

# **Types and Perceived Benefits of Civic Engagement, and Civic Experiences of School Adolescents in Addis Ababa**

**By**

**Azmeraw Belay**

PhD Candidate in Applied developmental Psychology, Addis Ababa University

E-mail: [belayazmeraw2@gmail.com](mailto:belayazmeraw2@gmail.com)

**Professor Belay Tefera**

Professor of Psychology, Addis Ababa University, School of Psychology

E-mail: [belaytefera@yahoo.com](mailto:belaytefera@yahoo.com)

## **Abstract**

This study explored the types and perceived benefits of civic engagement, and the distinct parental and school civic experiences of adolescents employing review of literature in the field, secondary data and empirical data from a narrative design in which 20 school adolescents participated in an in-depth interview. The interview focused on the different types of civic engagement activities participated, perceived benefits of these engagements, and the distinct family and school civic experiences that might have contributed to enhanced civic engagement or disengagement. Data on the types of civic engagement activities of adolescents were interpreted into seven themes: mobilizing resources for the needy people, promoting awareness on their rights and social issues, environmental campaigns, monitoring delivery of social services, social and political participation, public discussion, and economic participation. Benefits of civic engagement were reported to include skills for their development and paybacks to their communities. As regards to explanatory factors for high and low civic engagement of adolescents, explanatory themes for high and low civic engagement included not mere level of presence or absence of same factors but also existence of certain unique environmental circumstances that exist in one and miss in another. For example, in high engagement adolescent groups factors included open family environment for discussion; respect for each other's ideas; concern about broader community matters; parental civic engagement emulated by adolescents; living in family who stand up for the rights of the most deprived; open classroom environment for discussion; and teachers respect for students' ideas; being a member or a leader of district parliament; and schools that promote volunteerism. Explanatory themes for low civic engagement, on the other hand, included: absence of open family environment for discussion; lack of respect to other's ideas; lack of proper parental civic modelling; being civically engaged perceived as violating cultural and religious values; low level of education and awareness on children's rights; perceiving participation in adolescent-led parliaments exposes to risks; too young to participate in socio-political matters; fear of joining politics; and poor school performance leading to discrimination from participation. Implications for practice to support adolescents and youth to enhance their civic development: adolescents and youth as agency in themselves, families, schools, communities, and government are drawn.

**Key Words:** Adolescents, Types and Benefits of Civic Engagement, Parental and School Civic Experiences

## **Introduction**

### ***The Study Context of Ethiopia***

In Ethiopia, the proportion of those aged 15 to 29 accounts for about a quarter of the total population of the country (Donnenfeld et al, 2017; USAID/Ethiopia, 2018) and the

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number of people in this age group is projected to rise significantly in the near future. The World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations define adolescents as persons between 10 and 19 years of age (Sawyer et al., 2018). The National youth policy recognizes the active participation of adolescents and youth in political, governance, economic, social, and cultural activities and enabling in due course the youth benefit from the results (MoWCY, 2004). Adolescents and youth were mobilized and engaged in direct and indirect voluntary services to promote civic responsibility skills. During the COVID-19 pandemic over 10 million youths were engaged in self-initiated voluntary services only in a period of 3 months alone (Tefera & Zeleke, 2020). Furthermore, in a report presented at the International Voluntary Day Organized by the then Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth in partnership with Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Ethiopia, Addis Ababa Hilton on 7<sup>th</sup> December, 2020, revealed that a total of over 12 million youth had participated in volunteerism in the previous years (MoWCY, 2020).

In reality, adolescents and youth are not only engaged in volunteerism, but also engage in other components of the broader civic participation. Although civic engagement is not well investigated in Ethiopia, adolescents and youth are involved in different civic activities. Adolescents participate in the district and city level adolescent-led parliaments and youth-led groups. They are involved in informal helping such as tutorial support, mobilizing resources and supporting orphans, and in doing chores in their neighborhoods and community (MoWCY, 2018). Further, as members of the different adolescent/youth-led parliaments, they engage in promoting awareness on their rights, identify adolescents who experience violence, deprived of access to social services and report to local government offices to take appropriate actions (MoWCY, 2020).

Taking a more enabling and positive approach to understanding adolescence then requires examining critical developmental milestone in adolescent transitions to adulthood that include young people's civic engagements.

### ***Role of parents on adolescent civic engagement***

The fundamental role of family on adolescents' civic engagement is recognized in the literature (Van Goethem et al., 2014; Rossi et al., 2016; Taylor et al., 2019). Closeness between parents and adolescents is related to greater adolescents' civic responsibility (Lenzi et al., 2014). Parents play significant role in socio-political socialization during adolescence (Corbetta et al., 2013). Adolescents' discussions on social and political issues with parents are positively associated with a range of civic values and behaviors (Boyd et al., 2011; Hooghe & Boonen, 2015). Parent-adolescent civic discussion is a stronger predictor of political behaviors (Roman & Esau, 2015; Wray-Lake & Sloper, 2016)). Parental civic modeling is a strong predictor of adolescents' civic engagement (Van Goethem et al., 2014). Having parents engaged in civic activities and with whom adolescents can speak about civic issues promotes both civic action and the development of civic attitudes (Rossi et al. (2016).

In Ethiopia, parents and families influence adolescents to engage in community-based civic activities implicitly through imparting social and religious values and by participating in such activities such as supporting the needy people, volunteering during religious festivals and in times of crisis, and participating in community based social support groups. Several traditional associations exist in urban and rural parts of Ethiopia to give socio-economic support to their members and relations of their members in times of crisis. Community members are motivated to join community-based groups such as iddirs, as they are called in Amharic in Ethiopia, to support one another and other people outside their members (Dercon et al., 2006; Pankhurst, 2008).

### ***Role of Schools in Adolescent Civic Engagement***

Schools is one of the micro-contexts that can provide adolescents with opportunities to develop their intellectual capacities, to experience a sense of competence and belonging (Prati et al., 2018). School is a place where adolescents develop a sense of belonging, promote interpersonal relationships, respect for diversity, and community partnerships (Wang & Degol, 2016). Schools can create adolescents a conducive environment for expressing opinions, debating on socio-political issues, and participate in student council which increase their future commitments towards their community. Further, teachers support and encouragement of school adolescents help adolescents to develop a sense of belonging (Chiu & Churchill, 2016). Schools can help adolescents to develop skills, values and behaviors needed for civic engagement. This is achieved both through formal civic education that facilitate democratic discourse, build confidence of students to challenge different ideas, provide teachers with methods to be non-partisan provocateurs; and through facilitating to participant in extracurricular and community based activities (Youniss, 2011). Overall, activities implemented within the school could foster a democratic climate and have an important influence on adolescents' present and future civic engagement (Kim, Flanagan & Pykett, 2015).

### ***Objectives of this study***

Studying adolescent civic engagement is a contemporary initiative and yet not well explored in Ethiopia. In reality, adolescents in Addis Ababa participate in different forms of civic engagement activities including volunteering, informal helping, community-based campaigning and discussions. Parents and family, and schools are the two immediate social contexts that may contribute to enhanced civic development or disengagement of adolescents and youth. However, the types of civic activities adolescents engage in their family, schools and communities and perceived benefits of civic engagement have not been well explored. In doing so, in addition to collecting primary data from adolescents, this study reviewed what the previous studies have found out about the types of civic engagement of adolescents. Furthermore, the study identified and described the distinctive parental and school civic experiences of adolescents with high and low civic engagement. This study addressed the following research questions.

- What are the types of civic engagement of adolescents in Addis Ababa?
- What are the perceived benefits of civic engagement of adolescents?
- What are the distinct parental and school civic experiences of adolescents with high and low civic engagement?

## **Methods**

### ***Research design***

The research employed narrative method to collect and analyze the primary data about the types of civic engagements, perceived benefits of civic engagement, distinct family and school civic experiences of adolescents (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In addition, review of recent research on civic engagement in Ethiopia and other contexts was used additional research method.

### ***Participants and sampling***

Participants were selected from among adolescents who participated in quantitative study. From among 1530 school adolescents who participated in the quantitative study, 420 adolescents had low civic engagement and 344 participants had high level of civic engagement. From among adolescents whose civic engagement scores fall in the upper and lower quartiles,

20 school adolescents: 10 (6 male and 4 female, with mean age 16.4) with high and 10 (5 male and 5 female, with mean age of 16.6 ) with low civic engagement scores were selected using simple random sampling.

### ***Procedures***

Prior to initiating the study, the research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Addis Ababa University, College of Education and Behavioral Studies, School of Psychology, and secured ethical clearance. The researcher obtained permission from the school directors to conduct the interview with school adolescents. As guardians of students, the school directors were provided with written information about the research and completed consent form for students to participate. Students were informed about the study and asked whether they wished to participate. The interview sessions were conducted in their respective schools. An in-depth interview was conducted with adolescents to get their perspectives on the different types of civic activities they and their peers engage, perceived benefits of those engagements, and distinctive family and civic experiences that may have contributed to enhanced civic engagement and disengagement.

### ***Data collection instrument***

An interview schedule was developed and used to facilitate individual interview with adolescents. The interview items asked adolescents on the common types of civic activities they and their friends often engage, perceived benefits of their engagement, and adolescents' civic experiences in the family and school contexts.

### ***Analysis Strategy***

All written transcripts were read several times and significant statements were identified. The textual data for each adolescent was coded independently. The qualitative data were analyzed first using case analysis and then proceeded to cross-case analysis. The case analysis began with a case description of each adolescent's civic experiences, before doing description, categorization and analysis of variations and commonalities in the answers to common questions about civic experience of adolescents in the family and school settings. Thematic analysis was used to develop the essence of adolescents' account on the types of civic engagement and civic experiences in the family and school contexts that might have contributed for enhanced and civic engagement gap.

## **Findings**

This section presents the findings of the study. More specifically the types of civic engagements, perceived benefits of civic engagement for the adolescents and the community, and the distinct parental and school civic experiences of adolescents with high and low level of civic engagement are presented.

### ***Types of Civic Engagement***

Thematic analysis of the interview data has suggested that participants tended to commonly participate in the following types of civic engagement activities in their schools and communities. Each theme is substantiated with detailed first person accounts.

#### ***Theme 1: Mobilizing adolescents and other people to help the most deprived***

This theme describes adolescents' engagement in mobilizing adolescents and other people to support the most deprived in their schools and communities. "As members of child parliament, we identify school adolescents who are from poor families or who lost their parents. We mobilize financial and material resources and provide support to them." (16 years old

female) “Identifying most vulnerable adolescents and helping them continue their education is one of our civic engagements. In doing so, we mobilize contribution from students, our parents, schools, and businessmen.” (17 years old male). “We identify children especially girls who are exposed to violence and abuse. These children report to the child parliament and we immediately report the cases to the Bureau of Women and Social Affairs and police to take action on perpetrators.” (18 years old male)

A rapid assessment report on youth volunteering by MoWCY and VSO (2020) reported that identifying the needy and supporting the elderly and adolescents and youth in schools and communities, and mobilization of resources and effective distribution to the needy as some of the good practices of young people’s civic engagement.

### ***Theme 2: Promoting awareness on their rights, social issues and reporting risks***

This theme narrates how interviewed adolescents are engaged in promoting awareness on their rights and reporting protection risks to adolescents as civic engagements. Detailed first person accounts of cases are sampled as follows. “As a member of the district adolescent-led parliament, I engage in promoting awareness on the rights of children and adolescents using mini-media and community-based campaigns. We use national, regional and international days to sensitize the public.” (16 years old male) “As members of the adolescent-led parliament, we participate in important events such as the Day of the African Child. We conduct educational programs about our rights that we are entitled to for adolescents, parents, government officials and other stakeholders.” (17 years old female) “Together with my friends in my school and community, I am involved in promoting awareness on the rights and responsibilities, helping adolescents who have protection concerns, helping them to acquire knowledge and skills to protect themselves and others from violence.” (16 years female adolescent). “Some school adolescents miss classes and spend in risky places: drinking and ‘Khat’ chewing houses. These students were exposed to addiction and to sexual abuse. We monitor and report such cases to the police and these houses were closed.” (18 years old male)

Furthermore, one participant (18 years male adolescent) reported his and other adolescents engagements as:

In school and our community, we [adolescents] report risks that potentially or actually affect our health and wellbeing. For example, if we find Khat chewing or drinking house around our school, it very likely that school adolescents will be influenced by other adolescents who are involved in chewing Khat or drinking alcohol which further exposes school adolescents to engage in anti-social behaviors such as theft. Thus, we adolescents’ involvement in reporting such cases to the school administration or district police is one of the civic activities that many school adolescents are engaged.

Adolescents and youth were also engaged in promoting awareness on HIV/AIDS. The anti-AIDS clubs in different regions of Ethiopia, including Addis Ababa were engaged in educating and raising awareness about HIV/AIDS; encouraging and supporting behavior change among adolescents and youth as well as the wider community; provide alternative social opportunities for young people; campaigning against and challenging stigma and discrimination against people with HIV, and caring for and supporting people with HIV/AIDS (MoWCY, 2022).

An assessment report on the implementation of the National Youth Policy by the MoWCY (2022) revealed that adolescent and youth were engaged in direct and indirect volunteer activities in relation to prevention and control of COVID-19. Engagements that were

most common were the direct COVID-19 activities (i.e. awareness raising, assisting in hand washing, ensuring distance while people line up for transport and other services), fund raising/resource mobilization, identifying and supporting vulnerable groups because of the lockdown and those having less relevance to COVID-19 (blood donation, city/environmental cleaning). The report further indicated that there were variations in the length and amount of workload ranging from a minimum of 2 hours to a maximum of 8 hours/day nearly for seven months; workload was heavy towards the beginning where a lot of awareness creation activities were done and then became thinly spread afterwards. The approach was mainly group-based and in some cases blended with individual work. Furthermore, the finding of the a Rapid Assessment of the Contributions of Youth Volunteering in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic in Ethiopia (MoWCY & CSO, 2020) indicate that nationally an estimated number of 10, 210, 241 adolescent and youth volunteers (37% females), implying that nearly 1 in 4 young people, were involved during the first 8 months of COVID-19 pandemic in Ethiopia.

Some best accomplishment from adolescents' and youth volunteers' experiences in relation of COVID-19 prevention include, personal intervention in a company, a daily lunch feeding program for community members whose household income was highly affected by COVID-19 restrictions, various innovative methods of awareness creation, innovative technologies introduced during COVID-19 (touch-free handwashing technologies, ventilators, face masks of different qualities), multilevel monitoring system to coordinate and monitor implementation of COVID-19 prevention efforts, community-based approach in real terms and young peoples' motivation, commitment, passion and effective service to the communities.

Within the spirit of volunteering and spiritual obligation, adolescents and youth are actively engaged during religious festivals and community outreach services through religious preaching and visiting chronically ill families. During religious festivities, millions of adolescents and youth get organized and render volunteer services. They help in raising the national flag in the main streets of the city, cleaning roads, and work with security forces to maintain order during the religious ceremonies.

### ***Theme 3: Participation in improving environmental sanitation***

This theme narrates how adolescents and youth supported by a civil society organization were able to engage in various civic activities to improve environmental sanitations and campaigns in their communities. A review of the national youth policy assessment report (MoWCY, 2022) revealed that concerns over the growing degradation of environmental health in the cities have recently become a source of concern among individuals, associations, and young people as well. The report mentioned the good practices of a civil society organization called GAMA. GAMA was an association founded sharing this concern and to enhancing improvement of urban environmental health and sanitation through awareness raising and implementation of pilot environmental activities with job creation opportunities for the jobless especially for street adolescents and youth of both sexes in Addis Ababa and regional towns. GAMA applied artistic approach (music, drama, literature, poems) as a strategy in awareness creation campaigns; which in fact was best for winning the heart of young people and to allow them demonstrate their interests and abilities. Due to this, they mobilized more than 13, 000 students from various schools in Addis Ababa. This same movement, firstly observed in Addis Ababa, was instantaneously extended to other regional cities thereafter.

Many more young persons, particularly those in the streets, were awakened with the environment management ideas, went to their communities and begun implementing the objectives of GAMA in their villages in groups and in collaboration with their communities. They played decisive role not only disseminating but also creating clean and green project

ideas. The achievements were so remarkable that stunned not only the residents but also the international media. In fact, some of the artistic paintings in the streets, corners and villages of Addis Ababa and other cities are still living witnesses of this venture.

A 17 years female adolescent reported how she as a member of the children's parliament was participating in environmental protection activities. She described, "As members of the district adolescent-led parliament, we participate in environment protection activities such as creating awareness of the community on the consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, climate change adaptation, participate in school gardening, and school and community re-greening initiatives."

#### ***Theme 4: Monitoring delivery of social services***

This theme presents how adolescents and youth are engaged in monitoring the proper delivery of social services relevant to them. Adolescents and youth believes that participation in monitoring social services is their right and a means to improve accountability of service providers and the government. Detail accounts are presented as follows. "As members of the school and district level adolescent-led parliament, selected students participate in monitoring the delivery of social services. As right holders and service users, we demand for improved education services, resulting in increased accountability of service providers." (17 years old female) "Through our school monitoring, we identified gaps in the education service and demanded the school administration and district education office to fulfill those facilities. As a result, the identified service gaps were prioritized in the school and district education annual plan and budget." (18 years old male) "Adolescents and youth engagement in monitoring social services empowers us [adolescents], and makes providers of social services and government authorities more accountable and improves quality of services." (17 years old male)

#### ***Theme 5: Socio-political participation***

Considering Ethiopian adolescents and youth only in terms of vulnerabilities as some scholars do is just like sliding over the civic and political participation of this group and consequently undermining their role in the making and development of Ethiopia as a nation across historical periods. Civic participation entails individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.

This theme describes how adolescents and youth engage constructively in discussions with the government officials that have social and political nature. Their participation in such matters is considered as civic and political socialization as a preparation for their future political engagement when they become adults. Detailed accounts are presented below:

18 years male adolescent reported:

Adolescents and youth are organized in district and city parliaments. Being organized, we demand our rights to quality education, protection from all forms of violence, participation on matters that concern adolescents and youth. When programs are designed and implemented, we [adolescents] demand so that our priorities are considered in planning and implementation of programs. This helps us to influence decisions of service providers and duty bearers.

17 years female adolescent reported how they engaged in some of the discussions organized by the local government officials:

There are instances when we [adolescents] participate in socio-political matters. The government officials organize adolescent and youth forum to promote their political agenda

and gather the perspectives of young people. In such forum, a number of issues impacting adolescents and youth life are raised and discussed. I raise issues related to our participation in school, community and government structures, government's commitment in investing for adolescent and youth development program in creating an active and responsible citizen, and what the government direction towards adolescent and youth political participation.

A 16 years male adolescent reported how he participates in socio-political discussion in the family as follow.

, adolescents' participation in politics starts at home. In my family, we discuss about the current politics, how the government is functioning, maintaining law and order. We discuss about the increasing violence, displacement of millions of people, and death of civilians. All the family members have their own perspective on how the government functions and the gaps in maintaining law and order. In conclusion, all the participants of the discussion in the family propose political actions that the government should undertake as well as our roles and responsibilities to maintain law and order, and ensure peace and security in the country.

A 17 years old school female adolescent reported how she was involved in defending for the rights of a disadvantaged woman in her community and challenged the government officials to offer her a job so that he would be able to raise her children without difficulty. She described:

While members of the district adolescent-led parliament were conducting community outreach services, we found a woman who was raising her two children without the help of children's father. She was engaged in petty trading to generate meager income and feed her children. The police patrolling in the main roads forced her to leave the working place. Due to this, the woman faced difficulty to work and feed her children. I believed I have a role to play to stand for the rights of the woman. Then, I approached the district administration and reported the case of this woman and demanded the government officials to execute their responsibilities to help her and her children. I even openly asked the official to find her a job. To this end, the woman was able to secure a job in the district administration office as a cleaner and she started earning income to support her children. This is one of the examples that I as member of the district adolescent-led parliament influenced the decision of the district administration. This will enhance accountability of the government towards citizens.

A cursory inspection of the history of this Country depicts that, above and beyond their vulnerabilities, the Ethiopian young people have indeed been the pioneers of change in Ethiopia by mobilizing themselves and the society at large (Tefera and Dessie, 2015). In some occasions with their own initiatives, at other occasions with the initiative and support of others (government, civil society organizations, individuals), the Ethiopian young persons have assumed a uniquely important role in shaping the Country's political, economic, social, and cultural development.

As regards the period before the socialist revolution, notable experiences were the upper primary and secondary school students' participations in the then popular club, "Young Persons' Christian Association Ethiopia", as well as the university students' early political movements allegedly initiated to readdress unfair land distribution, bad governance, oppression of the masses, and the backwardness of their Country. The year 1965 was particularly marked as year for the birth of the Ethiopian student movement; for this was a time when students came out onto the streets with the popular slogan ("Land to the tiller") and revolutionary (Marxist-Leninist ideological) transformation of society as a political agenda.



The national policy assessment report (MoWCY, 2022) found out the tremendous political activism and struggle that young people waged against the previous Ethiopian government in different regions of the country that eventually became unified and coordinated was the cornerstone for overthrowing the regime and instituting a reformed version that brought the current Prime minister.

#### ***Theme 6: Participate in public discussion on community matters***

This theme narrates how adolescents participated in community matters to address issues that concern adolescents and youth, family and the community. They noted that their engagement in such affairs benefit not only themselves but also others. Detail account of cases is presented as follows. “Ethiopia has experienced socio-political transitions accompanied by recurrent social crises including COVID-19, conflict, and drought. As a citizen, I participated in such discussions and other community concerns in my school, community, and at government level.” (17 years old male) “During the World Children’s Day and Day of the African Child, we are invited to participate in panel discussions focusing on children’s rights, child rights violations, the role of adolescents and adults to contribute the civic development of adolescents.” (18 years old male).

It appears that adolescents’ participation in public discussion helped them to have broader understanding of social issues in their communities and ensure their perspectives are taken into consideration in community decision making.

#### ***Theme 7: Economic participation***

Work carried out by adolescents in and outside the household can have significant effects on education and health outcomes and hence on adolescents' transition to adulthood. There is an extensive literature on the tradeoff between children's and adolescents' labor and schooling, including reduced school attendance, worse school performance, and increased chance of grade repetition among those who work (Assaad, Levison, & Zibani 2010; Beegle, Dehejia, Gatti, 2009).

Despite this, there is a growing body of evidence on young people’s economic empowerment in Ethiopia. The government has established laws and regulations that protect the rights of young workers. The Ethiopia Labour Proclamation (No. 1156/2019) has set the minimum working age at 15 years old. The law also sets limits on the type of work young workers aged between 15-17 years old can do, which on account of its nature or due to the condition in which it is carried out endangers their lives or health (Gazette, 2019). As per the International Labour Law standards and recommendations, adolescents have the right to work once they reach the legal minimum age under protective conditions. The provision of work opportunities for adolescents under adequate conditions, rather than excluding them entirely from employment opportunities, is one of the effective measures to eliminate child labour, including its worst forms. Furthermore, adolescents’ and youth engagement in economic activities is supported by the national Youth Policy. One of the basic principles of the national youth policy is to ensure youth to be active participants and beneficiaries from, among others, the economic development activities.

Overall, there is very limited evidence that focuses explicitly on adolescents and their perceptions on opportunities in terms of access to skills, assets, resources and aspirations. In this study, interviewed adolescents reported being engaged in economic activities. In this connection, a 17 years old female adolescent reported her participation in economic activities as follows.

My parents do not have dependable source of income. Covering for a house rent and fulfilling the survival and development needs of the children is a challenge. Two of my brothers, my sister, and I are engaged in income generating activities. I want to become an accountant and help develop Ethiopia. Currently I am giving running errands services for my neighbours and engaged in daily labour especially on Saturday and Sunday, and after school from Monday to Saturday. I am dismayed that most of my peers do not think like me' and concentrate only on 'trying to get money' rather than investing in their future. I believe young people should use their talents and voices for the greater good.

A 16 years old female adolescent described her participation in small scale income earning activities to support herself and her family.

After school, I sell groundnut. I I get 100 birr profit per 100kg of groundnut. I used the money to buy educational materials and save part of the profit. I have a savings box [at home] ... I save it for my family. I want to continue small business activities while continuing my education. I have a vision to start my own business.

An 18 years old female described that she and her and her friend were making income when schools were closed and gaining skills to engage long term employment when she became an adult.

When school was closed in July, August, and September, I and my friend were employed as waiters in a café. I was able to earn 1000 Birr per month and worked for three months. I used the money to buy exercise books and pens. This has reduced the economic burden for my parents. I believe this has helped me to gain skills to engage in self-employment schemes in the future. The government of Ethiopia also encourages self-employment and my aspiration is in line with the this vision.

From the description of the detailed first person accounts, it is possible to infer that adolescents have economic aspirations. Adolescent girls and boys alike have high aspirations for their future livelihoods, as do their caregivers. A report on adolescent economic empowerment in Ethiopia by Jones et al. (2019) revealed that urban adolescents generally have more specific career paths and goals and have some knowledge about what they need to do to reach these goals. Assessing access to decent and age-appropriate employment, older adolescents are much more likely to be in work than their younger counterparts (in urban areas, 17% compared to 3%). There is a significant gender gap, with older adolescent girls 50% less likely to be in paid work than boys of the same age and nearly 50% less likely to control money of their own. Furthermore, adolescents with disabilities face particular challenges in accessing employment opportunities due to infrastructural barriers, poor educational opportunities and community-level stigma and discrimination.

### ***The most and the least recurrent types of civic engagement***

Participants identified the most and least recurrent types of civic engagement of adolescents. The most recurrent types of civic engagement activities include: mobilizing adolescents and others to help the most deprived, promoting awareness on their rights, social issues and reporting risks; participation in improving environmental sanitation, and economic participation. The least recurrent civic engagement activities include: monitoring delivery of social services; socio-political participation; and participation in public discussion on community matters.

### ***Perceived benefits of civic engagement as reported by adolescents***

Interviewed adolescents shared the perceived personal and community benefits of their participation in different civic activities. Most widely spoken benefits include the following:

#### ***Benefits for adolescents***

- Volunteerism helps adolescents to develop transferable skills: adolescents and youth who volunteer regularly practice skills—like collaboration and problem solving that are vital to succeed in academics, the workplace, and their personal lives.
- Reinforce social capital: adolescents who volunteer build relationships and strengthen their support network, or social capital.
- Facilitate prosocial behavior: participating in activities like caring for the elderly or addressing homelessness from an early age helps to develop empathy and altruistic/prosocial behavior.
- Adolescents who participate in civic activities increase positive feelings about school and work, reduce high-school dropout, demonstrate deeper cognitive engagement, and increase achievement among at-risk students, and develop their potentials.
- Fosters lifelong engagement: instill empathy, inspires a sense of citizenship, responsibility, and positive attachment to their communities.
- Fosters the development of essential skills: hard work, team work, patience, confidence, persuasion and community mobilization skills, coordinating and organizing work, problem solving, communication, and interpersonal skills, presentation and public speaking, and decision make skills.
- Civic engagement helps adolescents to be open-minded to try new things and accept changes. It helps adolescents to express their views freely and practice democratic ideals.
- Adolescents can adjust easily, are naturally inquisitive, and are more likely to discover creative solutions.
- Social skills: Adolescents' civic engagement helps to improve relationships of adolescents with their parents, teachers, friends, and the community. It helps adolescents understand others and adapt peaceful co-existence.
- Social behavior change: Acquire information that helps them to prevent from engaging in activities that exposes them to risky behaviors such as addiction, theft, etc. Helps adolescents promote awareness about their rights and responsibilities, protect themselves and others from violence and abuse.
- Acquire and consume information about social and political issues, and contribute for their socio-political development.
- Engagement in civic activities can help adolescents and youth feel connected to others and confident that they are making a difference in their communities.

#### ***Benefits for the community***

- Adolescents and youth are able to identify service gaps in schools, health centers, and the service providing centers, mobilize resources to address the service gaps, and help to address those gaps.
- Mobilizing local resources and helping the poor children and adolescents benefits the society.
- A society that can demand its rights and obligations from the government. Adolescents civic engagement enables them to demand for improved services and increased commitment of the government to address community, including issues that concern

adolescents and youth. This will enhance government's commitment to address issues raised by young people.

- Adolescent and youth civic engagement helps adolescents to strengthen partnership with stakeholders. It helps to solve community problems together leveraging resources of different stakeholders.
- Participating in civic life helps to build community, meet social needs, change policies, and ensure a healthy democracy.

### ***Distinct family and school-related civic experiences of adolescents with high and low levels of civic engagements***

This section presents the findings of the qualitative study. After developing the verbatim transcripts, using guideline of thematic (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and Saldana's (2013) coding process, from 20 verbatim transcripts, nodes or emerging themes were extracted. Arranging the formulated meanings of emerging themes into clusters (categories) using "Civic Experience" as an anchor code resulted in 18 themes (nine for adolescents with high civic engagement and eight for low civic engagement group) using phrases and sentences to describe subtle or tacit and explicit civic experiences of adolescents in their parents and schools. All the 17 themes emerged from the data.

### ***Parental and School Experiences of Adolescents with high Civic Engagement***

This section presents the themes developed from interviews conducted with adolescents with high civic engagement scores. The following nine themes have emerged as explanatory factors for high civic engagement of adolescents in family and school contexts. All the quotes of adolescents were translated from Amharic.

#### ***Theme 1: Open family environment for civic discussion***

This theme describes adolescent interviewees' perspectives on their civic experiences within their family. Results show how those adolescents with high civic engagement score identify parental socialization in terms of having open discussions about life as the contributor for their enhanced civic engagement. Detailed first person accounts are sampled as follows: A 16 year old male adolescent reported:

We discuss about family, social, economic and political matters; even when we have different ideologies, we manage the differences through peaceful dialogue; growing up in an open family helped me develop skills to participate in civic activities and be able to communicate civic messages.

Further, a 17 year old male adolescent described, "My parents are educated and believe in having open family discourse; we discuss social issues like increasing insecurity, inflation, and protection concerns for girls; participating in family discussions helped me develop civic skills and be able to participate in civic platforms"

An 18 years male adolescent reported that he joins the family discussion although parents and other adults initiate the process. He narrated:

Even when my parents initiate any discussion, we can join the discussion without any fear. There are times when we [adolescents] initiate the discussion especially when we would like to share information from social media or verify what we gathered, have our parents' perspectives and agree to make decisions. This has increased my confidence to engage in family and community discussions on various social matters.

***Theme 2: Concern about broader community matters***

This theme describes how the civic behavior of adolescents is influenced by their parents' views on broader community issues. Interviewees shared how their interest in civic engagement revolved around the pressing social issues discussed in their family. Detailed first person accounts are presented as follows: An 18 years old female adolescents reported:

My parents encourage free discussion on wider societal concerns. In the past three to four years, Ethiopia has experienced socio-political transitions accompanied by recurrent social crises including COVID-19, internal conflict, and drought. As a citizen, I have been able to participate in such discussions and other community concerns within family, school, community, and at government level. With my family, we discuss various issues like: the ensuing security concerns from the extended conflict in different parts of the country, the increasing prevalence of sexual abuse against girls which was exacerbated during COVID-19, increasing cost of living, and the last year's 12<sup>th</sup> grade result postponement. These conversations have given me the opportunity to develop civic knowledge and skills.

In addition, a 17 years old male adolescent reported his engagement in discussing in different social issues and how it enhanced his civic knowledge and skills. He described:

In my family, we discuss about broader societal matters including the need to maintain security in our community, climate change and environmental protection, the impact of rising inflation on the livelihood of families, increased vulnerability of poor households and the need to mobilize resources for destitute adolescents and their families. My participation in such discussions has broadened my civic knowledge and skills, and enhanced my confidence to participate in different civic activities.

An 18 years old male school adolescents reported how the issues discussed affect the rights of adolescents.

Most of the issues discussed impact the rights and wellbeing of adolescents in our community and city. Some of the issues discussed include, the need to involve adolescents in community discussions, gain access to quality social services for adolescents, the need to demand accountability from social service providers and government offices, and monitor the proper delivery of available social services. I believe all these issues are very relevant for us to discuss in the available participation opportunities.

***Theme 3: Parental civic engagements (behaviors) emulated by adolescents***

This theme explains how the civic behaviors of the adolescent interviewees are shaped by that of their parents. They shared how they consider their parents as role models and would like to emulate their civic engagements. Influential behaviors include: helping the poor, confronting injustices, involvement in community based self-help groups, etc. Detailed accounts are below:

15 year old adolescent girl reported:

My parents and other adults in the family help the poor and disadvantaged people in my neighborhood and within the community. They confront actions and behaviors that mistreat others and stand by their principles. They are my role models and have influenced my behavior to do the same for the needy.

Further, a 17 years old male adolescent reported how their parents engage in different civic activities that have cultural, spiritual, and secular nature, and how their parents become role models:

My parents are my role models to develop civic behaviors and skills. They participate in different community level discussions, Kebele committees, community-based organizations such as 'Iddir' and 'Mahibers' and other self-help groups. As spiritual people, they help the poor within the neighborhood, church and community. They provide street beggars with food, clothes and money. They also volunteer in the church to mediate disagreements and quarrels. Apart from the church, they mobilize resources from the local people to support the poor, the elderly, persons with disability, orphaned and vulnerable children through provision of food items, cloth, and renovation of their houses. Further, during my father's adolescent years, he used to be a member and a leader of different clubs. As a result, he recognizes the importance of participating in family discussions and joining adolescent and youth-led structures. He participated in the recent national election process (ie. voting, being candidate for a certain political party, being electoral committee member). His meaningful engagement has influenced my civic behavior and enhanced my civic engagement.

One participant (a 16 years old female adolescent) reported her father's experience in politics and how his experience influenced his political behavior. She also reported that her parents participate in community level discussions to address community development and she would like to emulate this behavior.

My father was a member of a political party. He used to follow and monitor news related to the political party. During the 2021 national election, he participated in the community based campaign to promote their political candidates during election. I see the importance of campaigning for a political candidate and electing political representatives. I think his participation in politics has had an influence on him to be more democratic in family discussions. I intend to emulate such a behavior when I grow up. My parents also participate in community level discussions and activities such as Green Legacy campaign, election campaign and voting, and mobilizing local resources to support disadvantaged people through community based organizations like 'Iddir' to strengthen developmental activities and social insurance. These are civic activities that my siblings and I are favorable to emulate as a citizen.

#### ***Theme 4: Living in family who stand up for the rights of others (help the most deprived)***

This theme describes how the behaviors of family members that challenge injustices influence adolescents. Interviewees shared living with a family that stands for the rights of disadvantaged people positively influenced their own civic engagement. For example, one participant (a 17 years old male adolescent) stated, "My parents stand by anyone that is mistreated and defend for their rights. I think watching my parents standing for the rights of disadvantaged people have positively influenced me to do the same for the needy." Further, an 18 years old female adolescent reported that:

My parents often help the poor and stand up for their rights. This is a particular civic behavior that I have started emulating. For example, there is a poor woman who is leading her family and raising her two children without anyone to help her. She sells tea and coffee in the street to earn income and feed her children. However, the patrol police regularly displaces her from her working spot. From my parents and participation in the child-led initiative, I have learnt that all of us need to stand for the rights of those being treated unfairly. For me, there is nothing better than defending the rights of a poor woman who is mistreated by the police. I repeatedly approached the district administration to find any job opportunity for the woman so

that she would be able to feed her children and send them to school. As a temporary solution, I mobilized my school peers to contribute money from their daily transport allowance and provided it to the poor woman. I strongly believe that I need to continue participating in similar civic activities.

Another participant (a 17 years old male adolescent) reported how their parents played as mediators between couples in their neighborhood. He affirmed that this has helped him develop conflict resolution skill.

My parents are highly respected within the community and often engage as mediators during neighborhood conflict. When women are abused by their husbands or one of their relatives or neighbors violates the rights of someone in the community, my father always stand on the side of the oppressed. This has helped me to develop conflict resolution skill, which can be considered as civic skill.

Furthermore, another participant (a 16 years of old female adolescent) narrated supporting the above assertion as:

In our neighborhood, a woman was complaining that her husband was often passive, wanting to avoid conflict with her, so he didn't make the effort to discover what was really going on with her. The more he was passive and avoidant, the louder her complaints got. My father discovered this issue and advised her husband to exercise proper integrity of his relationship with his wife. Her complaint brought his attention to those matters and their relationship improved. Although standing for human rights is never an easy fight and challenging, my father was committed to do it. He swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. He always takes sides. This is a behavior which inspires me to emulate and be a human rights activist.

#### ***Theme 5: Respect for each other's ideas***

This theme explains how adolescents in families where differences and ideas are respected help develop the peaceful dialogue skills. They also shared how membership in adolescent-led parliaments helped developed these skills. A 17 year old female adolescent narrated the level of respect for ideas among discussants in her family as follows.

We discuss about social, economic and political matters that have relevance to my family, community and the country.. During family discussions, we respect each other's ideas. Even if we do not agree on some of the issues, no one gets offended. We manage our differences through peaceful dialogue. Growing up in such an open family environment has helped me develop civic skills to engage in school and community based civic engagement activities.

Another participant (a 16 years of old male adolescent) narrated how his parents respect his ideas when different ideas are discussed in the family. He described that such an environment has helped him to respect others ideas during discussions in school and community settings. He described:

Whatever my family discusses social and political issues and family members have different ideas, my parents and other adults generally respect our ideas. My participation in student councils and school parliaments has also contributed to enhancing my confidence to learn how to accommodate differences in discussions. It has also created an opportunity to know and discuss my rights and responsibilities and respect others' rights, which is a typical characteristics of civically engaged adolescent.

Furthermore, a 16 years old male adolescent reported how he negotiates with his parents to get support for his ideas to participate in civic engagement activities.

In most cases, my parents do respect our ideas. During family discussions, I raise a number of issues related to my education, participation in different civic platforms, the need to participate in educational excursions with my friends, and my future aspirations. Should my parents think my participation in different activities is not relevant for my development, they advise me not to engage. If the issues are relevant, they accept my ideas and support me to engage with it.

### ***Theme 6: Open classroom environment for discussion***

This sections describes how interviewees who have scored high on civic engagement shared that the experiences they have had in school organized civic spaces enhanced their civic engagement. They have shared how open dialogue in classroom environments helped them with increasing their confidence to engage in civic activities. A 15 years old female adolescent described learning in an open classroom where students can discuss democratic ideals encouraged here to develop interest to engage in higher level discussions. He described:

During civic classroom, some teachers not only deliver lessons through direct classroom instruction, but also create an open classroom climate for us to discuss on social and political issues such as rule of law, rights of citizens and ensuring accountable government. This is encouraging for us to engage in higher level discussions.

Supporting the above assertion, a 17 years old male adolescent reported, “Our civic teacher promotes participatory classroom environment for students. This is a classroom culture that I need teachers would like to adopt. This has boosted my confidence to discuss on social and political matters and participate in different civic engagement platforms.” Furthermore, 18 years old female adolescent stated, “Our civic teacher encourages students to discuss on social and economic issues. This enables me to freely express my views even if my ideas differ from other students participating in the discussion.”

### ***Theme 7: Teachers showing respect for students’ ideas***

This theme describes how teachers respecting their students’ ideas and not exploiting their power shapes school adolescents in developing confidence to participate in civic engagement activities. Detailed first person accounts are presented as follows:

One participant (17 years old male adolescent) described, “Our civics teacher gives us space to participate in an open discussion and value our ideas even if we may not correctly respond to an issue raised during classroom discussion.” The other participant (18 years old male) reported, “Our teachers do not humiliate or berate students in an attempt to get them to behave. They do not use sarcasm and profanity. Even if our ideas differ, they do not discourage us. They never use counterproductive threats.” An 18 years old female stated, “During civic classes, teachers present several sides of an issue which gives me an insight to see from my own perspective. Even if the teacher disagrees with my ideas, she tries to explain why their ideas differ from mine.” A 17 years old male adolescent described, “Teachers treat me in such a way that I reciprocate respect back to them at all times. During classroom discussions, they handle interactions with students in a positive manner. They do not embarrass me but respect my ideas.”



Furthermore, a 16 years old male adolescent reported how his teacher treats students fairly by giving better pace so the dynamics of relationships changes to make the classroom interactive. He described:

Our civic teacher is characterized by fairness where he shares authority with students. He gives students both intellectual and physical space to makes and enforce the rules. The dynamics of power in a classroom rarely unfolds in a one-sided manner. Teachers intentionally act to share the balance of power in the classroom so that students look to each other or to themselves for particular lessons.

***Theme 8: Being a member or a leader of school clubs or district parliament***

Interviewees described how their participation in adolescent-led parliaments has empowered students to engage in different civic engagement activities. Additionally encouragement from peers and teachers increased their participation in civic engagement platforms. A 16 years old female adolescent stated:

Although not all students join these structures, our school facilitates opportunities for us to join school clubs, district or city level parliaments. I was encouraged by teachers and my school mates to join the district child parliament. Currently, I am a leader of the district adolescent-led parliament. This has given me the opportunity to participate in different trainings on child rights, promoting awareness on child rights, follow up students who are at risk of drop out, and mobilizing resources to support vulnerable school adolescents. I lead different meetings involving school adolescents and engage with adults on school matters and community issues affecting adolescents.

Another participant (18 years old female) reported the role of teachers in encouraging students to join different clubs and how his participation has increased her civic skills.

Our teachers facilitate conditions for students to participate in child rights clubs, gender clubs, and mini-media clubs. As member of the different clubs, I participate and lead discussions related to child rights, teacher-student relationships, quality of education, support to most vulnerable adolescents, child victims of violence and abuse, and the need to identify and report cases of violence against children to Woreda Women and Social Affairs and Police. My participation in these platforms has increased my civic knowledge and public speaking skills, which gave me confidence to aspire engaging in higher level civic matters.

Some participants reported their active participation in school management helped them to influence decisions on school matters. For example, a 16 years old female adolescent reported his experience as:

I am not only a member of the school clubs but also Students' Representative in the school management. As student representative, I participate in school management, discuss with teachers on school matters and sometimes in school decisions. Students' participation in school management and Parent, Teachers and Student Association has contributed to improving the school infrastructure and quality of the education delivery. Students were able to convince the school management to construct separate toilets for male and female students, secured facilities for the school library, and improved student-teachers' relationships. I was one of the student representatives who reported the gaps in our school education delivery services to the district education office and convinced the office to address the identified service gaps.

Furthermore, a 17 years old female adolescent reported how her participation in district parliaments helped her to gain a real-world experience of democratic processes and develop communication skills.

Adolescents aged 15-19 are encouraged to be members of the school and district parliaments, and this gives us opportunities to participate in different civic activities such in community services and informal assistance provision. My participation in the district parliaments gives me a real-world experience of the democratic processes, to be industrious and enhanced my overall development. It has heled me to develop confidence and communication skills, gave me opportunities to experiences similar processes in real life, communication skills, developed public speaking and leadership skills, and now I am able to participate in civic activities. I feel empowered in my life.

### ***Theme 9: Schools that promote volunteerism***

In this theme, interviewees reported how their schools promoted their participation in voluntarism. They also reported how adolescents' participation in civic activities benefited both themselves and the community, increased recognition and respect by the community, and enhanced their civic skills. A 17 years male adolescent reported his participation in volunteering during religious activities has helped him blessings from elders as an incentive. He described:

Some of our teachers encourage school adolescents to participate in school and community based volunteerism. I often engage in volunteering in regular religious activities and festivals, and during funeral ceremonies. As a result, I have gained respect and blessings from the religious leaders and community.. This is a big incentive I gained and I am encouraged to continue practicing selfless concern for the well-being of others especially the destitute people.

Another participant (18 years old male) narrated her experiences in volunteerism and the benefits it accrued from the community.

Being a member of the district parliament, I participate in volunteering, informal helping, student traffic service, and other extracurricular activities in school and afterschool in my neighborhood and community. I mobilize in and out of school adolescents to contribute financial and material resources and support school adolescents who need help. During COVID-19, members of the district parliament mobilized food, clothes and sanitary materials, and supported to 20 most needy children in District 5 of Gulele Sub-City. I also freely served to the elderly in our neighborhood and community, and provided free services for Muday Charity Association. This civil society organization provides education for the underprivileged children and supports vulnerable women through livelihood opportunities in Addis Ababa. My interest to engage in volunteering has been motivated by my deep concern for the needy people and denoted by altruistic motivation. This is a behavior that I have acquired from my participation in school clubs and District parliaments.

Further, one participant (a 17 years old male) described the role of school in imparting civic ideals on students and encouraging them to engage in different civic activities.

Our school is a place where we acquire civic knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and start volunteering. Through the school parliament, we get information about students from poor families who are often absent from school due to their engagement in daily labour to earn meager income. I mobilized financial resource and supported a number of children to fulfill

educational materials and enabled them continue their education. I also engage in tutoring students to help them catch-up with the knowledge level of other students who attend school regularly.

### ***Parental and School Experiences of Adolescents with low Civic Engagement***

This section presents the themes developed from interviews conducted with adolescents with low civic engagement scores. The following eight themes have emerged as explanatory factors for low civic engagement of adolescents in family and school contexts. All the quotes of adolescents were translated from Amharic.

#### ***Theme 1: Absence of open family environment for discussion***

In this theme, interviewees described how the absence of open family environment contributed to their civic engagement gap. Additionally, cultural norms and religious practices further widened gender differences between how boys and girls are expected to engage with family and community discussions/dialog. This translates to narrower opportunity for female adolescents engaging in civic activities. Detailed accounts are below:

A 17 year old male adolescent stated the lack of space in his family to participate in discussing on issues impacting his life without considering his views. “My father is very controlling. We [adolescents] do not have space to participate in family discussions with adults. My parents and other adults discuss on issues that directly or indirectly affect our life without our considering our perspectives.” In a related interview, a 16 year old female stated how he has been influenced by her the authoritarian parenting has influenced her behavior. She stated, “ My parents are non-democratic, who do not believe in involving adolescents in discussing social and political matters. I think their way of socialization has influenced my behavior and loose interest and motivation to engage in civic activities.”

Supporting the above assertions, a 17 years old female stated that her parents’ shape her to be non-assertive as a way of respecting social norms, and this has influenced her not to engage in civic platforms. She described:

My parents believe that children should be submissive and not participate in discussing social and political matters with adults. They shape children to be docile because submissive adolescents are well-behaved and respectful of social norms. This has influenced me to be nonassertive and loose interest to participate in child or youth-led clubs. Such family norms and practices have influenced me not to engage in civic matters.”

In his narration, a 15 years old male emphasized his parents fear that adolescents may leak confidential information about the family to others is one reason for not allowing them to engage in family discussion. He described:

My parents believe that children and adolescents should not sit with adults and discuss family issues. One of the main concerns of my parents is that we [adolescents] may share some confidential information to our friends and neighbors. My parents believe that adolescents are not matured enough to comprehend complex information. When we [adolescents] ask questions, my parents argue that this is not the right time for us to ask questions about family matters that the adults shall take care of it.

Gender difference in the way parents socialize children and adolescents was reflected by one participant. In this connection a 16 years old female adolescent described how boys and girls are socialized differently and its implication for their civic engagement.

The way my parents treat boys and girls differ. Boys are given more space than girls. Boys are often socialized to be outgoing, participate in different school and community based clubs, demand what they want from parents and government officials. While, girls are trained to be submissive and often not allowed to spend time discussing social and political matters. In general, girls are trained to be submissive wives, being soft, receptive, and caring. This has somewhat influenced my behavior in that I am not encouraged to join clubs and engage in civic related issues.

Cultural and religious influences were mentioned as factors influencing parents to socialize male and female adolescents differently. Supporting this, one participant (18 years old female) reported the influence of religion and culture on her parents' way of socializing male and female children, thereby impacting their civic participation. She described:

My parents' behavior is highly influenced by religious preaching and cultural values. They believe a good child is the one who is submissive, does not demand his or her rights, and does not discuss social and political matters with adults. I am more influenced by the culture and aspire not participate in civic matters.

### ***Theme 2: Lack of respect to other's ideas***

In this theme, participants narrated how growing up in a family where family members do not respect each other's ideas hindered the development of civic skills and ultimately contributed to civic engagement gap of adolescents. "Although not often, there are times when we discuss family and community concerns with our parents. However, parents do not respect nor consider our views in their decision making. This has reduced my confidence to engage in different participation platforms." (15 years old female) "It is the adults who are given space and dominate the discussions. Even when we have few opportunities, adults do not value our ideas. This hinders the development of civic competencies and participation in civic activities." (A16 years old male) "When students have different ideas during classroom discussions, some teachers do not encourage students especially females to express their ideas. This has created a feeling of being discriminated for myself, which in turn hindered the development of my civic skills." (15 years old female).

### ***Theme 3: Lack of proper parental civic modelling***

In this theme, participants described that their parents fail to be good role models to influence their civic behaviors, which eventually led to disengagement of adolescents in civic activities. This is because parents do not realize that they have the responsibility to be good role models for their adolescents and at times are very busy in accomplishing daily activities. "My parents do not know their responsibility to be role models for their children. They are busy in accomplishing daily activities with less interested to engage in community-based civic activities. There is less opportunity for us to emulate civic behavior." (A 18 years old female) "Although my parents participate in community based civic activities such as Iddirs, mobilizing resources to help the poor, and other community development initiatives, they do not teach us [adolescents] on the importance of engaging in such civic behaviors." (A 18 years old male).

### ***Theme 4: Being civically engaged is perceived as violating cultural and religious values***

In this theme, interviewees shared how their parents and other adults shared the conviction that civic engagement of adolescents such as adolescents intending to sit with adults and discuss issues with adults in the family are against their cultural and religious values. Being assertive especially for girls and women is perceived negatively by the community. Detail accounts are presented as follows. "My parents believe that active, extrovert, and demanding adolescents are perceived negatively by the society. If I actively participate in family

discussions and raise issues of my concern, they assume that my behavior deviates from the social and religious norms.” (17 years old male) “My parents believe adolescents’ participation in family discussions with adults is considered a violation of the cultural and religious values. This becomes serious especially when girls are empowered, demand their rights and advocate for changes in attitudes and practices.” (17 years old female) “My parents and other adults believe that children should be submissive and obey parental orders. They believe that assertive adolescents do not respect their parents and cultural values. Due to this, I lost interest to engage in civic matters.” (A 16 years old female) “I grew up in a family that strongly believes that children should be submissive and follow God’s commandments. If I become vocal, they give me comments that I am behaving against our culture and religion.” (18 years old female) “My parents and some teachers do not encourage me to participate in adolescent-led initiatives. In Ethiopia, there is a problem of calling assertive girls and women authoritarian. This has tacitly influenced the development of my civic skills.” (16 years old female)

#### ***Theme 5: Low level of education and awareness on children’s rights***

In this theme, interviewees shared how the low level education and awareness of their parents and other adults on adolescents’ rights to participation on issues that concern them, have hindered their civic development. This is an additional factor for low civic engagement of adolescents which was not visibly reflected in adolescents with high civic engagement. Detail accounts are presented here. “My parents are illiterate and do not know that adolescents have rights to participate in their own matters. Due to this, they do not support my participation in discussing on social and political matters.” (A17 years old female) “My parents have limited opportunities to know about children’s rights to participation. They expect me to accomplish responsibilities but not demand my rights. They believe children are under the protection of their parents and adolescents’ participation in civic-related activities should not be encouraged.” (A15 years old male) “Although my parents participated in community meetings, they did not receive any trainings on supporting children to participate on issues that concern them. That is why they are not good civic models to develop civic behaviors.” (16 years old female).

#### ***Theme 6: Participation in adolescent-led clubs and parliaments exposes to risks***

In this theme, interviewees described how their parental misconceptions about their participation in different adolescent and youth-led clubs and parliaments discouraged them from participating in civic engagement activities themselves. Although some parents believe on the importance of adolescents’ participation in school child rights clubs and district parliaments, there are still parents who misunderstood the objective of adolescents’ participation in parliaments and perceive their participations as not beneficial. Parents believe adolescents’ participation in these structures will expose them to different risks and is a waste of time. Detailed accounts are described here: “My parents discourage me not to participate in district or sub-city children’s parliaments. They believe my participation in parliaments is a waste of time, will encourage me to involve in anti-social activities, and learn undesirable behaviors.” (A17 years old male). “My father often reminds me not join student parliaments. He has a concern that my participation in student parliament exposes me to engage in unsafe sexual practices, unwanted pregnancy, substance abuse and truanting. This discourages me from participating in civic matters.” (A16 years old female) “My mother discourages me not to join adolescent-led parliaments. She is highly concerned that I will be exposed to sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, alcohol and Khat addiction. This has negatively impacted the development of my civic skills.” (A18 years old female)

#### ***Theme 7: Too young to participate in socio-political matters, fear of joining politics***

In this theme, interviewees shared their assumption that engaging adolescents in socio-political matters is too cumbersome for their age group. Furthermore, some adolescents

reported that their parents believe adolescents' participation in adolescent-parliaments will encourage them to develop political behaviors which are neither recommended nor desired. Detail accounts is presented here. "Some teachers do not encourage me to participate in adolescent-led initiatives. They consider students' participation in parliaments as empowering and this engagement as political which puts too much demand on teachers to fulfill their obligations." (15 year old female) "Some civic teachers discourage us not to openly discuss about political topics. They [teachers] often say that we are too young to discuss social and political matters. This discourages me not to engage in civic discussions." (A16 years old female) "Teachers advise us that our primary responsibility is to learn. We are not encouraged to participate in school governance and demand teachers to fulfill their obligations. They consider engaging in such discussion allowed only for adults not for students." (17 years old female)

In addition, another participant (17 years old male) reported that his parents and teachers discourage him not to join adolescent led-groups for fear of developing political behavior. He described:

My parents believe that my participation in different adolescent-led parliaments will give me opportunities to develop interest in politics and join political parties during adulthood. Participation in politics is discouraged by the society because people believe that it exposes people to life threatening dangers. People who participate in politics do not lead peaceful life and are exposed to personal risks. There is a saying in our society;["do not tend to approach furnace and politics as it puts your life at risk"]. This has contributed to the deterioration of interest to engage in socio-political matters.

### ***Theme 8: Poor school performance leading to discrimination***

In this theme, interviewees shared that their personal poor academic performances led to their discouragement by teachers from participating in civic matters. "I am one of the low performing students in my school with limited opportunities to participate in civic activities. Teachers encourage highly performing students to participate in school council and school parliament, which give opportunities for their civic development." (18 years old female adolescent) "Some teachers do not encourage academically poor students like me to participate in and out of school civic activities. Civic teachers appreciate high performing students but not low performers. This has negatively influenced my confidence to participate in civic activities." (A15 years old female) "There are some students who do not attend their education properly and spend their time in Khat chewing and alcohol drinking houses. These students discourage us not to join school and district level parliaments." (16 years old female adolescent)

## **Discussion**

This study identified the types of civic engagement activities of adolescents. This include: mobilizing adolescents, youth and other people to help the most needy people, promoting awareness on their rights, social issues and reporting risks; participation in improving environmental sanitation; monitoring delivery of social services; participating in public discussion on community matters; engaging in socio-political matters at home and school; and economic participation. In most of the themes identified, there is a spirit of volunteerism among adolescents. It has been noted that most adolescents and youth were engaged in volunteering in those civic engagement activities due to intrinsic motivation with no financial gains.

This is consistent with findings of the recent studies conducted in Ethiopia. An assessment report on the implementation of the National Youth Policy (MoWCY, 2022) revealed that adolescent and youth were engaged in direct and indirect volunteer activities in relation to prevention and control of COVID-19, and promoting awareness on HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, Tefera and Zeleke (2020) found out that during the COVID-19 pandemic over 10 million youths were engaged in self-initiated voluntary services only in a period of 3 months alone. A report by the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth (MoWCY, 2018) showed that adolescents and youth organized in the district and city level parliaments and youth-led associations are involved in informal helping activities including mobilizing resources and supporting most vulnerable students in their neighborhoods and community. Adolescents and youth as members of the different adolescent/youth-led parliaments, engage in promoting awareness on their rights, identify adolescents who experience violence, deprived of access to social services and report to local government offices to take appropriate actions (MoWCY, 2020).

Economic participation was identified as one of the key engagements reported by adolescents. A recent study by Jones et al. (2019) on adolescent economic empowerment in Ethiopia revealed that urban adolescents are engaged in income generation activities to support themselves and their family. Some of them have career aspiration and given opportunities to save their own pocket money in order to meet their longer-term needs. Furthermore, efforts to support parents, to alleviate household poverty and improve adolescent consumption appear similarly ad hoc – and gendered.

The analysis resulted in themes that explain the distinct family and school civic experiences of adolescents. Themes such as open family environment, concern about broader community matters, and respect for each other's ideas emerged as explanatory factors for enhanced civic engagement of adolescents in the family. These results can be interpreted in light of the Social Development Model (SDM), which underlines the crucial role played by the social contexts in which adolescents are daily embedded, in the understanding of both their attitudes and behaviors. This is consistent with the findings of previous studies (Rossi et al., 2016) which affirmed that growing up in a family environment that creates an open discussion on civic matters facilitates the development of civic behaviors. In ordinary family interaction, children are constantly engaged in a variety of communication with parents and other family members. Whatever we may think we know about families in the past, in most modern families negotiation between parents and adolescents is in all respects commonplace.

Furthermore, Boyd et al. (2011) and Roman and Esau (2015) found out that adolescents' participation in open family discussion on social and political issues in which parents respect their ideas were found to be associated with the development of civic behaviors. Further, parental civic behaviors emulated by adolescents and living in family who stands up for the rights of others emerged as explanatory themes. This is consistent with findings of the previous studies (Van Goethem et al., 2014; Wilkenfield, 2009) which asserted the important role of parental civic modeling in influencing the civic engagement of adolescents. In Ethiopia, parents influence adolescents to engage in community-based civic activities not only by imparting social values and but also by participating in such activities. Adolescents participate in voluntary service in their neighborhoods and communities during festivities and crisis, showing their commitment to respecting social and religious values, cultivate their relationship with the society and a means for adolescents' empowerment. Further, parents and adolescents participate in community-based care and support structures aimed at helping vulnerable members of the community (MoLSA, 2017). Adolescents with socially engaged parents are themselves more likely to become involved in community activities, and to maintain involvement over time.

Themes related to school related civic experience as explanatory factors for enhanced civic engagement of school adolescents include: open classroom climate for discussion, respect and encouragement of students by teachers, being a member or a leader of school clubs or district parliament, and schools that promote volunteerism.

Findings of previous studies such as Lenzi et al. (2014) indicated that schools are governable socialization institutions to promote adolescents' civic engagement by creating opportunities to engage in civic engagement related discussions and creating a democratic classroom climate. Teachers support along with discussion of civic issues are necessary to nurture adolescent civic behavior (Lenzi et al., 2014; Lenzi, Vieno, Sharkey et al., 2014).

Participation in adolescent-led parliaments emerged to be to one factor that has empowered school adolescents, gain a real-world experiences of democratic processes and participate in different civic engagement activities. This is in line with the previous findings. In this connection, Neundorf, Niemi, and Smets (2016) found out that schools facilitate conditions for students to participate in adolescent-led groups or associations which in turn gives school adolescents opportunities to participate in civic engagement activities such as debates on civic matters and community services. Furthermore, the results of a study on self-reported measure of assertiveness of adolescents in children parliament and nonparticipants in Addis Ababa by Bogale and Shikuro (2021) showed that there was a difference in the mean scores of the child parliament participants and non-participants. Those school adolescents participating in the adolescent-led parliaments had higher assertiveness skills characterized by enhanced social skills, demanding their rights and expressing their views freely, leading group discussions and mobilizing other adolescents and youth in their schools and communities to address social issues. This was also supported by qualitative data obtained through key informant interview with male and female adolescents from child parliament participants and nonparticipants. Adolescents' easy access to different trainings on issues such as child rights and protection, communication, decision making and advocacy skills; peer education and public discussions were found to have contributed to enhanced social skills adolescents participating in the parliaments. It is expected that with increased number of years of their participation in the adolescent-led parliaments and other adolescent and youth-structures, adolescents will get more opportunities to participate in various civic engagement activities that enhance their civic participation.

Absence of open family environment for discussion, lack of respect to other's ideas, lack of proper parental civic modeling, perceiving adolescents' civic engagement as violating cultural and religious values, low level of education and awareness on children's rights, perceiving adolescents' participation in parliaments as exposing to risks and perceiving adolescents are too young to participate in socio-political discussions are the themes emerged as explanatory factors for low civic engagement or disengagement of adolescents in the family and school contexts.

Interviewed adolescents reported the lack of civic space in their family and respect for their ideas to participate in discussion on issues impacting their life. They reported that their parents fail to consider their views in making family decisions. This is consistent with the previous findings. The family is uniquely positioned either to positively or negatively influence the well-being, development, and adjustment of adolescents. Family relationship is one of the significant properties of the family environment that is important to adolescent development and adjustment. Negative adolescent developmental outcomes such as civic disengagement are associated with relationships that are defined by low levels of emotional warmth, lack of cohesion, poor communication, and beliefs about the family (Whitten & Weaver, 2010).



Interviewed adolescents also reported that their parents' shape them to be non-assertive as a way of respecting family rules and social and religious norms. Furthermore, interviewees added how boys and girls are socialized differently in their family and how this influenced civic engagement. Supporting this, Feinauer, Larson, and Harper (2010) indicated that during the adolescent transition, the rules of the family will be challenged by behaviors. As adolescents demand more autonomy, parents may adapt control to the needs. Mismatches between the adolescent's demands for freedom of action and parents' hold on control to maintain family rules and social values may result in friction. This development will exert a certain pressure on the communication of the family members and in having open discussion on social and political matters. In this connection, Ayele (2020) found out that in many cultures of Ethiopia, parents do not encourage open discussions with adolescents on social and political matters. This is said to be attributed to the way the society perceives adolescents, the low level of awareness on their rights to participation, and culturally embedded decisions and practices. Furthermore, Abera (2016) found that parenting styles, cultural orientation, lack of teachers' gender sensitiveness and access to training opportunities were found to be psychosocial factors that affected the assertive behavior of female students. On the contrary, Cherie and Berhanie (2015) using large sample size (3545 adolescents) found out that although 43.8% of participants perceived that their parents follow authoritarian parenting style, a significant proportion of adolescents (57.5%) reported their family members feel free to closely discuss each other and nearly half of students reported that they have good connections with their parents. About, 39.2%) adolescent respondents indicated that their family members can easily think of things to do together as a family.

Low level of education and awareness of parents on the rights of adolescents emerged to be one explanatory factor for low civic engagement among school adolescents. Previous research (e.g. Flanagan & Levine, 2010) found out that higher parental education was positively associated with civic and political outcomes among adolescents. Adolescent in these families tend to have greater access to civic opportunities through concerted parenting strategies aimed at enhancing their civic development. Wray-Lake and Shubert (2019) indicated that some adolescents are "unequal" in civic engagement at the starting line implying those adolescents whose parents have low level of education and understanding about the rights of children and adolescents tend to have lower level of civic engagement opportunities in their families.

Some interviewed adolescents affirmed that their parents and teachers discourage them not to participate in adolescent and youth-led parliaments. The possible reasons why some parents and teachers discourage them from participation in adolescent and youth-led parliaments is multifold: (i) parents believe that adolescents' participation in adolescent-led parliaments will expose them to different protection risks; (ii) it is a waste of time; (iii) they are too young to engage in such activities; (iv) their participation in parliaments will give them different civic engagement platforms so that they will be able to develop civic skills, challenge their parents and teachers, and develop political behaviors which are neither recommended nor desired.

In studying young adolescents' perceived barriers to engage in civic action in school, Bauml, Davis Smith, and Blevins (2022) found out that the perception and practice that school adolescents might not make their schools/communities better. Other barriers to engaging in civic-oriented activities in the community include, lack of knowledge/information about the concerns that adolescents and youth are going to address and social-emotional factors such as physical safety concerns due to limited support and protection from adults, and lack of resources. Thomas (2007) argued that public life in communities, where adolescents' *Res Militaris*, vol.12, n°4, December Issue 2022

autonomous activity may meet a variety of reactions from adults and authority figures—children may be ignored, disapproved of or even feared, or they may be regarded as in need of protection and sequestration. Furthermore, Cockburn (2005) notes that one of the main difficulties in addressing adolescents' participation is the problem of the labels that are attached to adolescents by adults and the ways adolescents are 'described, analysed, argued, justified and theorised'. Furthermore, there is a conception that adolescents' participation as political. However, it can be conceptualized that adolescents' participation as social and as political. Taking this idea a stage further, we may distinguish two ways of looking at what goes on when adolescents and young people participate: one that sees it in terms of social relations and another which sees it in terms of political relations. There is a discourse of children's participation that is predominantly social—that speaks of creating social networks, of inclusion, of adult-child relations, and of the opportunities for social connection that participatory practice can create. Alongside this, there is an alternative discourse that is more or less overtly political—that speaks of power, and challenge, and change. To some extent these alternative discourses relate to different versions of adolescent civic engagement which is one of the key aspect of development.

Europe. Begg (2004) quotes critics of children's councils in Norway who say that they are 'not conducted on children's terms. Instead, children are praised when they behave like small adults and put in their place when they do not' (p. 131; this may of course be begging the question what counts as 'adult' behaviour). Pavl

## **Implications**

The findings of the study revealed adolescents are engaged in various civic activities that benefit themselves, other adolescents and youth, their schools and communities. We have seen adolescent and youth between the ages of 15-19 show motivation, commitment, passion and effective services to the communities. We can draw the following implications.

\* Monitoring delivery of social services; socio-political participation; and participation in public discussion on community matters are found to be the least recurring types of civic engagement. This implies interventions should aim at enhancing capacities and opportunities for adolescents to enhance school adolescents to engage in monitoring social services and engaging with service providers to improve the services; develop skills to engage in socio-political matters and public discussion on issues impacting their lives.

\*Not only that the Ethiopian adolescents and youth have far more serious concerns for the well-being and development of their Country than other groups but still that they possess the capacity and commitment to effecting their will.

\* Adolescents and youth in Ethiopia are huge resources to transform the Country if their engagements are voluntary rather than imposed.

\*Adolescents and youth need to be empowered with necessary skills to effectively discharge their energies not only for personal living and development but also for assuming societal responsibilities at large.

\*The methods to be used for empowering them with these skills need to be interesting, participatory, related and applicable to daily living.

\*Adolescents and youth as the coordinator, mobilizer, campaigner, or trainer himself/herself must have personal stake and genuine concern in the issue so that he/ she can persist with the goals in the face of hardships. This concern still needs to be demonstrated in action so that others would identify themselves with the actor. Moreover, he/she needs to identify, build, and capitalize on the strength of the target group and exploit this potential for materializing one's goal.

\*There is a need to conceptualize volunteerism in a manner that it is beneficial both to the society as well as themselves (goal), conduct it in a more coordinated and sustainable manner than as a campaign to respond to a crisis (approach), need to put in place a strong administrative, supervisory, and monitoring system (governance) that would ensure accountability, documentation of work, and establishment of data base. More refined and customized tools of operation also need to be employed while pursuing volunteerism.

\*Adolescents' and young people's organisations established for the purpose of promoting 'participation'—these may be locality-based or centered on a special interest. Adolescents involved in these organisations may simply represent themselves, or may be seen as in some way representative of a wider group. Thus, supporting their active and meaningful participation of and adolescent-led parliaments and other civic engagement platforms and monitoring outcomes is vital.

\*Future studies need to clarify which mechanisms are responsible for the positive association between characteristics of the social environments and adolescents' civic development and how these interactions evolve over time.

\*To develop programs promoting adolescents' civic involvement, it is critical to understand in what specific ways parents' civic engagement and school civic education promote adolescent civic responsibility and/or engagement within age ranges. For example, within the school context, education may be more or less effective based on additional variables such as student–teacher relationship, teacher enthusiasm for the subject, and/or credit given to civic engagement.

\*Once mechanisms to promote civic engagement are clarified, they can be translated into further developing intervention programs to more successfully encourage adolescent civic engagement. It is crucial to promote collaborative civic commitment across social domains. Boosting community and school civic engagement with peer-focused activities may be effective to support those adolescents with low civic engagement or disengagement; because the peer group influence proved crucial for older adolescents, involving whole classrooms in civic interventions may yield more salient civic discourses and practices than targeting individual students.

\*Community engagement in adolescent development and protection requires spaces where adults in communities can interact with adolescents and youth to discuss productive ways to work together on improving the community environment for adolescents to freely participate in different civic engagement activities and community development activities are informed by youth.

\*Schools can facilitate civic engagements by providing more opportunities for students in getting them organized and work together. Schools can facilitate situations to participate in solving problems in their schools and communities, volunteering during religious festivals or worship, community outreach services, student traffic, and participate in the district and city

adolescent-led parliaments. School adolescents can be supported to promote awareness on their rights and responsibilities, identify adolescents who are vulnerable to or experience violence and abuse, deprived of access to social services and report to local government offices to take appropriate actions. The National Children's Policy (MoWCY, 2017) specifically mentions that supporting meaningful children's participation on matters that affect them at family, schools, community and government levels. All of these changes may require additional time and planning by schools, but they would not necessarily require additional financial resources. If this requires financial resources, schools should establish and strengthen partnerships with civil society organizations and other stakeholders to get support to promote students civic engagement through training, mentoring students, and facilitating adolescents participation in community and government platforms.

\*Approaching adolescents' civic participation as a positive development denotes a shift towards accepting its mutual and interconnected nature, and hence its conceptualisation as a negotiated space between adolescents and adults, as well as among young people. Adopting a dialogical approach challenges understandings of the ways in which adolescents and youth are recognised, which, in turn, adds impetus to the acknowledgement of their rights and their capacity to participate and make change. When the interpretive process of participation is guided by an orientation towards dialogue with adolescents, the self-understanding and individual agency of adolescents and youth and their competence informs the conditions in which their participation is recognized and valued. This helps to acknowledge adolescents' engagement with important adults in their lives (parents, neighborhood, teachers, professionals, and government officials).

\*Adolescents have the right to work once they reach the legal minimum age, albeit subject to special protective measures. Ensure that employers should create "Decent work for youth" in line with local and international standards for out-of-school youth between 15-17 years old, but it should also create learning and development opportunities allowing young workers to receive further vocational education (e.g. technical on-the-job training or soft skill training on communication skills or hygiene), so that they can become skilled workers or management in the future.

Similar criticisms have been made of more established participatory structures in Europe. Begg (2004) quotes critics of children's councils in Norway who say that they are 'not conducted on children's terms. Instead, children are praised when they behave like small adults and put in their place when they do not' (p. 131; this may of course be begging the question what counts as 'adult' behaviour). Pavlovi

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### ***Author contributions***

the lead author (Azmeraw Belay) was fully responsible for the design of the study, data collection, data analysis and write up of the research report. Professor Belay Tefera, his PhD research advisor has supervised the research process and critically reviewed and edited the manuscript. Both authors approved the final manuscript.

### ***Conflict of Interest***

The authors declare that they have not conflict of interest.

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