Rural Youth Employment in Government Organizations in Makuey District, Gambella Region, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the employment dynamics of rural youth in government organizations within the Makuey district of Ethiopia, highlighting a pressing issue that significantly influences socio-economic development. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research incorporated both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Sampling techniques included simple random, stratified, and purposive sampling to select the study sites of Makuey, Puokuath, and Adura, along with their respective respondents. Data collection involved both primary and secondary sources, and descriptive statistics were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Inferential statistics included chi-square and t-tests, with econometric analysis performed via a binary logistic model. The findings indicate a high unemployment rate of 60% among rural youth in government positions, with a notable reliance on the services (57%) and agriculture sectors (36%) for livelihood. Moreover, the analysis reveals a significant positive correlation between relative occupational levels and youth employment (p = 0.059), while work experience is found to negatively impact employment prospects (p = 0.000). These outcomes suggest that familial connections and social networks are critical for job acquisition, thereby exacerbating barriers for youth without such ties. To mitigate these challenges, it is recommended that regional and district governments foster a more equitable working environment, ensuring fair access to job opportunities free from nepotism. Additionally, targeted interventions should be implemented to empower rural youth, contributing to a more inclusive labor market and promoting broader socio-economic development in the district. This study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms to enhance rural youth employment prospects in Gambella.

KEYWORDS: Employment, Government Organizations, Makuey District, Rural Youth

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment is a global issue, with young people constituting a significant share of the unemployed labor force. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that individuals aged 15–24 represent nearly 40% of the world's unemployed population, although they make up only 16% of the total global population (Nnyanzi et al., 2024). In developing regions such as sub-Saharan Africa, including Ethiopia, youth unemployment is particularly severe. In Ethiopia, where 37% of the population falls within the 15 to 34 age bracket, rural youth unemployment is a critical challenge. This issue not only affects the livelihoods of individuals but also threatens national economic growth and social stability. In rural areas, where agriculture dominates, youth unemployment is compounded by socio-economic, structural, and institutional factors that restrict access to employment, particularly in government organizations (Abdulahi, 2023).

Youth unemployment in rural areas is influenced by several interrelated factors, including education, socio-economic status, government policies, and labor market dynamics (Marques & Videira, 2021). In rural Ethiopia, limited access to quality education, infrastructure deficits, and a mismatch between skills and job market needs worsen the problem. These challenges are further complicated by rural-to-urban migration, which often depletes the rural labor force, making youth employment essential to the survival of local economies (Bassie et al., 2022).

In regions like Gambella, which are predominantly rural, unemployment among youth is an acute issue. The Gambella region is characterized by underdevelopment and marginalization, with most youth excluded from formal employment opportunities, especially in government organizations. This exclusion stems from inadequate access to education and vocational training. Additionally, rural economies are primarily agrarian, offering limited formal wage employment opportunities, which are often seasonal or

informal. As a result, youth seeking more stable government-related employment are marginalized (Maulani & Agwanda, 2020).

A growing body of literature examines youth unemployment in developing countries, focusing on the structural challenges that prevent young people from entering the labor market. Van der Geest (2010) suggests that in developing nations, youth unemployment is often associated with higher education levels. More educated youth tend to have higher expectations for formal sector jobs, which are limited in supply. In contrast, youth from poorer households with lower educational attainment tend to be employed in less desirable, informal sectors, typically in agriculture. This dichotomy indicates that while education is critical, it alone is not a sufficient solution for employment in rural areas, where economic opportunities remain scarce (Weiss & Heinz-Fischer, 2022).

In Ethiopia, several studies have critiqued current policies aimed at addressing youth unemployment. Yami (2020) argues that government efforts to create wage employment opportunities in rural areas have focused too narrowly on agricultural work, neglecting the potential of self-employment and entrepreneurship. Policies promoting rural development have largely centered on improving agricultural productivity without fostering non-farm sectors that could absorb the growing youth population (Bisht & Pattanaik, 2020).

Moreover, additional challenges such as poor infrastructure, lack of market access, and limited financial services further hinder rural youth from engaging in self-employment or securing government jobs (Baş, 2021). Schmidt & Woldeyes (2019) adds that rural youth often face systemic barriers, such as social networks or political connections, which are crucial for securing government employment. This further marginalizes rural youth and limits their ability to contribute meaningfully to the local economy.

Despite the increasing focus on youth unemployment in Ethiopia, limited research has specifically targeted rural youth employment, particularly within government organizations. Most studies have concentrated on urban youth or explored rural employment within agricultural contexts. However, rural youth are increasingly seeking government jobs, which are perceived as stable and prestigious compared to agricultural work. Yet, the pathways to securing such jobs remain unclear and underexplored in existing literature.

The specific socio-political context of Gambella, a marginalized region, adds urgency to this study. Gambella faces unique challenges, including a lack of education, infrastructure, and public services, all of which significantly impact employment opportunities for the region's youth. By focusing on Makuey District in the Gambella region, this study seeks to provide a detailed analysis of the factors affecting rural youth employment in government organizations. This research can inform policy interventions not only for Gambella but also for other similarly underdeveloped regions in Ethiopia.

The primary objective of this study is to evaluate the employment of rural youth in government organizations in Makuey District, Gambella. This study examine the status of rural youth employment and identify the factors influence rural youth employment specifically.

METHODS
Description of the Study Area
Makuey district, located in the Nuer zone of Gambella, Ethiopia, serves as the central district in the zone, approximately 140 km west of Gambella town. It spans an area of 164.2 km², with the local economy primarily driven by farming, pastoralism, fishing, and seasonal agriculture along the Baro River during winter months. The district experiences a varied climate, with temperatures ranging from 20–35°C in summer and winter, and 32–40°C during spring and autumn, reflecting seasonal shifts in the region (Jacob, 2018).

Makuey faces significant developmental challenges, including inadequate infrastructure and persistent inter-tribal conflicts, particularly with the Moreley tribe from South Sudan. These conflicts result in frequent livestock theft and loss of life, destabilizing the area. Furthermore, the district is bordered by Itang, Jikow, Lare, Wanthoa, Abobo, and Jior, which adds to its strategic importance but also exposes it to regional conflicts. These factors combined have constrained local development and exacerbated socio-economic vulnerabilities (Jacob, 2018).
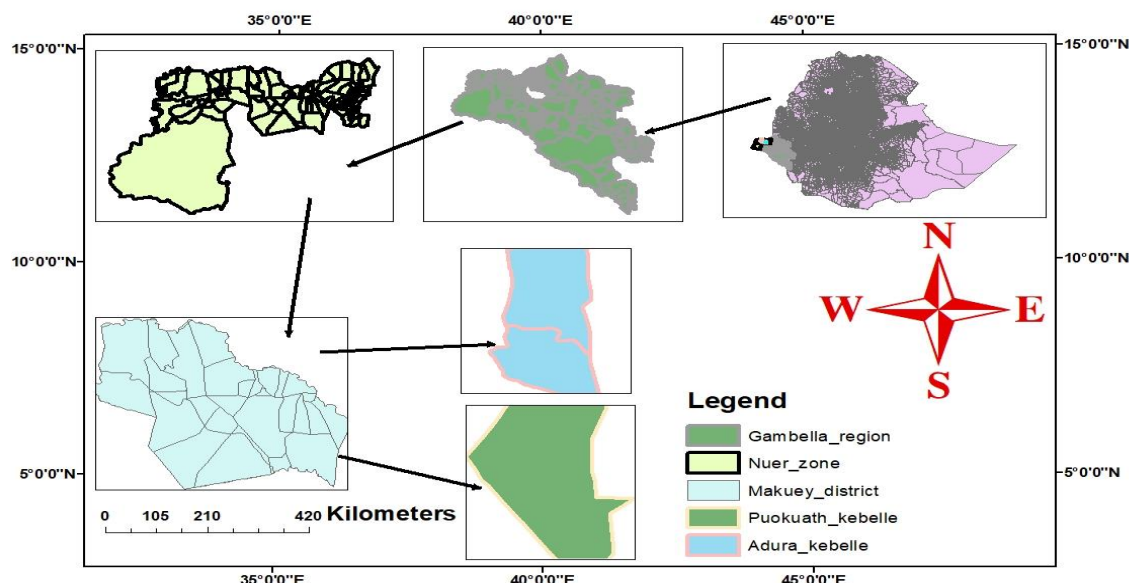
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Fig 1: Map of the study area
Source: Arc map (2024).

Research Design

This study aimed to investigate the employment of rural youth in government organizations within the Makuey district. It employed both quantitative and qualitative research methods, also known as mixed research methods. The combination of these approaches allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the data, integrating numerical data from quantitative methods with insights from qualitative findings.

Sampling Procedures

The respondents for this study were selected using a three-stage sampling technique to ensure a representative and robust sample. In the first stage, the Makuey district was chosen from five districts within the Nuer zone using a simple random sampling method, specifically the lottery approach. This method was selected to guarantee equal opportunity for each district to be included, ensuring fairness and simplicity in the selection process. In the second stage, two kebelles, Puokuath and Adura, were selected from the Makuey district through stratified random sampling, with strata defined by employment status (employed or unemployed). This approach allowed for proportional representation of different employment groups while promoting homogeneity within each stratum, thereby enhancing the accuracy and reliability of the results. The focus on two kebelles was justified by the commonality of rural youth employment issues across the district, ensuring that the selected kebelles accurately reflected the broader context. In the final stage, purposive sampling was employed to select individual respondents, targeting those most relevant to the study, particularly given

the high unemployment rates observed in the Makuey district. This methodological framework facilitated a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing youth employment in government organizations.

Furthermore, the total number of households in the study area was 320, with Puokuath kebelle comprising 210 households and Adura kebelle comprising 110 households. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) formula for sample size calculation, applying a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{320}{1 + 320\,(5\%)^2} = 178$$

$$Puokuath\ Kebelle = \frac{210 * 178}{320} = 117$$

$$Adura\ Kebelle = \frac{110 * 178}{320} = 61$$

Where n is the total sample size, N is the total household, and e is the margin error.

Sources and Methods of Data Collection

This study utilized both primary and secondary data. Primary data, which included both qualitative and quantitative information, was collected directly from the selected respondents. Methods for collecting primary data involved focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and structured interviews. These methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the issues related to youth employment. Secondary data, on the other hand, was gathered from various sources, including official reports, academic

journals, and online databases, ensuring that the research was well-supported by existing literature and documented evidence.

Methods of Data Analysis

For data analysis, the study employed a combination of descriptive, inferential statistics, and econometric models, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were utilized to summarize and present the data effectively. Inferential statistics, including chi-square tests for qualitative data and t-tests for quantitative data, were applied to test the significance of the relationships between variables. Additionally, an econometric analysis was conducted using a binary logistic model, which helped in identifying factors influencing youth employment outcomes in the study area.

RESULTS

Statistical Test for Categorical Variables

Among the unemployed, 59% were male and 41% were female, whereas the employed group had a slightly more balanced distribution, with 52% male and 48% female. The chi-square test revealed no significant association between gender and employment status (p = 0.410), indicating that gender did not have a strong influence on whether an individual was employed or unemployed.

Educational attainment had a notable impact on employment status. Among the unemployed, 51% held diplomas and 49%

held degrees, while 64% of employed respondents had diplomas and 36% held degrees. This suggests that individuals with diplomas were more likely to find employment, whereas those with degrees were more evenly distributed between employment and unemployment. The chi-square test (p = 0.074) confirmed a significant relationship between education level and employment status, emphasizing the importance of education in improving job prospects.

Regarding family connections, 68% of the unemployed reported having no relatives working in government organizations, compared to 45% of the employed respondents. Although more employed individuals had relatives working in government organizations (55%), the chi-square test indicated no significant association between having relatives in government positions and employment status (p = 0.537), suggesting that family connections did not play a significant role in determining employment.

Access to credit was a notable factor in employment status. Among the unemployed, 77% did not have access to credit, while 23% did. For the employed, 91% lacked access to credit, with only 9% reporting access. The chi-square test found a significant relationship between credit access and employment status (p = 0.015), suggesting that credit access was a critical factor in determining whether individuals secured employment, particularly in rural areas like Makuey district.

Table 1: Summary for categorical variables

Variables	Unemployee		Employee		
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	P-value
Gender					
Male	65	59	35	52	0.410
Female	46	41	32	48	
Educational level					
Diploma	56	51	43	64	0.074***
Degree	55	49	24	36	
Relative occupation					
No	75	68	30	45	0.537
Yes	25	22	37	55	
Credit access					
No	85	77	61	91	0.015**
Yes	26	23	6	9	

Source: Own Field Data (2024). **, *=significance at the 5% and 10% probability levels.**

Statistical Tests for Continuous Variables

The average age of unemployed individuals was slightly lower at 25.3 years with a standard deviation of 4.883, compared to employed individuals, whose average age was 26.13 years with a standard deviation of 5.00. The t-test result

for age (1.10) indicated no significant difference between the ages of unemployed and employed respondents, suggesting that age did not play a substantial role in determining employment status.

A notable difference was observed in the average household income between the two groups. Unemployed individuals had a lower average household income of 3,409.14 units, with a standard deviation of 2,108.32, while employed individuals had a higher average income of 4,179.78 units, with a standard deviation of 2,673.37. The t-test result (2.13) was statistically significant at the p < 0.1 level, indicating that employed individuals, on average, earned significantly more than their unemployed counterparts. Gupta & Kishore (2022) found that participants who were unemployed had a significantly lower household income compared to those who were employed. They suggested that household income may

play a key role in determining employment status among individuals.

The most significant difference was seen in work experience. Unemployed respondents had almost no work experience, with a mean of 0.01 years and a standard deviation of 0.10, compared to employed individuals, who had an average of 1.79 years of work experience, with a standard deviation of 1.409. The t-test result (13.30) was highly significant (p < 0.01), demonstrating that work experience was a key factor in employment status, with employed individuals having significantly more work experience than those who were unemployed.

Table 2: Summary for continuous variables

Variables	Unemployee		Employee		t-test
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation	
Age	25.3	4.883	26.13	5.00	1.10
Household incomes	3,409.14	2,108.32	4,179.78	2,673.37	2.13***
Work experience	.01	.10	1.79	1.409	13.30*

Source: Own Field Data (2024). *, * =significant at 1% and 10% of probability level.**

Status of Rural Youth Employment
Out of a total sample of 176 rural youth, 106 (60%) are unemployed, while 70 (40%) are employed. Among the employed youth, 64 (36%) work in the agriculture sector, 98 (57%) are in the services sector, and 14 (7%) are engaged in other sectors.

Table 3: Status of rural youth employment

Employment rate	Frequency	Percentage
Unemployee youth	106	60
Employee youth	70	40
Types of employment		
Sectors distribution		
Agriculture	64	36
Services	98	57
Others	14	7

Source: Own Field Data (2024).

Factors Influence Rural Youth Employment
The econometric analysis was used to assess rural youth employment in government organizations. The binary logit model was employed to estimate the effects of the hypothesized explanatory variables on rural youth employment in government organizations. The binary logistic regression results in Table 4 showed that out of eight explanatory variables, only two were statistically significant, and the remaining five variables were statistically insignificant. The statistically significant variables are discussed below.
Relative occupational level: The model result shows a significant positive association between relative occupational level and rural youth employment at 10% (p = 0.059). This shows that an increase in relative occupational level would increase rural youth employment in government

organizations. The estimate shows that as the relative occupational level increases, the probability of rural youth employment will increase by 8.208 as shown in Table 4. This implies that respondents with a large number of relative occupational levels would have a greater chance of being employed in government organizations than those who have no relatives in government organizations.
Work experience: The work experience influences rural youth negatively at 1% (p = 0.000). This means that the lack of work experience decreases the employment of rural youth in government organizations. The estimate revealed that increasing the years of work experience by one year would also decrease the probability of rural youth being employed by 0.000 years as show in Table 4. This implies that respondents with zero years of work experience are refused by government officials to be employed. This implies that

respondents with zero years of work experience are refused
by government officials to be employed.

Table 4. Binary logit model result for explanatory variables

Variables	Coefficient	P-value	EXP(B)
Gender	.216	.764	1.242
Educational level	-.961	.216	0.383
Relative occupational level	2.105	.059***	8.208
Credit access	-1.531	.235	0.216
Age	-.008	.919	0.992
Household incomes	.000	.697	1.000
Work experience	-7.664	.000*	0.000

Source: Software Output (2024). *, *= significance at the 1% and 10% probability levels.**

DISCUSSION

The International Labour Organization (2018) noted that youth unemployment is a persistent issue in developing countries, especially in rural areas where job opportunities are limited and mainly agricultural. However, some studies, like Haan and Noor (2005), suggest that informal economies offer significant employment opportunities for rural youth, enabling engagement in various income-generating activities that may lower official unemployment rates. O'Higgins (2017) further highlighted a shift towards self-employment and entrepreneurship among young people, indicating that traditional unemployment statistics might not accurately reflect the employment landscape, as many youths may be involved in self-directed work outside formal classifications. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2017) highlighted that rural youth in Sub-Saharan Africa are primarily engaged in agriculture, emphasizing its vital role in poverty alleviation and food security. Nevertheless, the study revealed that 57% (98 youth) were employed in the services sector, indicating a notable shift toward non-agricultural employment. This trend reflects a diversification of the rural economy, with young individuals increasingly pursuing opportunities beyond traditional agricultural roles. Supporting this, Tschirley et al. (2015) observed a transition from agriculture to services in developing economies, driven by urbanization and evolving consumer preferences.

While the engagement in alternative sectors was limited, it pointed to systemic barriers that hindered diversification and job creation in non-agricultural areas. Previous studies, such as those by Rammelt et al. (2018), indicated that inadequate infrastructure, limited access to credit, and insufficient skills training could stymie the growth of employment opportunities in rural communities. This limited engagement in alternative sectors suggested that while agriculture and services dominated employment opportunities, there remained a niche for other types of work that could contribute to local economies.

Engagement in manufacturing and informal enterprises presents significant economic opportunities, as noted by the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO, 2020), which asserts that manufacturing can drive economic development in rural areas. However, informal jobs often lack formal recognition, resulting in low wages, limited access to social security, and job instability. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) emphasizes that while informal employment is crucial for livelihoods, it typically lacks the protections of formal jobs. Additionally, reliance on informal work can perpetuate poverty cycles and hinder access to education for rural youth. Oqubay (2015) underscores the need for developing manufacturing capabilities to diversify rural economies, highlighting that investment in infrastructure and skills training are essential for enhancing youth engagement in these sectors.

The study identified a significant positive association between relative occupational level and rural youth employment in government organizations, with each increase in relative level enhancing the probability of employment by 8.208. This suggests that familial connections are vital in the job market, especially where formal opportunities are scarce. Granovetter (1973) emphasized that weak ties, such as family networks, can facilitate access to job information. Trinh et al. (2022) noted that these connections are crucial in rural areas, where community ties are strong. However, Kramarz and Thesmar (2013) argued that such reliance may perpetuate inequities, marginalizing youth from less connected backgrounds. Padgett et al. (2019) highlighted that nepotism can disadvantage qualified individuals lacking familial ties, advocating for transparent hiring practices to ensure equal opportunities.

The study revealed that work experience negatively impacted rural youth employment, with each additional year reducing the likelihood of securing a government position. This finding reflects a concerning trend where youth with no experience face significant barriers in public sector employment. Gafar and Harun (2018) noted that employers often prefer

candidates with prior experience, exacerbating the disadvantage for rural youth who have limited opportunities to gain relevant skills. Furthermore, the expectation of work experience creates a paradox: youth struggle to obtain jobs that would provide such experience, perpetuating high unemployment rates (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Structured pathways like internships or apprenticeships could help bridge this gap, as suggested by Baird and Hards (2017); however, these programs are often lacking in rural areas. Kahn (2018) emphasized that reliance on prior experience can exacerbate inequalities, especially for marginalized youth with fewer opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The study findings conclude that youth employment in government organizations remains low, highlighting the insecurity of diverse employment sources. Among the employed youth, there is a significant reliance on the services and agriculture sectors as primary livelihoods. The binary logistic model analysis reveals a positive association between relative occupational level and employment status, underscoring the importance of social networks and familial connections in securing job opportunities. Conversely, the study highlights a concerning trend where work experience negatively influences employment prospects, as many young individuals find it challenging to secure initial employment due to a lack of prior experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed to address the employment challenges faced by rural youth:

Strengthen vocational training and internship programs: To mitigate the adverse effects of limited work experience, both government and private sectors should invest in vocational training, apprenticeships, and internships. Such initiatives would provide young individuals with essential skills and practical experience, thereby enhancing their employability.

Enhance job creation across diverse sectors: Diversifying employment opportunities beyond agriculture and services is crucial. Investments in non-agricultural industries, such as manufacturing and technology, along with improved infrastructure and access to finance, can generate broader employment prospects for rural youth.

Promote transparent hiring practices: To lessen dependence on familial connections for job acquisition, it is essential for government and organizations to adopt transparent recruitment policies. This approach would ensure equitable access to employment opportunities and reduce nepotism, fostering a fairer labor market.

Support entrepreneurial development: Equipping rural youth with resources, financial support, and training to launch small businesses can empower them to pursue self-employment. This strategy would help alleviate youth unemployment while stimulating local economic growth.

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