

Young Lives

An International Study of Childhood Poverty



12,000 children in
4 countries over 15 years

www.younglives.org.uk

We need to end child poverty in order to break the cycle of poverty



Our aims

Young Lives produces high-quality evidence to inform and influence policy and practice to reduce childhood poverty and inequality. We do this by:

- generating new research and analysis on the causes and consequences of childhood poverty
- ensuring our findings reach the right people and organisations at the right time
- making our data publicly available for others to use.

“Education is the most important thing for a girl to change her life.”

Seble’s mother, Ethiopia



What we do

Young Lives is a unique international study of childhood poverty following the changing lives of 12,000 children in 4 countries – Ethiopia, India (in Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam – over 15 years. This is the timeframe set by the UN to assess progress towards the Millennium Development Goals.

We are collecting a wealth of information about the children’s material and social circumstances, as well as their views on their everyday lives, their hopes and aspirations, set against the environmental and social realities of their communities.

We are following two groups of children in each country:

2,000 children who were born in 2001–02; and
1,000 children who were born in 1994–95.

The fact that our work spans 15 years of these children’s lives – covering all ages from early infancy into young adulthood – means that we are also able to examine how children change over time, whether growing up in rural or urban contexts, in poor or not-so-poor areas, or in large families or as migrants, as well as a variety of other circumstances.

Our study countries

Our research focuses on 4 countries – Ethiopia, India (in Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. These were chosen to reflect a wide range of cultural, economic, geographical, political and social contexts. They face some of the most common difficulties experienced by developing countries, such as high debt burden, post-conflict reconstruction, and adverse environmental conditions like drought and flood.

Despite an initial emphasis on diversity, Peru and Vietnam (and to a large extent India) have experienced consistent economic growth since our work started in 2001. But economic growth does not necessarily mean that the challenges of poverty are overcome – and high levels of social and economic inequality continue to persist.

Thus, we are now studying poverty in the context of national economic change, while recognising that inequality may become increasingly entrenched with growth, and that rising food and oil prices and other global forces may begin to undermine growth in the coming years.



“We are nearly rich... as we have a new cupboard... but we haven’t got a washing machine.”

Duy, 6, Vietnam

Why focus on children?

Globally children are the largest age group affected by poverty and deprivation which have both severe and lifelong consequences for children, households, communities and countries. To break national and global patterns of inequality and poverty, childhood is the place to start.

Children are not only most at risk but early intervention is the key mechanism to affect long-term change. The fact that rates of malnutrition have not fallen within the Young Lives sample in line with GDP growth, and that inequalities have actually hardened, powerfully demonstrates that economic growth alone will not solve childhood poverty.

Our research

Young Lives combines different research strands to generate in-depth analysis of poor children’s lives and the coping strategies they and their families adopt.

We do this through a detailed and large-scale household survey of all the children and their primary caregiver every 3 years, interspersed with more in-depth interviews, group activities and case studies with a

sub-sample of the children, their parents, teachers and community representatives to understand their opinions and perceptions. This longitudinal data is supplemented by a survey of the children’s schools and selected information about their younger siblings. Additional sub-studies review how national government programmes are implemented at the local level and the impact of policy on children’s lives.

Tracking children in this way means we are building a rich and detailed picture of how their lives and livelihoods change over time, the key events they face, and the social and environmental factors that shape their choices and opportunities.

Our analysis and policy engagement work is clustered around 3 themes that are central to the lives of poor children and young people.

- **The dynamics of childhood poverty** explores how changes in household and community circumstances affect children and young people. Our analysis includes the long-term trajectories that children and their families follow, how continuing inequalities, shocks and adverse events affect their lives, and the effectiveness of government policy such as cash transfers or social protection.



“I want to be happy like my aunt, enjoy myself, and not get married yet.”

Luz, 14, Peru

- **Children’s experiences of poverty** looks at how childhood is experienced in poor communities, including both ‘subjective’ indicators (children’s own perspectives on poverty, their hopes, choices and priorities) as well as ‘objective’ indicators such as gender, health, nutrition, and school outcomes. Here we also look at risk and resilience and the forms of protection that children draw on, including relationships with their family and friends, and sources of support within the community.
- **Learning, time-use and life transitions** focuses on children’s daily lives in the context of poverty, and the structures, institutions and processes that accompany children as they grow and become young adults. Key elements of this are how children fare in school, children’s work and their role within the family, the importance of community norms, and the impact of modernisation.

Such findings over time enable us to create a nuanced analysis of the factors and policies that can make a difference. In this way, our research provides credible, authoritative evidence to help policymakers analyse and address the challenges they face in alleviating childhood poverty.

Our policy work

A major aim of Young Lives is to contribute evidence to policy debates and programme planning. One example is the research we provided on the relationship between malnutrition and educational disadvantage for a major report on the UN’s aim to achieve Education For All by 2015.

Young Lives data

We are committed to the widest possible dissemination of our data, including public archiving to enable policymakers and other researchers to benefit from this unique longitudinal survey.

The anonymised datasets from Rounds 1 and 2 of the survey are archived with the UK’s Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) (project ref: SN 5307, <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/findingData/snDescription.asp?sn=5307>) and available to all researchers through the internet. ESDS has also developed an international study guide for Young Lives (<http://www.esds.ac.uk/international/access/133379.asp>). Reports from Round 3 will be published and the dataset deposited with ESDS in mid-2011 and all datasets will be available on CD-Rom for users who cannot access the internet.

**“I have my granny.
All other children
have a mother;
but my grandmother
is good.”**

Deepak, 6, India



The Young Lives team

Young Lives is coordinated by a team based at the Department of International Development in the University of Oxford, led by Jo Boyden. Other senior research staff include Stefan Dercon (Oxford) and Martin Woodhead (The Open University).

Young Lives partners

- **Ethiopian Development Research Institute**
Ethiopia
- **Centre for Economic and Social Sciences**
Andhra Pradesh, India
- **Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University)**
Andhra Pradesh, India
- **Save the Children-Bal Raksha Bharat**
India
- **Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (Group for the Analysis of Development)**
Peru
- **Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (Institute for Nutrition Research)**
Peru
- **Centre for Analysis and Forecasting, Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences,**
Vietnam
- **General Statistics Office,**
Vietnam
- **Save the Children UK**
Ethiopia, Vietnam and London.

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