

2023

Alliance 2015

towards the eradication of poverty

ETHIOPIA BRIEF

GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF ETHIOPIA'S YOUTH
IN SHAPING FOOD SYSTEMS

May 2024



© Theodor Kutzer-Uhl/Welt Hunger Hilfe



To learn more, visit
www.globalhungerindex.org
#GHI2023



Key Messages

- **According to the 2023 Global Hunger Index (GHI) report, hunger in Ethiopia is serious.** With a GHI score of 26.2, Ethiopia ranks 101th out of the 125 countries with sufficient data to calculate GHI scores. Since 2000, Ethiopia's GHI score has decreased by 27.1 points—a decline of 51 percent that has pushed Ethiopia from *extremely alarming* to *serious*. However, Ethiopia's progress in the fight against hunger has slowed in the past decade, while its levels of malnutrition continue to be high and concerning.
- **About 19.7 million people in Ethiopia faced a high level of acute food insecurity in 2023**, in part because of extreme weather and localized conflict.
- **Many young people, particularly young women, are struggling to obtain the education and jobs they need.** At 19.3 percent in 2021, the rate of young people (aged 15–29) not in employment, education, or training (NEET) is low compared with the global average and with many other African countries. However, Ethiopia's NEET gender gap has widened considerably since 2013, and the 27.9 percent NEET rate among young women is nearly three times as high as the male rate (9.8 percent).
- **Although youth make up about 29 percent of the population, their engagement in Ethiopia's food systems is limited.** This situation can be attributed to young people's limited access to land, capital, inputs, technologies, and services such as extension, credit, and market opportunities. Youth also face capacity gaps, stigmatization of agriculture and food-related livelihoods, weak institutional support, and lack of youth voice and representation, as well as a context of climate change and conflict. Furthermore, Ethiopian youth voices have not been sufficiently integrated into the framework for transforming the country's food systems.
- **Ethiopian youth could play significant roles in shaping food systems.** These potential roles include input supply; production, processing, packaging, marketing, distribution, and consumption of nutrient-dense foods; innovation and entrepreneurship; sustainable agriculture leadership; food system policymaking; knowledge sharing; and capacity building.
- **In the face of the existing challenges, we must engage youth to transform food systems in Ethiopia and globally to become sustainable and equitable.** Harnessing the energy, ideas, and potential of Ethiopia's large youth population is essential for developing resilient, sustainable, and equitable food systems that can meet the country's long-term needs.

INTRODUCTION

Food systems incorporate many actors at different intersecting levels and spaces. Young people constitute one of the most significant groups of these actors. They contribute significantly to food systems in a variety of ways, from agricultural production and processing to food-related retail services, through formal and informal employment, paid and unpaid labor, and self-employment (Mugo and Kinyua 2023). Given that youth (ages 15–29) make up 28 percent of the Ethiopian population, and considering the impact they will have on the development paths and future sustainability of food systems, their role is of utmost importance. Yet, their potential remains largely untapped, as their role is not sufficiently acknowledged and their inclusion in policy- and decision-making remains limited.

Ethiopia's food systems are not always able to deliver inclusive and equitable benefits for all (Dorosh and Minten 2020; Woolfrey et al. 2021). On the one hand, since 2000 Ethiopia has experienced substantial agricultural growth, thanks in part to a doubling in the use of modern inputs, significant land expansion, and increased labor use (Bachewe et al. 2018; Minten et al. 2020). In addition, household welfare indicators have drastically improved as rural poverty has fallen. On the other hand, food systems in Ethiopia suffer from low availability and affordability of nutrient-dense foods, limited dietary diversity, unhealthy diet trends, inadequate access to agricultural inputs and technologies, weak market linkages, soil depletion, and insufficient climate adaptation and resilience mechanisms (MoA 2022). Only 2.4 percent of the population meets the World Health Organization's recommendation of five servings of fruit or vegetables per day. Salt intake is high across all regions of Ethiopia (Baye and Hirvonen 2020).

Even though agriculture in Ethiopia employs most young people and has the potential to absorb more, it does not tend to attract young people seeking livelihoods, owing to the seasonal nature of agricultural income, fear of agricultural risk, and lack of initial capital (Tarekegn et al. 2022). Those who participate in agrifood systems find themselves working within subsistence farming cycles characterized by poor market access that limits the profitability of production and restricts off-farm employment opportunities, leading to a downward spiral of low productivity and low income.

Food systems need to be shaped in a way that increases food availability and choice, promotes equitable incomes, and supports the adoption of healthy diets and sustainable environmental practices. The 2023 Global Hunger Index (GHI) highlights the need for increased youth participation in food system transformation. To expand on the Ethiopian context, Alliance2015, in collaboration with the African Union (AU) and Ethiopia's Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) and Ministry of Health (MoH), has developed this brief on the role of Ethiopia's youth in shaping food systems transformation.

BOX 1.1 ABOUT THE STUDY

The assessment of the role and potential of Ethiopian youth in shaping food systems transformation was conducted in six regions of Ethiopia: Addis Ababa, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Sidama, and Southern Ethiopia. These regions represent both rural and urban areas of the country, including the highlands, lowlands, and agricultural, pastoral, and agropastoral areas. The assessment targeted youth groups in youth-led associations, networks, small and medium-size enterprises, organizations, and beneficiaries of interventions delivered by members of Alliance2015.

Data were collected from primary sources at different levels. The assessment used a qualitative approach, including a desk review of key reports and policy documents related to food insecurity, malnutrition, food systems, and youth engagement in these areas; focus group discussions (FGDs) with representatives of youth groups; and key informant interviews (KIIs) with representatives of government and nongovernmental organizations that work with food systems and youth. It aimed to capture the perspective of Ethiopian youths and their role in shaping food systems transformation.

Despite significant progress since 2000, food and nutrition security is at worryingly high levels

At the national level, Ethiopia's aggregate food production—of cereals, pulses, oil seeds, vegetables, and animal products—rose significantly between 2000 and 2020 as a result of both expansion of cultivated area and technologies that increased productivity per hectare. Agricultural production, particularly of cereals, has contributed to overall economic growth and helped reduce poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition. However, growth in food production has not kept up with population growth, resulting in a widening food gap that leaves people of all ages vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity and reliant on short-term food aid. Nationally, about 50 percent of households meet their calorie requirements through starchy staples, and 40 percent of households are experiencing energy deficiency (FDRE 2018).

Between 2021 and 2022, acute food insecurity worsened in Ethiopia, leaving about 19.7 million people facing acute food insecurity in 2023 (FSIN and GNAFC 2024). Globally, Ethiopia remains one of the most severe food crises due to ongoing droughts, macroeconomic challenges and internal conflict. Although localized conflict affected households' food and nutrition security, the main driver of food insecurity in 2022 was extreme weather. Consecutive droughts led to widespread livestock deaths in pastoral areas of southern Ethiopia. Furthermore, the country continued to face macroeconomic challenges aggravated by, among other things, a weakening currency against the dollar and high inflation that eats into households' purchasing power (WFP 2022).

Ethiopia made progress against hunger between 2000 and 2020. It significantly boosted the dietary energy available, dietary diversity, expenditures on nutrient-dense and animal-source foods, and overall food consumption. From a 2000 GHI score of 53.3, classified as *extremely alarming*, Ethiopia achieved a 2023 GHI score of 26.2, classified as *serious* (von Grebmer et al. 2023) (see Box 1).

However, child undernutrition, and especially child stunting, remains a major public health problem. Most recent preliminary findings from the National Food and Nutrition Strategy Baseline show that 39 percent, 22 percent, and 11 percent of children are stunted, underweight, and wasted, respectively (EPHI 2023).

To tackle these problems, the government of Ethiopia adopted a Food and Nutrition Policy in 2018 to improve food and nutrition security and promote accountability through structural changes. Since 2021 it has carried out the National Food and Nutrition Strategy to support the effective execution of the policy (EFDE, 2021).

Most importantly, the government launched the Ethiopian Food Systems (EFS) plan—24 game-changing solutions that aim to holistically transform Ethiopia's food systems, from production to consumption. This transformation is aligned with Ethiopia's commitment at the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) and seeks to promote enhanced food safety, nutrition, and diets while also improving income and livelihoods, preserving and restoring land, and enhancing resilience. The food system transformation pathway is gender inclusive, and most of the game-changing solutions demand active youth participation.

ETHIOPIAN YOUTH AND PROSPECTS FOR THEIR ENGAGEMENT IN FOOD SYSTEMS

Youth make up a significant share of agricultural workers

Ethiopia's population of young people ages 15–29 is large and growing fast. Between 2000 and 2022, the youth population is estimated to have increased at an average annual rate of 3.3 percent, somewhat above the African average youth population growth rate of 2.8 percent and well above the global average of 0.6 percent (ILO 2023). In 2022, youth accounted for 31 million (29 percent) of Ethiopia's total population of 105 million (ESS 2023; CFYE 2021). Of these, 23 million were from rural areas, while 8 million youth resided in urban areas.

These young Ethiopians, and especially young women, are struggling to get the education and jobs they need. In 2021, 64.9 percent of male youth had a job compared with 50.6 percent of female youth. Since 2013, the employment-to-population ratio has fallen by more than 16 percentage points for young men and more than 20 percentage points for young women. The share of young people not in employment, education, or training (NEET) in 2021 was 19.3 percent—significantly below the global average and lower than in many other African countries. However, Ethiopia's NEET gender gap has widened considerably since 2013, and the 27.9 percent NEET rate among young women (27.9 percent) was nearly three times as high as that for young men (9.8 percent) in 2021 (ILO 2023).

Youth employment—especially of young men—is heavily concentrated in agriculture. The agricultural sector accounts for nearly 70 percent of the jobs held by young men and about 50 percent of jobs held by young women (ILO 2023). This indicates that Ethiopia's current and agriculture is heavily dependent on young generations.

Youth Engagement in Food Systems remains limited

FGDs and KIIs reveal that youth engagement in Ethiopia's food systems is limited, for several reasons. Youth are facing restricted access to land, capital, inputs, technologies, and services such as extension, credit, and market opportunities. They lack capacity-building support tailored to their needs.

Although many youth are employed in agriculture, the FGDs make clear that agriculture and food system activities hold little interest for most young people. They perceive these livelihoods as incapable of providing sufficient and stable incomes compared with other sectors. Social and cultural norms play a significant role in shaping this perception. Careers in agriculture and food systems are often undervalued or stigmatized, particularly among youth.

Moreover, with the benefits and burdens of food systems distributed inequitably among young individuals, current systems fail to build the resilience and capacity of young Ethiopians to cope with shocks and stresses that may arise. Insufficient attention is given to ensuring environmentally sound practices, social equity, and economic viability in the management of food systems, which must include a role for youth.

There is a lack of inclusivity in food system decision-making processes and a dearth of opportunities for youth to contribute meaningfully to shaping food systems. A significant number of FGD participants were unaware of the recently launched food systems transformation pathway in Ethiopia and expressed a sense that youth voices have not been sufficiently integrated into the framework for transforming the country's food systems.

BOX 1 ETHIOPIA AND THE GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is a tool for comprehensively measuring and tracking hunger at global, regional, and national levels. To capture the complex and multidimensional nature of hunger, the index combines four indicators that reflect not only calorie availability but also the quality and utilization of food:

1. **Undernourishment** (the share of the population with insufficient caloric intake);
2. **Child wasting** (the share of children under age five who have low weight for their height, reflecting acute undernutrition);
3. **Child stunting** (the share of children under age five who have low height for their age, reflecting chronic undernutrition); and
4. **Child mortality** (the mortality rate of children under age five, partly reflecting the fatal mix of inadequate nutrition and unhealthy environments).

Based on the values of the four indicators, the GHI determines hunger on a 100-point scale, where 0 is the best possible score (no hunger) and 100 is the worst. Each country's GHI score is classified by severity, from low to extremely alarming. The GHI, which draws on data from the previous five years, is best suited to measure hunger over recent years and decades and is complemented by other tools, such as the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), that offer real-time assessments and short-term projections of hunger (von Grebmer et al. 2023).

In Ethiopia, hunger is categorized as *serious*, according to the 2023 GHI report. With a GHI score of 26.2, Ethiopia ranks 101th out of the 125 countries with sufficient data to calculate 2023 GHI scores (von Grebmer et al. 2023).

For more information, see the full GHI report at www.globalhungerindex.org

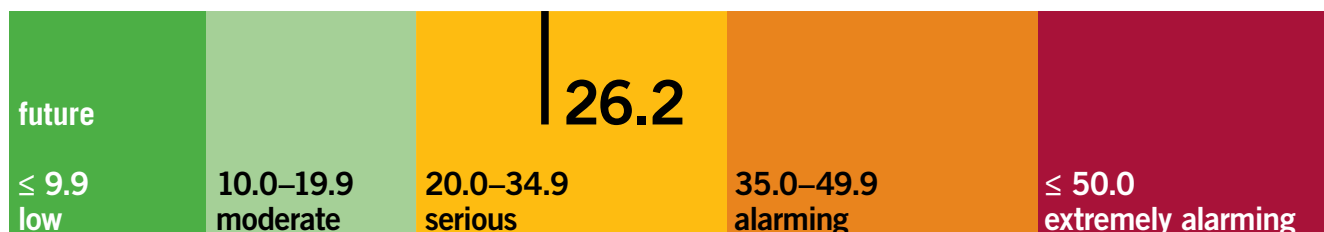
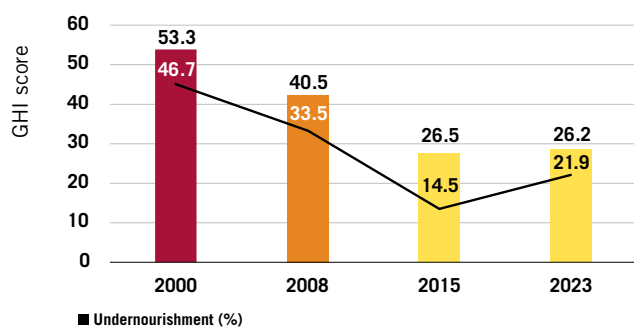


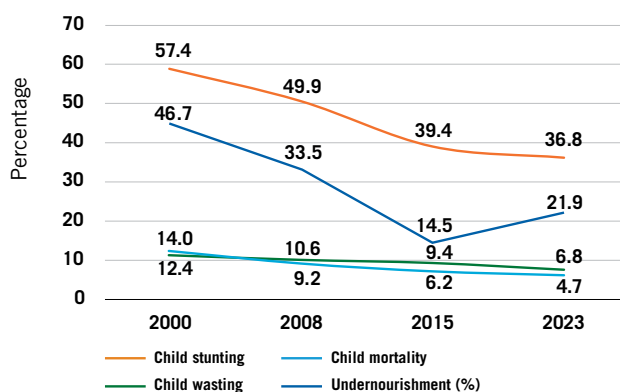
FIGURE 1: GHI SCORE TREND FOR ETHIOPIA AND PREVALENCE OF UNDERNOURISHMENT IN RECENT DECADES



Note: Data for GHI scores are from 1998–2002 (2000), 2006–2010 (2008), 2013–2017 (2015), and 2018–2022 (2023).

The component GHI indicators for Ethiopia also show strong progress since 2000.

FIGURE 2: TREND FOR INDICATOR VALUES FOR ETHIOPIA



This assessment has pinpointed various opportunities and challenges associated with youth engagement in food systems.

FGD participants mentioned that Ethiopian youth could play significant roles in shaping food systems. These roles include input supply; production, processing, packaging, marketing, distribution, and consumption of nutrient-dense foods; innovation and entrepreneurship; sustainable agriculture leadership; food system policymaking; knowledge sharing; and capacity building.

Opportunities

- **Youth demographics:** Ethiopia has a young population that represents a large pool of potential human capital that could drive food system transformation.
- **Innovation and creativity:** Youth bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and a willingness to embrace new technologies. Their creativity can lead to transformative approaches in addressing food system challenges and driving sustainable practices.
- **Entrepreneurship:** Many young individuals possess an entrepreneurial spirit and a desire to create their own opportunities. Engaging youth in food systems can foster the development of agribusinesses and start-ups, contributing to economic growth and job creation.
- **Digital connectivity:** The increasing access to technology and digital connectivity provides youth with valuable tools to access information, market products, and connect with networks and resources. Digital platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing, market linkages, and collaboration among youth engaged in the food system.
- **Advocacy:** Young individuals are vocal advocates for causes they believe in. They can mobilize and raise awareness about food system issues, promote policy changes, and influence decision-making processes at local, national, and global levels.
- **Improved food and nutrition security:** Greater youth engagement in food production, processing, distribution, and consumption could enhance the availability, accessibility, and utilization of nutritious foods.
- **Economic empowerment and livelihoods:** Expanding opportunities for youth in the food system could provide viable, sustainable livelihoods and contribute to broader socioeconomic development.
- **Enabling policy:** Various existing policy frameworks create enabling conditions for youth involvement in food systems.

Challenges

- **Limited access to resources and services:** Young people often face barriers in accessing land, finance, technology, extension services, credit, and other critical resources needed to participate in and thrive within the food system.
- **Capacity gaps:** Young Ethiopians often lack the necessary skills, knowledge, and technical capabilities to effectively engage in food system activities and enterprises.
- **Negative cultural and social perceptions:** Social norms and cultural biases that undervalue or stigmatize agriculture and food-related livelihoods can discourage youth engagement.

- **Weak institutional support:** Inadequate policy frameworks, programs, and support mechanisms tailored to youth in the food system can hinder their meaningful participation.
- **Lack of youth voice and representation:** The limited inclusion of youth perspectives and leadership in food system governance and decision-making processes can lead to a disconnect between policies/programs and youth realities.
- **Climate change:** Climate change impacts can disproportionately affect marginalized and disadvantaged youth, who may have fewer resources and coping mechanisms to adapt to changing conditions.
- **Poor market access and value chain integration:** Limited access to markets, lack of market information, and challenges in value chain integration pose significant barriers to youth engagement in the food system.
- **Conflict:** Conflicts, civil unrest, and political instability can disrupt agricultural production, transportation, and distribution networks, leading to food shortages and price volatility. These conditions can undermine the viability and profitability of food system activities, discouraging youth from pursuing livelihoods in the sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

How to harness the energy, ideas, and potential of Ethiopia's large youth population for developing resilient, sustainable, and equitable food systems that can meet the country's long-term needs:

- Improve access to resources and services. Ensure that youth have access to essential resources, such as land, credit, extension, inputs (seeds, fertilizers), and training, that can empower young farmers to participate more effectively in food systems.
- Expand youth employment opportunities. Facilitate youth employment in various on- and off-farm activities related to food production, processing, transportation, and sales so they can enhance their livelihoods while contributing to healthy, sustainable food systems.
- Build up youth capacity in agribusiness. Increase and improve the capacity of youth to profitably engage in activities along the agriculture value chain through a multipronged approach, including basic agribusiness training and an intensive agribusiness entrepreneurship program.
- Engage young people in food system policies and programs. Create platforms and opportunities for meaningful youth participation to ensure that their diverse perspectives, experiences, and innovative ideas are heard, considered, and actively integrated into the transformation agenda.
- Promote the use of modern technologies and practices in agriculture that integrate indigenous and traditional knowledge. Government and nongovernmental organizations must support and diversify agricultural production using innovations that can make agriculture more profitable, reduce labor-intensive tasks, and attract youth to the sector.
- Facilitate accessible and affordable finance options for youth engagement in the food system.

REFERENCES

- Bachewe, F. N., G. Berhane, B. Minten, and A. S. Taffesse. 2018. "Agricultural Transformation in Africa? Assessing the Evidence in Ethiopia." *World Development* 105 (May): 286–298. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.05.041>.
- Baye, K., and K. Hirvonen. 2020. *Accelerating Progress in Improving Diets and Nutrition in Ethiopia*. Ethiopia Strategy Support Program Working Paper 144. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- CFYE (Challenge Fund for Youth Employment). 2021. Ethiopia Scoping Report <https://fundforyouthemployment.nl/>
- CSA (Central Statistics Agency). 2021. *Labour Force and Migration Survey Key Findings*. Addis Ababa.
- Dorosh, P., and B. Minten, eds. 2020. *Ethiopia's Agrifood System: Past Trends, Present Challenges, and Future Scenarios*. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896296916>.
- EPHI (Ethiopian Public Health Institute). 2023. *National Food and Nutrition Strategy Baseline Survey: Key Findings Preliminary Report*. Addis Ababa.
- ESS (Ethiopian Statistical Service). 2023. Population Projection of Ethiopia. (<https://www.statsethiopia.gov.et/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Population-of-Zones-and-Weredas-Projected-as-of-July-2023.pdf>)
- FDRE (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia). 2018. *Food and Nutrition Policy*. Addis Ababa.
- FDRE (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia). 2021. *National Food and Nutrition Strategy*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
- FSIN (Food Security Information Network) and GNAFC (Global Network against Food Crises). 2024. *Global Report on Food Crises 2023: Joint Analysis for Better Decisions*. Rome. <https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2023>.
- ILO (International Labour Organization). 2023. *ILO Youth Country Briefs: Ethiopia*. Geneva.
- Minten, B., M. Dereje, F. Bachewe, and S. Tamru. 2020. "Evolving Food Value Chains." In *Ethiopia's Agri-Food System: Past Trends, Present Challenges, and Future Scenarios*, ed. P. Dorosh and B. Minten. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. <https://www.ifpri.org/publication/evolving-food-systems-ethiopia-past-present-and-future>.
- MoA (Ministry of Agriculture). 2022. A synthesis Report: Game Changing Solutions to Transform Ethiopia's Food Systems. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Mugo, V., and I. Kinyua. 2023. "Youth Engagement in Agriculture and Food Systems Transformation in Kenya." In *Food Systems Transformation in Kenya: Lessons from the Past and Policy Options for the Future*, ed. C. Breisinger, M. Keenan, J. Mbuthia, and J. Njuki. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute. https://doi.org/10.2499/9780896294561_14.
- Tarekegn, K., K. Kamaylo, G. Galtsa, and E. Oyka. 2022. "Youth Participation in Agricultural Enterprises As Rural Job Creation Work and Its Determinants in Southern Ethiopia." *Advances in Agriculture* 2022: 5760331. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2022/5760331>.
- von Grebmer, K., J. Bernstein, W. Geza, M. Ndlovu, M. Wiemers, L. Reiner, M. Bachmeier, A. Hanano, R. Ní Chéilleachair, T. Sheehan, C. Foley, S. Gitter, G. Larocque, and H. Fritschel. 2023. *2023 Global Hunger Index: The Power of Youth in Shaping Food Systems*. Bonn: Welthungerhilfe (WHH); Dublin: Concern Worldwide.
- WFP (World Food Programme). 2022. *Eastern Africa Market and Trade Update*. Rome.
- Woolfrey, S., P. Bizzotto Molina, and M. Ronceray. 2021. *AgriInvest-Food Systems Project: Political Economy Analysis of the Ethiopian Food System: Key Political Economy Factors and Promising Value Chains to Improve Food System Sustainability*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb3255en>.



We thank Concern, Welthungerhilfe and Alliance2015 colleagues for their inputs.

The GHI data and calculations are taken from the 2023 Global Hunger Index, published in October 2023. Some values have been updated or added for the purpose of this brief.

Visit: www.globalhungerindex.org

Contact: sara.worku@alliance2015.org