

Rural encounters with the city

A study of the gendered livelihood strategies of migrant
youth in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

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More than half of the world's population growth will be accounted for by cities in the coming decades, with sub-Saharan Africa at the centre of this change. While studies have pointed to the disproportionate effects unemployment and urban poverty have on women in urban areas, gender-focused livelihood research continues to occupy a peripheral space in the field of Human geography. In Ethiopia, one of the fastest growing economies in the world, urbanisation has predominantly been fuelled by rural-urban migration. Driven by hopes of a better life, many rural-urban migrants, a large proportion of whom are youth between the ages of 15 and 29, move to Addis Ababa, the nation's capital, where they are faced with limited employment opportunities and precarious living conditions. Nonetheless, little is known about the livelihood strategies rural-urban migrant youth adopt in Addis Ababa and the gendered experiences that define their city lives. This thesis explores the ways in which gender shapes the livelihood strategies of rural migrant youth in two neighbourhoods in Addis Ababa, *Megenagna* and *Sholla*. Guided by a feminist geographic analytical lens and drawing on qualitative research methods, this study finds youth migration to the city is largely defined by rural household livelihood insecurity, accentuated by an absence of opportunities for youth to transform their lives which, in various ways, is a pattern reproduced in the urban setting. Migrating to Addis Ababa, alongside early experiences of urban life, lead many into segments of the informal economy moulded by gendered livelihood practices, particularly in the street trade but not exclusively, where access to resources and opportunities is prescribed by prevailing gender norms. Findings also underscore the value of individual and collective agency in navigating the intricacies of migrants' urban predicament, motivated by efforts aimed at maximising their daily earnings, while simultaneously manoeuvring their intersectional identities in an overwhelmingly constraining social and economic context. Through its focus on a categorically disenfranchised portion of the city population, this thesis addresses an empirical gap pertaining to gendered livelihoods research by shedding light on the lived experiences of youth in a rapidly transforming sub-Saharan African environment that remains widely unexplored.

Key words: rural-urban migration; youth; gender; livelihoods; Addis Ababa; Ethiopia

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