocks, such as death of cattle during drought in 2008. Sefinesh explained:

> if we want to eat *teff* (grain used to make *injera*, flatbread) we can get it;... if we have no food in the house, my grandmother goes to her family in Addis Ababa and she brings money and we buy food with that money.

In 2011, Sefinesh was still at school, and proudly reported that she had rejected several marriage proposals. By 2014, aged 19, she had moved to Addis Ababa to study, and was living with her aunt, who made a living selling *injera*. The household had not faced food shortages. Sefinesh was grateful to her grandparents because they insisted she attended school:

> I would not get education opportunity if my grandparents were not concerned about me. … There are many poor children even who do not have anything to eat. When I compare myself with these children, I feel that I was raised properly. I appreciate my grandparents in this respect.

In Zeytuni, Mihretu described how in 2010, the family had lost four cattle because of accidental poisoning by herbicides (about 200 cattle died in the community). The *equib* (traditional savings association) and the community gathered grain, sold it and redistributed the money to those who lost cattle (livestock are vital assets, see Pankhurst and Bevan, 2004). Between 2007 and 2011, Mihretu attended school, but the loss of livestock was a blow to children in Zeytuni, and some children were determined to migrate for work. Members of the community saw how distressed Mihretu was, and collected money so that he could buy exercise books and continue his schooling. He said without the support from the community,

> it would have been a very difficult season for us. We would have been forced to buy grain from the market as we couldn't … plough the land. … However, the community was very cooperative to plough the land collectively. Now, we have food as equal as the other members of the community and we have replaced all what we have lost... we didn't have any harvest from the summer season. The community's support has saved us.

By 2011, Mesih was still studying, supported by his parents, and his brother, who helped out financially. By 2014, he was studying in the nearby town, where he lived with his sister. His brother's income helped buy school materials. He said he hoped to go to university.

Haymanot described doing PSNP work, which she undertook alternating with her sister on a shift basis. The work involved 'watering trees, digging the ground, building fences with stones'. They were paid 10kg of wheat per month – previously they received cash, but Haymanot preferred payment in grain, because 'when it is in cash the payment is 40 birr per person and it is not enough to buy 10kgs of wheat'. She said "I don't want to be worried about my life'. When asked: 'what do you worry about now?' She replied 'Our food'. However, since Haymanot's divorce, the family situation had improved, because Haymanot's sister had sent money, and they received Direct Support. When asked how it had helped, Haymanot explained: 'when it is given in cash, we get 300 birr; when it is given in kind, we get 50 kgs of grain'. Haymanot's mother said the support was useful because 'it contributes to what we have' but, she added, 'it doesn't help improve life'.

Thus, PSNP supports poorer households in times of crisis, and children and caregivers spoke highly of it. While the unintended consequences of PSNP may be on children's time allocation, as they either work directly for PSNP or substitute their caregivers' work (Tafere and Woldehanna, 2012), money and grain received by households enables families to buy livestock and survive through periods of hunger. However, if we compare Defar and Kassaye, both households suffered material deprivation, but Kassaye's household was able to support

him to stay at school, not least because there was enough food. The narrative, over time, is of a young man facing food shortages, eager to try solve difficulties for himself, and to support his family – but whose ambitions were constrained by the struggle to survive. For Defar, despite the family receiving PSNP support, his unwillingness to contribute to the household economy meant he left home to earn money to support himself. In Sefinesh and Mesih's cases, financial support from kin meant they continued in education. For Haymanot's family, the intermittence of payments meant that could not rely on PSNP, and wage labour was necessary. PSNP was helpful, but not transformative.

4. Towards a framework for analysing the intersections of food insecurity and children's trajectories

The case study data highlight the challenges young people face in situations of poverty during a period of fluctuating climatic conditions and rapid modernisation. We have shown how experiences of food insecurity influence young people's trajectories, that a range of shocks (such as drought, poisoning of cattle) intersect to increase households' vulnerability, and several factors (such as access to PSNP) mitigate the effects of shocks. Children dealt with multiple pressures of household work, agricultural work and schooling, while not getting sufficient nutrition at times. Further, they were well aware of the importance of good food for schooling and health. Children from poorer and food-insecure households seemed to be more likely to start a separate life, either by marrying (girls) or migration from rural areas to towns (boys). The proximity of Tach-Meret to town meant that there were wage-labour opportunities (see Crivello and Van der Gaag, 2016; Dom, 2016). Boys gained decision-making power with age. Defar kept his earnings for himself and resented supporting his family, though he seemed to be homesick. In other cases, boys handed their income to their parents, and were proud to do so. In some cases, young people felt responsible for their natal families, and continued to assist their parents after migration or marriage. In other cases, food shortages led to family conflict, as in Defar and Sessen's cases.

Food insecurity effects on children's work were also influenced by gender dynamics. First, for girls, both Haymanot and Sessen were involved in heavy work as part of PSNP. They both hated the work, but they were aware that their labour was necessary– neither would abandon their mothers. Both married young, and had babies. If one compares Sefinesh with Haymanot and Sessen, the household economy seems to be crucial in influencing decisions about marriage. Arguably, Sefinesh could reject marriage proposals because she had kin to rely on. Yenealem had not yet married, but her wages were needed for household survival.

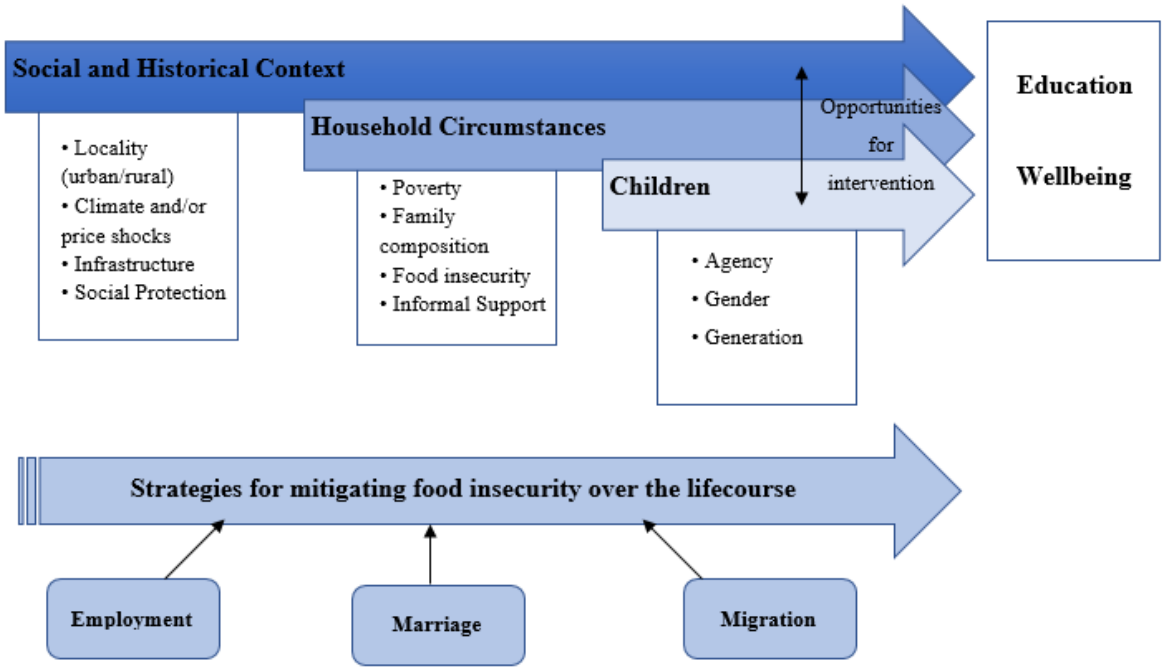
The introduction of irrigation in both sites meant that households could diversify their crops, with marked improvement in food supplies and produce to sell. In Zeytuni, infrastructure projects meant that there were opportunities for wage labour, which allowed households to earn cash and diversify the range of assets that they could rely on in times of food shortage, and save them from selling livestock. In Zeytuni, waged work often involved hard physical labour, and thus households with adult men tended to benefit more from these opportunities (see Boyden et al., 2016).

Intra-household dynamics and inter-generational relationships intersect with experiences of food insecurity in children's everyday lives. In rural areas, the intergenerational flow of resources seems to go upwards, with children acting as 'shock absorbers' for households (Abebe, 2015). Rural subsistence economies need children's work because there is a demand from livestock, farming, and (increasingly) cash crops that require irrigation and harvesting. Thus, locality would appear to be crucial in determining children's experiences of hunger, availability of food, and long-term trajectories.

Ethiopia has made great strides in tackling malnutrition, with a focus on early childhood. This is vital, but we suggest that food insecurity has persistent, long-term consequences for children and young people in poor rural households. From children's standpoints, food insecurity defines well-being in a central way, and also interrupts educational progress. A life-course approach to children's biographies reveals the interconnections between historical era (for example, period of drought), events (food price rises), relationships (interdependencies between family members) and agency (children's decisions and responses to hardship). This helps to identify critical points, such **when** children stop school, and **who** may be vulnerable to drought and other shocks, which combined with entrenched gender norms lead to differing outcomes for young women and young men. Girls living in female-only households may be particularly at risk.

Figure 2 below illustrates the connections between time, location, context, gender, food insecurity and trajectories. Children's agency and consequent trajectories are at the centre; the outer layers situate children within societal/household contexts, which are dynamic. Policy and programming affects children directly and indirectly, leading to inequalities in experiences and outcomes. For example, social protection affects household poverty and thus child well-being; nutrition programmes improve well-being, and so on.

Figure 2: A model for identifying the consequences of food insecurity for children over the life course (adapted from Dornan and Woodhead, 2015)



Social protection programmes may protect children from the deleterious consequences of food insecurity in terms of health and education. The small-scale school meal programmes started in 2016 have been scaled up by the World Food Programme during the recent drought. School feeding programmes have a protective role, encouraging children to stay in education, particularly girls (Gelli, 2015). However, children who are not at school, or who attend intermittently, risk missing out. In relation to gender, early marriage for girls related to poverty and food insecurity. Boys from poorer households may leave home in search of wage work, but the work they find may be precarious. Finally, the data suggest that PSNP does operate as a safety net, as intended, but that much more policy action is needed to turn the current form of social protection from safety net into transformational and sustained change. As Roelen and Sabates-Wheeler (2012) suggest, the remit of social protection could be broadened to tackle poverty, vulnerability, poor delivery and patterns of exclusion.

5. Conclusion

In countries affected by climate instability, populations are vulnerable to food insecurity when macro-shocks like the 2015-16 drought occur. Structural factors such as widespread poverty lead to food insecurity, which is in turn compounded by climatic shocks or economic shocks such as the global food price spikes. Children growing up in poverty have high hopes for the future, but the material realities of hunger seem to influence their trajectories. State

responses have potential to mitigate the effects of food insecurity. However, food insecurity is not only a matter of economics and politics of food production and distribution, it has important consequences in terms of psychological well-being, and it also affects social relations. So dominant are concerns about food and so volatile is food provision, that children's trajectories – whether and when they discontinue school, when they work, when they marry – are influenced by answers to the deceivingly simple question of whether there is enough food to eat. Family practices related to food insecurity need to be understood in relation to other aspects of children's lives. Qualitative longitudinal research with children and young people via biographical case-studies extends our understanding of how structural factors – poverty, parental ill-health, absence or death, and environmental shocks – intersect with gender norms to influence children's trajectories, and helps to explain patterns of inequality. This highlights the importance of paying attention to children's experiences, in their own words, towards a holistic approach that maps the effects of food insecurity over time. This would enable identification of potential entry points for intervention.

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