

# Changing Lives in a Changing World

Young Lives children growing up





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# Introduction

Young Lives is an international research project into the causes and consequences of children's poverty. We are following the lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam over 15 years. We have now known the children for ten years. Our older group have turned 16 or 17. Our younger group have just had their ninth birthdays.

Our research follows all 12,000 children, collecting survey data about their lives, their families, their communities and their schools. We also collect in-depth views and perspectives by interviewing a smaller number of children in each country in detail. We speak to their families and people in their communities and we interview them in groups as well. This gives us insights and information which are hard to capture in a large survey questionnaire.

The 24 stories in this book come from these in-depth interviews. This is the second book we have produced that gives us a more detailed glimpse into the reality of some of the children's lives as they grow up. The first was called *"Nothing is impossible for me": Stories from Young Lives children*. As before, none of the children appear in the photographs or give their real names. This is because we want to protect them from outside interest and prevent one child from being singled out over another.

## Changing lives

By now, we know quite a lot about the individual children and their families. We know how many brothers and sisters they have, where and how they live, some of the problems they face, and whether they think they have a good life or a bad life. We also know a little about what helps them when they are in difficulty. And both the children and their parents have told us about their hopes and fears – and their dreams for the future.

We know that if a child comes from a poor family, especially if they also live in a community with few resources, they are likely to face other disadvantages on top of being poor. We want to show how this can be changed, and the cycle of poverty broken.

But we are also finding that the things children and their families worry about are not necessarily the same as those prioritised by policymakers. We hope to be able to provide evidence for both governments and international organisations so that they know which policies and programmes really make a difference to poor children and their families.

If we can get things right at the start of a child's life, we have a chance to stop poverty and inequality being handed down through the generations. That is why the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, agreed in 2000, included goals and targets aimed specifically at children. Young Lives uses evidence to inform policy debates with the aim of improving children's lives.

## The wider context

Each child's story has a corresponding theme that gives a sense of the wider context of the children's lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's understandings of what it is to be rich or poor.

For example, both poverty and education are strong themes in Louam's life. Louam is 9 and lives in a village in Ethiopia. When the Young Lives team visited in 2006, she was 5 and desperate to go to school. But now she is not so sure. She says she gets teased and finds school difficult. The last year has been hard for her family. There was not enough rain and so the harvest was not good. But her mother hopes that Louam will continue in school. She believes that this will ensure that her daughter's life is better than her own.

Or boys like Salman, from India, who has struggled after the death of his father. Salman is now 15 years old. He comes from a Muslim family and has four siblings. His father died when he was 6. He dropped out of school in 1st grade and his mother worried that he was getting into 'bad company'. Today, both Salman and his mother say he is doing much better. He looks up to his uncles, who work abroad. He says he would like to go and work abroad too one day so that he can earn more money.

Most of the children live with a wider family group, including brothers and sisters, grandparents and often aunts or uncles. Household structure changes all the time as siblings leave home, family members die, or parents separate. We found that between 2002 and 2009, such changes were experienced by 88 per cent of households in Ethiopia, 81 per cent in Vietnam, 45 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, India, and 81 per cent in Peru. Family networks are very important, but families are also constantly coping with change which is not easy when you are poor – even the birth of a new child can be an economic burden as well as a blessing.

Some children live in towns and some in villages and this makes a big difference to the lives they lead. For example, Lupe, aged 9, lives in Lima, the capital city of Peru. Her mother left the family home because of fights with her father. Then her grandmother, who was looking after her, broke her hip, so now Lupe and her sister have to care for her grandmother and do all the household chores as well as go to school. When they have a little spare time and their father gives them some money, they go to an internet café and check their Facebook accounts. They are the only children of the 24 who mention the internet in their interviews.

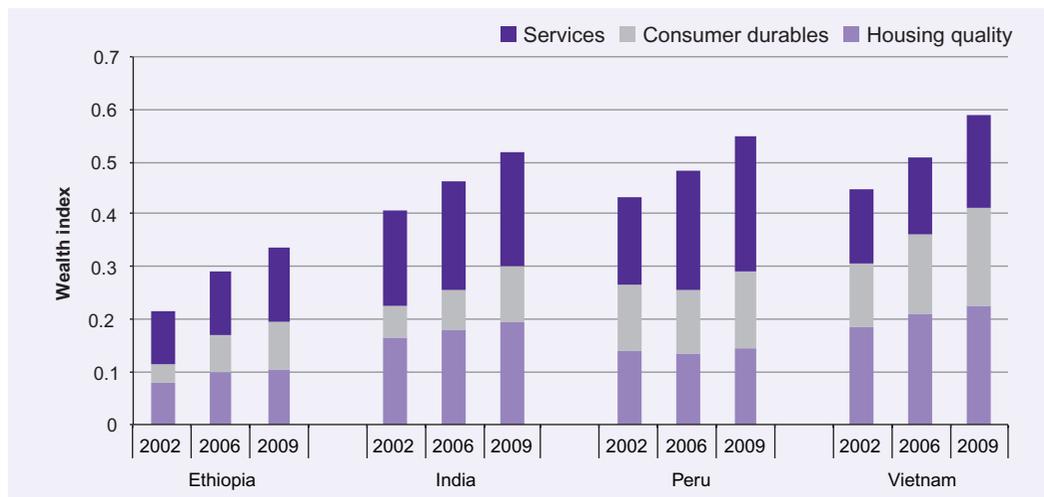
Y Sinh, from Vietnam, lives in a village, and although he is 9 like Lupe, his life is very different. He has already dropped out of school in order to help support his mother and sister by working in the sugar cane fields. His father is no longer around, and his stepfather is violent and rarely comes home. His mother worries about what would happen to her children if she died. Y Sinh is small and thin for his age. He says he doesn't know how old he is, or the name of his village. But he does know he is a very good singer.

## Poverty – the good news ...

Most of the families in our study are poor, or relatively poor. So as part of looking at the contexts in which our children live, we have been following overall poverty levels in the four countries in our research. And the economic situation in all of them is improving. Over the 15 years between 1995 and 2010, per capita GNI (Gross National Income) grew by 91 per cent in Ethiopia, 122 per cent in India, 61 per cent in Peru, and 145 per cent in Vietnam (World Bank 2011).

On the whole, Young Lives families also became less poor, despite the global economic crisis in the late 2000s and the rise in food prices in many countries. In Ethiopia, for example, we found that between 2006 and 2009, the number of Young Lives families living below the national poverty line went down by 4 per cent from 72 to 68 per cent. The chart below illustrates how there have been significant improvements for families in access to services and consumer goods but smaller improvements in housing quality.

### Changes in household wealth



Note: The wealth index is composed of three parts (services, use of durable goods and access to basic services) and is scaled between 0 and 1

Source: Paul Dorman (2011) *Growth, Wealth and Inequality: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 5.

We found that other things had improved too. Stunting means a child is shorter than they should be for their age and is a sign of long-term malnutrition. Stunting among Young Lives children fell in all countries, although the change in India was small and malnutrition remains of great concern there. This is important, as stunting at an early age has permanent consequences on brain development, and so children may fall behind at school as well. Stunting at age 8 is linked to lower educational aspirations and self-esteem by the time a child is 12 years old.

Many families also said that they noticed an improvement in living conditions in their homes and communities. Services like electricity, safe water, toilets, and roads were installed or improved. Louam's family, in Ethiopia, built a kitchen and a toilet and now have drinking water,

although they still have no electricity. She also points out some positive changes in her village. There is a new road, a new bridge, a school, a health centre and a church. Some people have mobile phones, although her family does not.

Governments in all four countries introduced or extended social protection schemes aimed at poor families, and we find that many Young Lives families were eligible for these. In rural areas, it became easier for some children to go to secondary school, either because new schools were built nearer their homes, or because, as in the case of Deepak in India, there is a boarding hostel where he can live while at school. This is important, because we also see that in most places, children from rural areas are not doing as well as those from towns and cities.

### ... and the less good news

Many things in our study countries have improved, both overall and for Young Lives children and their families. At the same time, we have found there is more inequality; the gap between rich and poor, rural and urban, and ethnic majority and ethnic minority (or in India, lower caste) groups, is entrenched and often increasing, and there are small but significant differences between boys and girls.

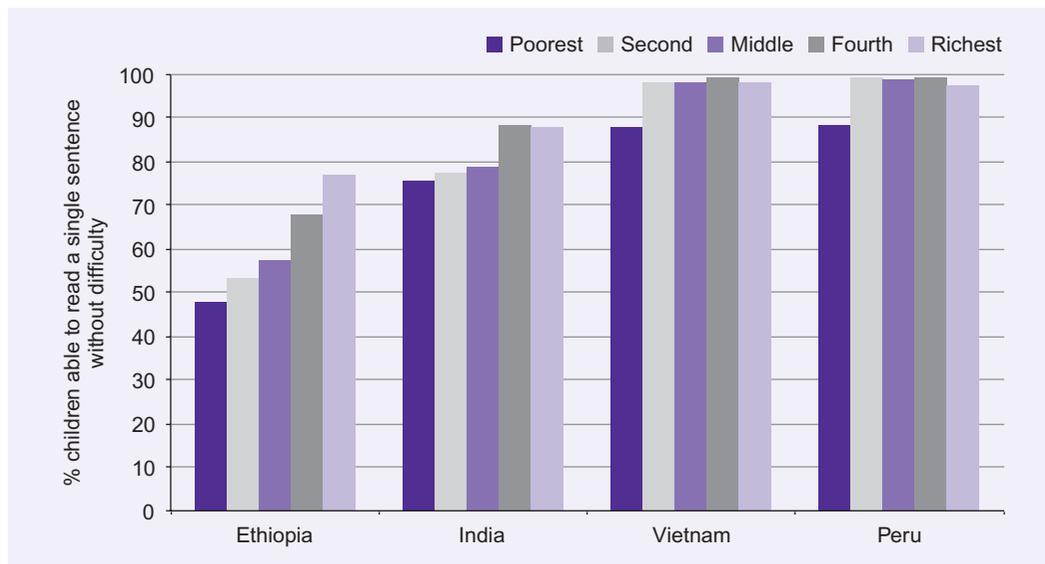
In all four countries, we found that different forms of inequality interact and intersect. The same children often face multiple disadvantages – on the basis of where they live, what ethnic or caste group they come from, and whether they are girls or boys.

So, for example, in general, rural children's families were much less well-off than urban children's families, and in some countries, like Vietnam, families from some regions were generally poorer than families from other regions.

We also found that across the countries, children from minority groups – this might be indigenous groups, or lower caste or tribal groups – were doing worse than the rest of the population. For example, in India, Ravi, aged 16, comes from what the Government calls the 'Scheduled Caste' group (sometimes known as *Dalits*), who are still considered to be lower status than other castes and, like the 'Scheduled Tribe' or *adivasi* indigenous peoples, are discriminated against, despite laws that are meant to support them. Among Young Lives families, these groups are poorer than other caste groups and their children are more likely to be undernourished. The school drop-out rate for older *Dalit* children is almost double that for other caste groups. Not surprising, perhaps, that the children from these groups were less likely to describe themselves as having a 'good' life. Neither of Ravi's parents went to school, and he has now dropped out of school himself and is working in the groundnut fields. This kind of discrimination and disadvantage is also faced by indigenous groups in Peru and Vietnam, as shown by Manuel and Fabricio in Peru and H'Mai and Y Sinh in Vietnam.

Among the younger children, those from the poorest families have seen less reduction in stunting than those from less poor families. And although enrolment levels at school in all countries have improved considerably, there are questions about the quality of the education children receive, which seems to vary hugely between richer and poorer families. For example, our tests of the ability of 12-year-olds to read a simple sentence found that in all countries the poorest fifth of children performed worse than the richest fifth.

## Literacy and wealth (12-year-olds)



Source: Paul Dornan (2011) *Children and the Millennium Development Goals: Fragile Gains and Deep Inequalities*, Young Lives Policy Paper 2

We have also found that poor families are more affected by crises such as natural disasters, illness or death. We know from our interviews that children are very resilient, and keen to support their families. But if a family is poor, a crisis such as a failed crop or the illness of a family member can change a child's future. If you are a boy, you may be taken out of school to work in the fields, or if you are a girl, you may have to help at home if a parent is ill. A richer family may still experience these crises, but will have the resources to pay for medical treatment, or have savings to cope with the failure of a crop.

So, for example, Hung's family in Vietnam had their orange crop destroyed by a huge hail storm. Then their pigs got foot and mouth disease and had to be put down. The final blow was when Hung's brother fell ill and needed expensive surgery. Hung had just failed his high school exams, so he left out of school and started looking for a job. He now works for a construction company.

Of the 24 children in the book, three have lost one or both parents, three have a family member who is seriously ill, four have suffered some kind of external disaster like flooding or crop failure, and six have families reporting violence (which is often hidden) or a father who drinks. Some have more than one of these crises at the same time, as we have seen in Hung's case.

In Andhra Pradesh, India, older children said that a crisis meant they had to work more, or their families had to migrate to find work, or they missed classes or were pulled out of school. A parent's illness, or possible illness, was something that worried many of the children. Other family responses in all countries included selling animals, as with Hung's family in Vietnam, or getting into debt, like Tufa's family when a fire destroyed the family home in Ethiopia.

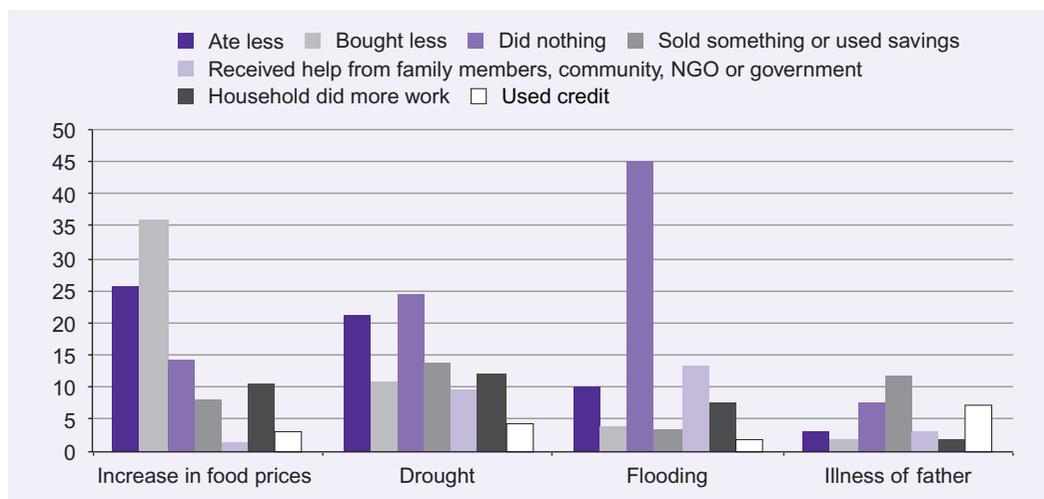
## What protects and supports poor children?

By examining patterns of both gains and setbacks for different children in this way, we can also see where policymakers need to pay attention in protecting and supporting children and their families, both from the daily indignities of poverty, and from the bigger crises that hit the poorest families the hardest.

We know that a number of factors help children to cope in these situations. The wider family or neighbours are common sources of support in times of crisis. Many children talk about an important person or people in their lives, who has encouraged them to go to school, or talked to them, or simply brought them a glass of juice at bedtime. This may be a parent, but is just as likely to be an aunt or a cousin or a grandparent or even a neighbour. For example, Harika, in India, talks about her older female cousins supporting her to continue her education. And Deepak loves his grandmother, who used to look after him but who he sees much less of now that his father has remarried. In Peru, 16-year-old Elmer's little brother is looked after by neighbours when Elmer is at school because their parents live and work some distance away.

Families have a range of strategies to cope with the effects of flooding, or illness, or an increase in food prices. The chart below shows this in some detail. For example, the illness of a father may mean going to a health centre (62% of families say they did this) but may also mean that the family eat less, while the main coping strategy for an increase in food prices is receiving help from family members, the community, a non-governmental organisation or the government.

### Family responses for different crises in Ethiopia (%)



Source: Save the Children (2012) *The Future We Want: Learning from Children's Experiences for Sustainable Development*.

As the children become older, the composition of adults and children in the household tends to change towards more adults and fewer children (as older siblings pass 18, marriage partners joining the household, etc.). This means that there are potentially more adults available to work, which means that these households are more able to cope with shocks and adverse events than younger couples with small children.

## Government schemes to support poor families

Many Young Lives children come from households that benefit from national social protection schemes aimed at poor families. These are an increasingly common way for governments to try and tackle poverty and help families manage risk. Particular schemes often provide money, paid work or food to poor people in return either for work or compliance with certain conditions. For example, in Ethiopia and India work might be building roads or other public facilities, and the requirements in Peru involve children visiting health centres and attending school.

We have found that these schemes do help children and their families. However, they need to be supported by other public services and by economic development to provide better jobs. There may also be unintended detrimental consequences which policymakers need to consider. For example, if an adult is required to be away from the house to work, children may have to do more in the home, which in turn could have an impact on their education. And while more children are attending school, increased pupil numbers mean more pressure on class sizes and teachers. There can also be tension in communities about who receives benefits and who does not.

We have found that:

- In Peru, the schemes have resulted in more children in school and improved the attendance and performance of teachers. But increased demand on schools has not been matched by investment.
- In Ethiopia the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) has been used to reduce food insecurity using public works (adults working in return for food or cash); and direct support (without a labour requirement). There are complex impacts on children's time use, especially associated with the public works element, which seems to increase the demand for children's paid work (perhaps with them substituting for work previously done by their parents), but also reduces the time they spend on chores in the home and, according to some evidence, enables girls to spend more time studying.
- In Andhra Pradesh, the public works scheme has provided a cushion for poor households, proving particularly valuable to those dealing with the impact of drought. However evidence also suggests that though marginalised groups are using these schemes, more is needed to ensure that they are fully included.

For more information on these schemes in each country see the profiles of Deepak in India, Fabricio in Peru, Hadush in Ethiopia, and Dao in Vietnam.

## The promise of education

Children and their parents in all four countries have one thing in common: they believe that education will help them to fulfil their dreams and have a better life than their parents. And to a large extent, the evidence is that they are right. Education does make a difference.

The parents may know this from their own experience: in all countries, the number of years a mother or father or other main caregiver has been to school has a strong positive impact on whether their son or daughter is educated. It also affects their children's health, nutrition and even children's own perceptions of their well-being (see Harika's profile).

For example, in India, while 92 per cent of older children whose mothers had been to secondary school were in school themselves, this went down to 68 per cent for children whose mothers were not educated. The percentage of children in school increases with each level of education obtained by their mothers. Children in India whose mothers had no education were less likely to have attended preschool and were four times more likely to have repeated a grade by the age of 8.

Perhaps for this reason, parents make huge efforts to send their children to school and to help them to succeed – in India, increasing numbers of poor families are finding the money to send a child to private school, and in Vietnam, the majority of families are paying for extra classes, even if they are poor and get into debt to be able to afford the extra costs (see box on page 107).

## What prevents children going to school – and staying there?

Despite these efforts, poverty pushes many children out of education. Nine of the 24 Young Lives children in this book have left school, and six others only attend intermittently, or dropped out for a while because they had other commitments, either at home or because their families needed them to earn money. For example, Harika, in India, left school for a time to work in the cotton fields but has now returned. By the age of 15, between one in ten and one in five Young Lives children had dropped out of school.

It seems to be mostly boys who drop out permanently in order to work. Manuel in Peru, Ravi and Salman in India, Tufa and Hadush in Ethiopia and Hung and Y Sinh in Vietnam are all doing paid work to help their families and have left school altogether. Of these, Y Sinh is the youngest, at 9, while all the rest are over 15.

Only two girls have dropped out of school completely, and they are now married. From this evidence it would seem that having left school early, they then got married, rather than the other way around. Seble, from Ethiopia, and H'Mai, from Vietnam, are both 16. Seble has been married for a few months and H'Mai already has a tiny baby. The Young Lives team could not talk to H'Mai, because tradition dictates that a woman must be confined at home, without visitors, until her baby is a month old, but her mother said it was her choice to get married, and Seble's mother said the same thing. Seble seems happy, but interestingly says that when she has children she would like them to go to school and stay there. Last time we visited, both girls had said they wanted to stay in school. We will be following Seble and H'Mai to see what happens to them, and also noticing whether other girls also leave school and get married.

Interestingly, we have not yet found huge differences between boys and girls in terms of their education. Most parents say they want their daughters as well as their sons to go to school so that they can get good jobs. In India, there seems to be a trend, however, for parents to send their sons to private school if they can only afford to send one child. Only Shanmuka Priya specifically complains that while there are currently 58 children in her class, only 15 are girls, and there is only one girl in the top group. She thinks she should be there too.

We are also noticing that some parents say they are not happy with the education their children are getting. For example, Duy's mother in Vietnam says that schools in the city are better than schools in the villages, which are badly equipped and where the children are not taught well: "Schools in Hanoi have enough equipment; schools in the rural areas don't. In

my opinion they don't teach very well in rural areas." Shanmuka Priya's mother, in India, also worried that when her daughter started primary school, the quality of the education there was not good.

In all countries, the children indicate that violence is prevalent in schools, both from teachers and in the playground. So for example, in Peru, Cecilia says that in 1st grade she had a teacher who did not let them out during breaks and who hit them on their legs with a whip. Fabricio says that if he does not finish his work he is punished by the teacher. In India, Shanmuka Priya says she doesn't like the male teachers who beat the children and explains: "Once I got hurt when the teacher beat me. I wrote in small letters, so he beat me." Deepak, on the other hand, who is now boarding in a school hostel, says the reason that Telugu is his best subject is because "the teacher never beats us and teaches us well".

Shanmuka Priya also talks about violence from other children and how she retaliated against those who hit her younger brother: "If I was not at school, somebody would hit him. He would come home and say: 'This boy hit me, or that boy hit me.' So I kicked them after the teacher went out." Louam, in Ethiopia, and Ravi in India talk about being teased by other children to the extent that Louam now doesn't like school and this is one of the reasons why Ravi has dropped out. In the next round of our research, we will find out whether this unhappiness with aspects of education influences whether children stay in school."

### **"Can our dreams come true?"**

As we have seen, the majority of the children's parents in all countries want both their daughters and their sons to go to school. As many of them have not had much of an education themselves, they believe this is the key to a better future for the next generation.

Shanmuka Priya's father, in India, says: "Why should our children suffer like we have? We want them to have a better life than we did. We all like to see our children happy and comfortable. I hope our dreams come true." In Peru, Manuel's mother puts it even more bluntly: "He will stay poor, like me, if he stays here."

Louam's mother, in Ethiopia, also says that she thinks her daughter will have a better life than she did because Louam is in school. She thinks the only things more important than education are "obedience, courage and saving money". In Peru, Lupe says that if she didn't go to school "I wouldn't learn things, and in secondary school, I'd be zero", and that it would be difficult to find a job if she didn't study.

But we also know that parents are very ambitious for their children – and many of the children themselves have high aspirations for their futures. Farmers want their sons and daughters to be doctors and engineers or, perhaps more realistically, teachers. Many want their children to go to university. But for poor families in the current economic climate, and even for families in the rich world, the jobs may just not be available, even if parents make huge sacrifices to ensure their children are educated. Lien's older sister has already found this out. She went to university, which was a great achievement. But now she is home and cannot find work and her mother embarrasses her by constantly asking anyone they meet if they can find her a job.

## Changing worlds: key points for policy

In the next rounds of our research we will be continuing to follow the children and their families to see what happens to them – whether they stay in school, how their families cope with the challenges life throws at them, and what kinds of roles and responsibilities the children take on as they grow into adults. We will be able to find out whether their dreams, and those of their parents, can be fulfilled.

It is important to start with listening to and respecting the perspectives of the children and their families. Learning from the experiences explored in this book can help policymakers develop better and more successful policies and programmes which address the challenges faced by children in poor families, and build on their strengths and aspirations.

From a policy point of view, some key points emerge from the children's and families' perspectives:

- Not all children have benefited from falling poverty rates. Inequalities interact with each other, and children are repeatedly disadvantaged because of where they live, their ethnicity and household poverty. Economic growth needs to be pro-poor, for example, through rural development and the expansion of services into the poorest areas.
- Poverty affects many areas of children's lives, from health, to education and future opportunities. If they are doing less well in one area, this can affect another one; having poor health will affect their ability to go to school, for example. Designing policies from children's points of view means creating a system of different services which support their well-being and achievement in one area (e.g. school enrolment) while ensuring that this is not undermined by lack of progress in another (e.g. poor-quality health facilities).
- Our evidence shows clearly that children and young people and their families believe that education is key to improving their lives. And while enrolment levels in school are improving, attention now needs to be paid to the quality of education received as well as the learning environment.
- It remains to be seen whether the promise of education will be translated into better-paid jobs and improved life chances for both girls and boys. In order for this to happen, governments need to ensure that there are sufficient employment prospects when children leave school, through the development of appropriate skills and availability of vocational training, alongside pro-poor growth and development.
- Government social protection schemes are showing positive results for children and their families, such as enabling them to attend school (for example some families use the wages earned to pay for school materials) and to cope better when crises occur. But the quality and coverage of other services, such as health facilities, needs to improve alongside these schemes, so that families can participate more effectively.
- As the children become older, differences increase between children, including those between boys and girls. Poverty and gender interact to disadvantage both sexes. Boys may have to leave school to work to support their families, and girls may get married and have children at a young age. It is important to understand how poverty can widen inequalities and reinforce social norms for boys and girls, and to ensure that policies do not exacerbate these inequalities.

- We are also finding that policies may have unintended consequences. For example, a social protection programme may take an adult away from the house to work, which will improve the family income, but may mean that children have to do more in the home. This in turn might affect their education, causing them to drop out of school. Policymakers need to be aware of this when formulating policies, listening to children and their families and improving ways of monitoring and taking into account what they have to say.

Children's lives, and the world around them, are changing rapidly. But our research is revealing just how much poverty continues to shape the experiences of the Young Lives children. They may have high aspirations, but their chances in life are often heavily influenced by where they are born and their family circumstances. In order not to waste the talent of children such as these, policymakers need to develop policies and programmes which can unlock their potential and build on their many strengths. Only then will they be able to realise their dreams.

# Country context: Ethiopia

Ethiopia, a country in the Horn of Africa, has a population of 80.7 million. It is Africa's oldest independent country but remains one of the world's poorest, although progress has been made in recent years. Child mortality has fallen, access to healthcare has improved and advances have been made in primary education, in part due to the commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The Government has also introduced a number of Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes.

For the last seven years, Ethiopia has had double-digit economic growth rate – around 11 per cent on average each year. More than 60 per cent of government spending now goes to what the Government calls pro-poor sectors, namely education, health, roads, water and agriculture.

But in 2011, the United Nations still ranked Ethiopia 174 out of 187 countries in terms of human development. Almost 40 per cent of the population survives on less than 1.25 dollars a day. The country also suffers regularly from drought, which affects up to 13 million people. Many families are unable to buy or grow enough food to feed themselves, and so need food aid each year to survive. The effects on children are devastating.

- One in every 13 children dies before reaching their first birthday, while one in every eight does not survive until they are 5 years old.
- Nearly one in two children under 5 are stunted (short for their age), 11 per cent are wasted (thin for their height), and 38 per cent are underweight.

Despite significant investment to increase enrolment in primary schools, they are often poorly staffed and equipped. There are large differences in children's attendance between urban and rural locations, between boys and girls, and between and within regions. Overall literacy is low, at 31 per cent for rural and 74 per cent for urban residents.

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**Sources:** Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report 2011*; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children 2012*.



# Afework's story

**Afework is now 16 and is generally happy with his life. He is still living with his brother and cousin, and they have a good system for managing the house together. Afework is in a private school, paid for by a scholarship for orphans, and is about to take his national exams. And the last few weeks have brought the family a big and welcome surprise ...**

When the Young Lives team arrives, Afework is proudly wearing a new white T-shirt, printed by the church with quotes from the Bible. Everything in his house is very clean and tidy, with pictures of saints on the walls, and a shared kitchen. The three young men have a system for household chores – Afework washes up, cleans the house and washes his clothes and school uniform, and Bekele does most of the other jobs like making the beds, cooking, baking *injera* (Ethiopian bread) and preparing tea. Addisu is in charge of the household and finances and makes the rules.

This time there were also some big differences in the house, including new furniture, a television, and even a PlayStation. The roof was new too, and the old linoleum on the floor had been replaced by tiles. This was all the doing of his sister, said Afework happily. Last time, he was sad because she had gone to work in the Middle East. But today he is delighted because she has just come for a visit. He came home from school and there she was, waiting for him.

“What did she say to you?”

*She gave me a kiss. We had food and drink together and she gave us games, blankets and other household things. The next day, she bought us a cabinet from the market. She asked me what she should bring me next time and promised to send me a laptop computer.”*

He was also very happy because at the time of his sister's arrival, he had been preparing to invite his *mahber* (informal community association) friends for St Mary's Day. He had been postponing this because he was not able to prepare all the things needed for the feast. When his sister came, she helped him. He was very proud. He invited his friends and neighbours for food and soft drinks. His celebration was the best of all the feasts prepared by other association members, he says.

Addisu also acknowledges how much the family has benefited from the support of his cousin (whom he too calls 'sister').

*“We are changing in good ways. Every year, things are getting better.”*

Afework was 12 years old last time we visited him. His mother died when he was 7, and his father when he was 10. Since then he has been living with his older brother, Bekele, and his cousin Addisu, who is like a brother and father to them both. Afework had a scholarship to go to school because he was an orphan. He liked school and wanted to be a doctor or a football player when he grew up.

What is the reason for the changes?

*We have a sister abroad and it is her help that has changed most of the things here. We used the money she sent us to buy what is needed in the house. We also have cousins on my father's side who send us money once a year and we buy things that are really necessary with that."*

Addisu talks a little bit about his own life, which he says was much harder than Afework's. He had no-one to advise or support him. His mother was forced to marry his father at the age of 14, and died soon after he was born. Addisu was sent to live with his aunt, as his father was a soldier and often away. Then his father was killed, and his aunt starting beating him, ordering him to work a lot and insulting him. One day he left the house and went to live with his friends. He worked as a shoeshine boy. He believes that Afework is very lucky "because he has not seen the bad life" like he has.

Afework thinks he has a good life. He has many friends and is still at school. The orphans' scholarship allows him to go to a good private school. He says he is now preparing for national exams and working hard.

*"I see my friends studying hard and am motivated to study. I get good grades.*

Who helps you when you need support?

*My older brother has completed Grade 10 and is in vocational school. My teacher also helps me."*

Afework says religion has become very important to him.

*"When I was around 10 years old, I did not like going to church. I was forced to go. My family told me going to church was a good thing. But one day, I started to like it and now I to go to church all the time. And I became a member of the church choir."*

He says he admires the father of a boy in his community, who is a professor. In Ethiopia, he admires the prime minister for his leadership skills and knowledge to lead 'this poor country'. In the world, he admires President Obama because he is the first black American president. He says he also admires the footballer Cristiano Ronaldo and Teddy Afro, a popular Ethiopia singer. And the singer Justin Bieber.

In terms of his future, he says he is still keen on becoming a soccer player, but he says he is also leaning towards being a doctor or an engineer, after discussions at school.

*"We are changing in good ways.  
Every year, things are getting better."*

## “I will never be anybody’s servant”: children’s understandings of wealth and poverty

Afework and some of the other young people in his community had a number of discussions about what it meant to be rich or poor. This is what he said:

*“Nobody gets wealth from their mother’s womb. One gets wealth by means of education and work.*

How for example? Having your own job?

*I will educate myself and have my own job but I will never be anybody’s servant. But if you do well with your job, you might be able to be the manager of that company or be in another position. You can even have your own company.”*

The boys agreed on a list of things that would apply to a boy who was not doing well, and that the reverse would be true for one who was doing well (not in any order).

- Lack of a play space
- Lack of a space for studying
- House located near dirt, hence susceptible to diseases
- Being bad-mannered
- Lack of family love
- Spending time with drug users
- Leading an inadequate life
- Unable to learn
- Involved in child labour
- Unable to get a balanced diet
- Leading a hopeless life
- Works but does not get enough money
- Eats dirt
- Lives in a house made of plastic.

Young Lives is unusual in looking at children’s subjective well-being. Our interviews suggest that in general, children see well-being as encompassing material, social, personal and family resources. Rural children give more emphasis to material resources such as land and livestock, while urban children stress the importance of services, such as education. Ill-being, or living a bad life, comes as a result of not having or not being able to access these resources.

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**See also:** Laura Camfield (2012) “‘Pen, Book, Soap, Good Food and Encouragement’: Understandings of a Good Life for Children among Parents and Children in Three Ethiopian Communities’ in Jo Boyden and Michael Bourdillon (eds) *Childhood Poverty: Multidisciplinary Approaches*.

## Beyond orphanhood

There are an estimated 5.4 million orphans in Ethiopia as a result of the death of one or both parents, with around 15 per cent believed to have been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. Within the Young Lives study in Ethiopia, up to one in five of the older children had lost one or both parents by the age of 15, and one in ten of the younger group by age 8.

There has been a widespread assumption that orphans have poorer life chances than other children. However, our findings indicate that:

- inequalities in schooling and health outcomes are larger between urban and rural children and according to household poverty level than between orphans and other children.
- the vast majority of orphans are, like Afework, cared for by family members and play an important role in supporting the households in which they live.
- children's experiences are shaped not only by parental death and which parent has died, but also by the wider social and economic contexts of their daily lives, including their gender, age and household poverty level.

Our in-depth interviews with children show that being an orphan does not necessarily result in negative impacts on children's experiences and life chances. Orphans tend to rate themselves lower in subjective well-being, suggesting that parental loss impacts on children in other ways, such as their identity, and effects may appear later. However, many of the problems faced by orphans are also faced by other children in their communities. It is poverty, not only orphanhood, that is at the heart of the difficulties these children face. So rather than policies based exclusively on targeting specific groups such as orphans, increasing the coverage of basic services and social protection schemes would be a better way of reaching the poorest and most marginalised children.

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**Source:** Kिर्रily Pells (2012) *Beyond Orphanhood: Rethinking Vulnerability in Ethiopia*, Young Lives Policy Brief 16.

*“I will educate myself and have my own job but I will never be anybody’s servant. If you do well with your job, you might be able to be the manager. You can even have your own company.”*



# Hadush's story

**Hadush is now 16 and his life has improved a lot in the past few years. Due to a good harvest, his family circumstances are much better and they have been able to pay off their debts. And although he is worried about not having gone to school and learned to read and write, Hadush enjoys his work and has many ideas about his future.**

Hadush has changed a lot in the last few years and is now bigger than his peers. Last time we interviewed them, the family were worried about the harvest but since then there have been good rains and good harvests and his family has prospered. They have been able to pay off their debts, and buy oxen, a new bed, a radio and jewellery for Hadush's stepmother. Hadush's own mother died when he was very small. His parents had ten children, two of whom died young. All but Hadush have now left home and some of his older sisters have children of their own.

His stepmother has been married to his father for nine years now. She says that she was married to her first husband at the age of 15 and that Hadush's father is her fifth husband. She was divorced each time because she could not have children. She is now 44 and Hadush's father is 68. She has problems with her eyesight.

The family have a toilet but no electricity or running water. They get their water from communal water points. Their house has a new corrugated iron roof that Hadush is very happy about. He sleeps in the kitchen with a torch and radio next to his bed.

Hadush dropped out of school when he was 7 or 8 because the school was a long way away and, he says, there was no-one to help at home. Hadush's father says none of his boys went to school, though two of his daughters did.

*"All the boys have refused to go to school and none of them is educated.*

**Whose path did Hadush follow?**

*It was his own decision."*

But he also says that Hadush regrets not going to school. He gives an example of a time when Hadush was invited to take part in a group discussion with his peers. But he refused to participate because he was shy and feared that he might be asked to write something. Hadush went to a religious school for a while, and both he and his father talk about him going back one day so that he can learn to read and write.

Otherwise, Hadush says he is healthy and enjoys his work. At the moment he is digging soil and sand and loading it onto trucks, which is hard physical work but

Hadush was 13 when we last saw him. He lived in a rural area with his father, stepmother and three older siblings. His mother had died when he was small and his father had married again when Hadush was 7 years old. Hadush spent most of his time looking after cattle and was proud of his work.

keeps him healthy. Last year he was allowed to plough by himself, which he enjoys. He also likes being able to contribute to the family. "I am happy with my job. On festivals and holidays, I buy drink and meat for my family."

Hadush says that his family's main activities are construction work, selling cobblestones, farming and selling vegetables in the regional capital and the next village. They also take part in the Government's Public Work programme, which he likes "because it is done with many people. And because I get to rest in the afternoon. When I do other work there is no time for rest."

Officially children are not allowed to take part in the programme until they are 18, so we ask him:

"Is there a difference in the type of work that is given to children and for adults in the Public Work Programme?"

*There is no difference; it is the same type of work for adults and for children. We all dig holes and only if you finish your work do you get to rest. There are also school students who miss their classes to take part. I know five students like this. Sometimes they ask permission from their teachers and sometimes they don't.*

How many days a week do you take part in this work?

*Sometimes we go every day and sometimes we miss some days. We work in the morning until midday.*

Do you know how much you are paid?

*No, I don't. But I think my parents receive ten kilogrammes of grain a month. I don't know because it is my parents that receive the money or the grain. If my parents are unable to work, I cover for them. But if we all are unable to do work, we are marked as absent.*

How do you think the Safety Net programme can be improved?

*Children should not work as much as adults. Many people prefer to be paid in grain rather than in cash. I would also like to suggest that when people are absent because they have very serious problems, they should not be considered absent.*

Looking at your family's living conditions, do you think that you are poor, medium or rich?

*Medium.*

What does poverty mean to you?

*When you do not have any animals. A medium family may have a cow with its calf, a pair of oxen. Rich people have camels, mules and horses, sheep and oxen.*

Why do you think that people are poor?

*Because God didn't bless them.*

What problems do poor people face?

*They suffer from debts, they are unable to pay back their loans, the interest is accumulated and they become more and more poor.*

What will you be doing when we come here again in three years?

*You will find me leading a good life. Ploughing, building houses and owning a shop.*

Will you stay here or go somewhere else to work?

*It all depends on God's will."*

## Ethiopia's Productive Safety Net Programme

The Government's Productive Safety Net Programme (PNSP) is the biggest social assistance programme in Ethiopia.<sup>1</sup> It was launched by the Government in 2005 and backed by international donors. It consists of two components: Public Work and Direct Support. Public Work, which is what Hadush's family are part of, is by far the larger programme, and pays daily wages for unskilled labour (either in cash or in kind) to people who do not have enough to eat, mainly in rural areas. Direct Support provides free food for people who are not able to work, such as disabled or elderly people, pregnant women and women who are breastfeeding.

Young Lives has found that about 41 per cent of rural households and 7 per cent of urban households in our study participate in the Public Work programme, while 13.5 per cent of rural and 4.6 per cent of urban households benefit from Direct Support. Overall, the programme seems to be having some success in benefiting more vulnerable groups. More poorer and female-headed households take part than better-off and male-headed households.

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**Sources:** Tassew Woldehanna (2009) *Productive Safety Net Programme and Children's Time Use between Work and Schooling in Ethiopia*, Young Lives Working Paper 40; Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

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<sup>1</sup> There are also a number of other social protection programmes, including programmes for agricultural extension, credit and savings, HIV-related education, family planning, and health extension.

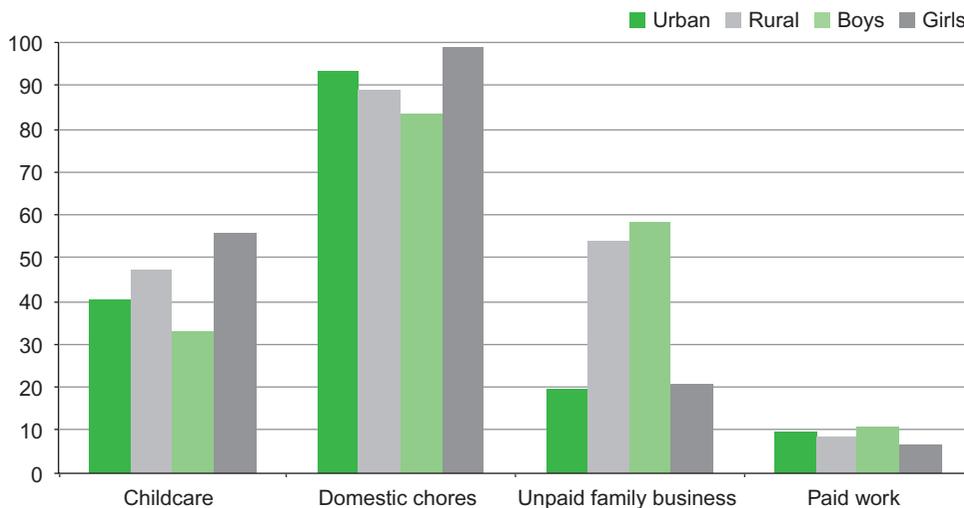
*“[In three years’ time] you will find me leading a good life.  
Ploughing, building houses, and owning a shop.”*

## Child work, paid and unpaid

We have studied children's time use and found that more than 90 per cent of the younger children and 98 per cent of the older children in Ethiopia are involved in some kind of paid or unpaid work (most of which is unpaid, including in family businesses or chores). A slightly higher number of older children are involved in paid work than younger ones (8.6 per cent compared with 8 per cent) and more boys than girls (11 per cent and 6 per cent).

We found that most children say they spend the majority of their days in school and spend around two hours a day studying. The number of hours spent on childcare and household chores is higher for girls than boys, and higher in rural areas than urban ones. The number of hours spent on paid work is slightly higher for girls than boys and in urban than in rural areas. Children in rural areas and boys are more likely to be doing unpaid work for the family business than girls and children in urban areas.

### Participation of older children in different activities (%)



We have also found that children's involvement in this kind of work is lower when their caregivers are more educated (households with more educated caregivers also tend to have higher wealth levels, both factors could affect children's work). Only 15 per cent of children whose caregivers were educated beyond 8th grade do unpaid work for the family business, compared with 45 per cent of those whose caregivers had no education.

**Source:** Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.



# Louam's story

**Now Louam is 9, and her wish to start school has been granted. Her family's circumstances are better, and they have a new kitchen and a toilet. Other things in the village have improved too. But school has not lived up to her expectations ...**

Louam now lives with her parents and three of her siblings. One of her sisters has just got married and another has joined the police. Louam's house has a corrugated iron roof and mud walls which are covered in newspaper on the inside. There are two bedrooms and a living room and a new separate kitchen and toilet. The living room is divided from the bedrooms by curtains. There are chairs made from leather and wood, and a table where Louam studies. She says that the family's living situation has improved since the Young Lives team last visited.

**“What is new in your home?”**

*We have built a kitchen and a toilet, so we no longer have to go outside. We have tap water but no power supply.”*

Louam also points out some positive changes in the village. There is a new road, a new bridge, a school, a health centre and a church. Some people have mobile phones, although her family does not.

Apart from this, the last year has been hard for the family. Louam's mother says there was not enough rain and so the harvest was not good.

**“What did you do about this?”**

*We sold our animals and had to buy grain. We sold nine sheep and also our eucalyptus trees.”*

Louam's mother says that the wedding of her daughter added to the family's expenditure. In addition, this year it will be their family's turn to invite others for the annual feast of St Michael.

*“There are 13 families who take turns to invite each other to eat and drink.*

**Is it expensive?**

*Yes. Although it hurts, it is our culture and we have to do it.*

**Does it affect Louam's life?**

*Yes, because we can't afford her clothes and school materials until later.”*

Last time we interviewed Louam, she was 6 years old. She is the youngest of seven children. Her parents farmed and bred cattle and were relatively well off, but there was a time when they had to live on bread and tea because bad weather had destroyed their crops. Louam was desperate to go to school like her older brothers and sisters.

Louam says her family are not poor and not rich, but medium. She thinks that poverty means wearing ragged clothes and going hungry. Louam knows what this is like. A year ago her mother, who is now 49, was seriously ill and had to go to the city to be treated in hospital. Louam's sister looked after Louam but they didn't have enough to eat. Her mother explains.

*"Last year, I was sick and was in the city for almost the whole year. I have been OK since last September."*

How did your sickness affect Louam?

*"There was no one to give her food, so she was hungry. Now I am better, she is OK. I bought her clothes and shoes and also wash her body every three days."*

When asked what good things have happened to her recently, Louam has a simple reply:

*"I found 50 cents while walking on the road."*

What else?

*"I found my book after I lost it somewhere."*

Last time the Young Lives team visited Louam, she was so desperate to go to school that she tried to register early and was very disappointed to be turned away. So now we ask her how she likes school. She is rather non-committal:

What do you like most at school?

*"Playing."*

Have you ever missed school?

*"Only once."*

Does your school have a library, playground, tap water and toilet?

*"Yes it does. It has separate toilets for boys and girls."*

When are you planning to finish school?

*"When I reach Grade 5."*

It turns out that Louam doesn't like school because she is teased because her skin is darker than the other children's.

Why do you want to leave in Grade 5?

*"Because the kids insult me."*

Do you become angry when others insult you?

*"Yes, I do."*

She says she wants to go to another school and stay there until 10th grade. Her mother says she also wants Louam to continue at school.

Do you think that your child will have a better life than yours when she grows up?

*"Yes I do, because her life will be better than mine as she is learning."*

What else is more important for your child other than education?

*"Obedience, courage and saving money."*

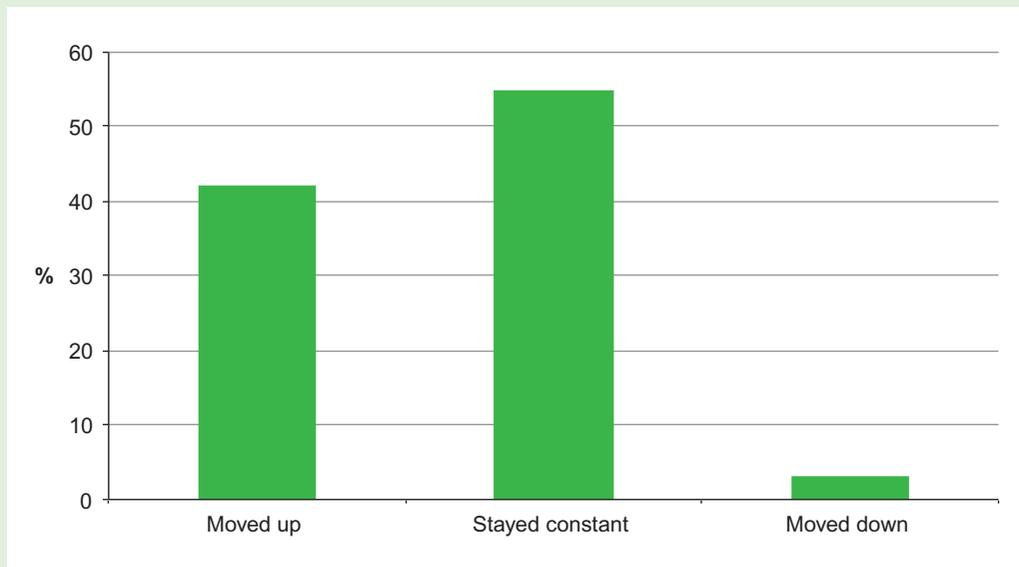
## Reductions in poverty in Ethiopia

Most of the children in our study come from families who are living below the national poverty line. But Louam's is not the only family in our study in Ethiopia whose circumstances seem to be gradually improving.

Young Lives measures poverty in three main ways, by wealth index, by absolute poverty<sup>1</sup> and by relative consumption poverty. On all three measures, poverty among Young Lives families seems to be declining.

- Numbers living below the national poverty line went down from 72 per cent in 2006 to 68 per cent in 2009.
- Numbers living in relative poverty<sup>2</sup> went down by 16 per cent over the same period.
- In terms of poverty measured by wealth<sup>3</sup> rather than consumption, 42 per cent of families moved out of poverty, 55 per cent stayed the same and 3 per cent became poorer.

### Young Lives families in Ethiopia: movement into and out of poverty, 2002–2009 (wealth level)



*“We have built a kitchen and a toilet, so we no longer have to go outside. We have tap water but no power supply.”*

## Reductions in poverty in Ethiopia *continued*

Although families living in rural areas tend to be poorer than those living in urban areas, rural poverty in Ethiopia is declining faster than urban poverty. The main reason for the improvements seems to be that families have increased the number of ways in which they earn income. In urban areas, involvement in business activities and new jobs, as well as remittances from family members living outside the household, have played a major part in this.

However, 9 out of 10 children in the younger group said that their families had been affected by rising food prices between 2006 and 2009. Families who have become poorer during this time say it is due to drought, and, like Louam's family, the illness of household members.

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**Sources:** Paul Dornan (2010) *Understanding the Impacts of Crisis on Children in Developing Countries*, Round 3 Preliminary Findings; Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

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- 1 The percentage of households living with a consumption level below the national poverty line
- 2 The percentage of households with less than 50 per cent of typical (median) income. (Median is when you rank everyone by income, then pick the middle one. it is used to avoid the tails of the income distribution biasing the calculation.)
- 3 Measured through consumer durables, service access and housing conditions. An index of items is created (between 0 and 1), and a threshold (0.4) set for being poor or not poor.

*“Last year, I was sick and was in the city for almost the whole year. I have been OK since last September. ... [While I was sick] There was no one to give her food, so she was hungry. Now I am better, she is OK. I bought her clothes and shoes and also wash her body every three days.”*

Louam's mother



# Tufa's story

**Tufa is now about 16, although he looks much younger. He did go back to school for a short time, but then his father was sent to prison and he had to drop out again to help his mother. He is a hard-working and responsible boy, but it will not be easy for him to return to school again although he would like to.**

Tufa is about 16 years old, although he does not know his exact age. He has not grown much since our last visit and is still very thin.

When we visited Tufa's house he was not there. We met his mother and his new baby brother, plus two of Tufa's seven siblings, and some neighbours' children who were playing with them. Tufa's grandmother was making coffee.

There are two buildings in the family compound. One is where the family lives and the other is a kitchen with no roof. There is also a barn for storing crops, where Tufa often sleeps. Inside the house there is a bench, a box for clothes, two chairs, a big pot (used for water or *farso*, home-made beer) and a very small table. On the floor, there is a mat made from animal skin for sleeping or sitting on. The living room is very small. There is electricity but no running water. The family have a radio but no television. There is a wooden bed which has animal skins instead of a mattress.

Tufa is not very forthcoming in his interview. He says he is sad about dropping out of school again and feels he is falling behind his friends. The most recent time was when his father went to prison. His father explains what happened:

*"I was employed as a security guard and a machine was lost. I was sent to jail together with seven other people for a year. As there was no one to take care of the farm, Tufa had to leave school."*

It was not the first time that Tufa's father had been in prison. Tufa says: "My father drinks alcohol and when he gets home drunk, he beats my mother. That makes me very sad." Tufa's mother says the argument that made her leave home and caused her husband to go to prison the first time was over an affair he was having with another woman.

While his father was in prison, the family were entitled to join the Government's Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), a social assistance programme which pays daily wages for unskilled labour, and provides food for those in need. Tufa's mother says the programme enabled her to buy food and clothes for the children. But she says there is corruption:

Tufa was 13 years old when we last met him. He was living in a village with his parents and five siblings. The family were poor and all lived in one room. Tufa had dropped out of school when he was 11 because the family home had burned down and he needed to work in order to support his family. He was hoping to be able to go back soon.

*“For instance, I have ten household members, but only four benefit. I ask them why they don’t register all my family members. They say the Government has told them to register only four or five members of a family of ten. But there are neighbours who register all their family members ...”*

Tufa has been working in the programme, although technically no one under 18 is allowed to do so.

“What types of work do you do?”

*We dig holes, plant seedlings, water seedlings, collect rocks.*

How many days do you work?

I collect rocks for two days and dig holes for two days.

Do you like working there?

*Yes*

Why?

*Because I am working.”*

But both Tufa and his parents agree that they are better paid if they work privately rather than on the PSNP. In any case, since Tufa’s father has been released, the family is no longer eligible. His father says: “We have now been categorised as ‘middle income’ and so we are not eligible to receive the support.” He says that he thinks life for his children is harder than it was for him as a child: “Though my family was not that rich, there was enough food for everybody. Neighbours would share. But children these days do not have enough food even to satisfy their basic needs.” He says he has had to sell most of the land he owned just to make ends meet.

His father says Tufa is a conscientious and hard-working boy:

*“He works hard day and night. His effort is even greater than mine and he never gets tired. He may not be very tall, but, in his mind, he is very mature. For example, he goes with the other children to collect leftover vegetables and sell them. But he does not spend the money immediately like the other children, but saves it to give to his parents and to buy clothes for himself. Sometimes he even buys a chicken.*

*He bought me the shoes I am wearing. He uses the money wisely to support himself and his family, especially his mother. Some of his actions are beyond our expectations. Even when the other children spend their time watching TV and playing, he usually does not want to do this. He is the wisest and most special of my children.”*

Tufa says his health is OK, though he continues to suffer from malaria from time to time. He says that he really wants to go back to school, although he might have to start in Grade 1 again. But he knows that it will be difficult to do this. He would also have to pay a fine for leaving school, which the family cannot afford. Very few of his siblings attend school. And neither of his parents had much education either. His ambition, he says, is to become a doctor. It is very unlikely that his wish will be fulfilled.

## A day in the life of Tufa

Period	Estimated time	Activities
Between waking up and breakfast	6.30am–8.30am	Took cattle to the field
	8.30am–9.00am	Came back from the field and ate breakfast
Between breakfast and lunch	9.00am–3.00pm	Fishing in the lake. Caught six fishes. Sold three of them at 12 birr (around 70 US cents) and gave the other three to the family
	3.00pm–3.20pm	Ate lunch with some of the money from the fish
Between lunch and bedtime	3.20pm–5.00pm	Came back home and rested
	5.00pm–5.30pm	Brought cattle from the field to home
	5.30pm–6.00pm	Spent at home
	6.00pm–6.10pm	Ate dinner
	6.10pm–7.00pm	Watched TV at neighbour's home with friends
	7.00pm–8.00pm	Came back home and played with siblings
Night	8.00pm–6.00am	Slept outside home to guard family crops in the barn

*“[Tufa] works hard day and night. His effort is even greater than mine and he never gets tired. He may not be very tall but in his mind, he is very mature. ... He is the wisest and most special of my children.”*

Tufa's father

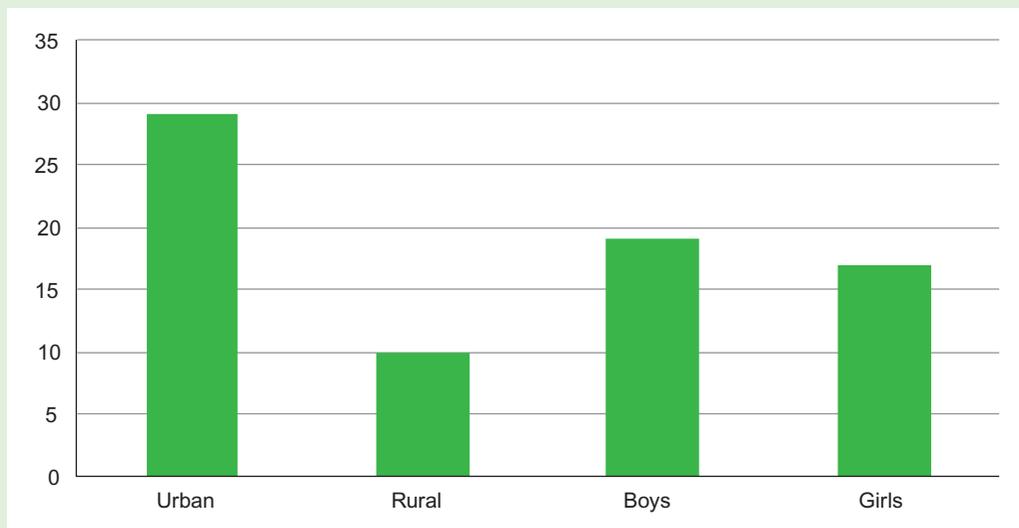
## School drop-out among older children

More children are now going to school in Ethiopia than ever before. This is partly because the Government has built many more primary schools – the number has almost doubled in a decade. As a result, the net enrolment rate in primary school increased from 21 per cent in 1995/6 to 83 per cent in 2008/9.

It is not surprising therefore that the difference in primary school attendance between our older and younger children reflects these improvements. While 77 per cent of the younger children are attending primary school, only 18 per cent of the older children have completed primary school by age 15. This is by far below the 72 per cent national primary school completion rate for all ages.

Like Tufa and Hadush, boys may drop out of school in order to support their families by working, especially if there has been an illness or a crisis in the family, while girls like Seble may leave in order to get married. There is a big difference between completion rates in urban and in rural areas.

### Primary school completion rate by age 15 (%)



**Sources:** Paul Dornan (2010) *Understanding the Impacts of Crisis on Children in Developing Countries*, Round 3 Preliminary Findings; Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.



# Seble's story

Seble is now 17. It takes a little while to find out that there has been a major change in her life. Seble says she is happy about it, and her mother has a lot to say as well ...

The last time we interviewed Seble, she said she wanted to stay at school and become a teacher. She did not want to get married young. This time, when we ask her about what has changed, at first she says nothing.

“So what new things have happened in your family? Has anyone died? Are there any new babies?

*No, nothing like that.*

Was anyone sick?

*No, no one.*

Did anyone get married?

*[Laughs] ... There is one!*

Who is that?

*It is me.*

Seble was married 11 months ago at the age of about 16. Seble's mother, who was married at 14 and had two children by the time she was Seble's age, says it was her daughter's choice. She seems to be ambivalent – on the one hand, she says she wanted Seble to wait and to be educated, on the other she says that girls these days must be married early to avoid 'dangers'.

*“Going beyond 16 or 17 is not good. We live in corrupt and dangerous times; it is better that she is married early. Many children have already fallen into bad ways. For instance, one girl I know, who is still a child has had a baby. She suffered a lot. Her father is not alive and it was hard for her and her mother. When you see these kind of things, it is better that a girl marries early.*

*The only joy that I have is in my married daughters. They often visit me and encourage me not to be cross with their father. They are doing well and I hope they will help me a lot in future. My boys are not as supportive as my girls. They don't get involved ... My husband has this chronic drinking habit. He often comes home drunk and insults us.”*

When the Young Lives team came last time, Seble was about 12 years old, though she wasn't sure of her exact age. We had a long discussion with Seble's mother about her childhood and about how important she thought it was for her daughter to stay in school. Seble herself talked about her health, and about helping around the house. She was still in school but had dropped out once and missed a grade.

Seble's father 's drinking often causes problems, although in his interview he tells a very different story: "I am at peace with everybody. I do not quarrel with anybody. I do not argue with my wife ... My wife is the main person in the household. She controls all the important activities."

Seble says her own husband, who has been educated up to Grade 8, is good to her, but that he does not want her to work. She also says that her life is better now than it was before. Her husband is a fisherman, and provides her with all that is needed. She says she spends her time knitting, cooking and cleaning and mends her husband's fishing nets, which she enjoys because she feels she is contributing to the household. In her free time she visits her friends or her mother and also takes part in *ekub*, an informal saving association.

"How often do you have *ekub*?

*Every month.*

How much money do you contribute?

*20 birr [just over a dollar].*

How many people are there in your *ekub*?

*There are five people.*

Where do you get the money to pay for your *ekub* as you don't have your own job?

*My husband gives it to me."*

Seble's material circumstances seem much better than when she lived with her parents. The house she shares with her husband has a single room that serves as bedroom and living room. There is a tiny mattress on the floor that serves as a bed and a place to sit. There are three-legged chairs and a small table. Seble says they are waiting for some new furniture. The house has glass windows and the walls are decorated with beautiful pictures. Their compound consists of seven single-room houses, which are rented out. The owner of the houses also lives in the same compound. There is a communal toilet and cooking place. There is also a tap and a well.

Seble's mother says her daughter has a better life than she did when she was young:

*"Seble's time is better [than mine]. Young people can go wherever they want to go and relax. Their relationships with their husbands are more friendly. They can even call their husbands by his own name. In my day, calling your husband by his name was taboo."*

Then there is the question of children. Traditionally, until Seble has a child, her mother is not allowed to set foot in her home.

"Does your mother come here to see you?

*Yes, but she does not enter my house. She is not allowed to enter until I give birth. But I go to her house whenever I want and we drink coffee, chat together and I wash her clothes.*

When do you want to have a baby?

*When I am 20.*

You don't want to have one before that?

*No.*

Why?

*We would like to get on better in life first.*

You said you were taking contraceptives in the form of an injection. Are you still taking them?

*I am still taking them.*

How many children do you want to have?

*Four. I think that is enough."*

Interestingly, although Seble dropped out of school herself, she says she wants her children to be educated.

"Do you plan to educate all your children?

*Yes.*

What is your attitude towards marriage? What do you advise your friends about marriage?

*I tell them to marry when they have finished school.*

Now you are 17. What will we find when we come in three years' time?

*You will find me with a baby."*

## Traditional practices and girls' choices

According to Ethiopian tradition, Seble has not married that young. Although 18 is the minimum legal age of marriage in Ethiopia, large numbers of girls are married before the age of 15. The median age at first marriage is 16 for women now aged 25 to 49 and 24 for men in the same age range.

What is interesting is that Seble and her mother both agree that the marriage was Seble's choice, not her parents'. Young Lives is finding that a number of girls are insisting on getting married young or undergoing female genital cutting,<sup>1</sup> despite their mother's objections. One mother explains: "The circumcision of my daughter who is 14 years old ... was done at her request. After she witnessed a girl insulting another who was not circumcised, my daughter came home and asked me to organise her circumcision."

As we have seen with Seble's mother, attitudes towards both practices are mixed. There is a lot of resistance to change. Traditionally, both early marriage and circumcision were seen as a way of protecting girls; keeping them safe from sexual activity outside marriage, which is considered socially unacceptable.

The mother of Teje, another child featured in this book, says that she was circumcised but her daughters are not. The 2005 Ethiopian Demographic Health Survey, shows that although more than 74 per cent of women between the ages of 15 and 49 have undergone some form of genital cutting, this has dropped to 38 per cent for their daughters.

1 Procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons (WHO 2010). Also known as female genital circumcision and female genital mutilation, the practice can have serious health implications.

### Traditional practices and girls' choices *continued*

The practice of FGC varies throughout Ethiopia, with some girls being circumcised at birth and others before marriage. Both FGC and early marriage are now against the law. But getting rid of such practices, and the firmly held beliefs behind them is not easy. One grandmother says: "People are saying that it is taboo if a girl is left uncircumcised." But she also says that the circumcision caused her so much pain after marriage that she ran away from her husband. She notes:

*"On the one hand, when I see a girl going around with boys, I think that it would be better to circumcise her because she would be calm and wouldn't be seen with boys all the time. On the other hand, some girls are circumcised but are not disciplined. So maybe it depends on the nature of the girl. My experience shows that female circumcision has to be condemned. It is only God's will that I have survived at all."*

Despite the experiences of their mothers and grandmothers, some of the younger generation retains a strong belief that such practices are a necessary part of being female. Some young girls resort to being circumcised at night, which makes the operation more dangerous. The ban has also resulted in girls undergoing FGC at a younger age in some places.

Young Lives is looking into the reasons why these practices continue, and the policy implications of this. We believe that it is important to start with listening to and respecting the perspectives of girls and their families. Strategies aimed at reducing the practices need to be linked to other initiatives to improve the health and socio-economic status of women and families more broadly, including the promotion of education and employment opportunities for women and girls. The Government could also encourage culturally appropriate and sensitive ways of celebrating rites of passage (at birth or adolescence) which promote cultural values without causing physical damage. Changing cultural values is much easier through open dialogue about fears and anxieties concerning social processes of change, rather than just through legislation.

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See also: Jo Boyden, Alula Pankhurst and Yisak Tafere (2012) 'Child Protection and Harmful Traditional Practices: Female Early Marriage and Genital Modification in Ethiopia', *Development in Practice* 22.4; UNICEF 'Ethiopia Statistics', [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/ethiopia_statistics.html).

*"[Today] young people can go wherever they want to relax. They can even call their husband by his own name. In my day, calling your husband by his name was taboo."*

Seble's mother



# Teje's story

Teje is 9 years old. She has three sisters and a brother, the youngest of whom is 4. Her family has suffered a lot recently because her father is ill and unable to work. Teje has big ambitions, and her mother too has dreams for her daughter. But it is too early to say whether they will work out ...

Teje lives in a city, in a compound with many trees. Her house has one room divided into two by a curtain. The family sleep in one half and live in the other. There is big table in the living room which is used for studying. There is a television and a radio. Young Lives asks Teje about her home:

“Do you have a toilet, electricity and water?”

*We share the toilet with the neighbours but we have our own electricity and tap.”*

Asked if there is anything new in the house, Teje pauses and then says, ““I have hair cream.”

Teje's mother, who is 34, says: “We live here because we have no other choice; renting a better house would cost us more than 200 birr [about 11 dollars]. I get paid very little and my husband retired last year so all we have is his pension.”

Illness has blighted Teje's family's life. She herself says she has been sick four times with typhoid since the last Young Lives visit. Her brother was in hospital for a month with asthma. But the main problem has been her father's health. His illness means he can no longer work, and so the family now has to rely mainly on her mother's income. This has pushed them from being a middle class family to a poor one.

*“Our children were well fed and educated back then. My husband retired early so I have to go to work at 4am and work until late at night to support our family.*

Has your husband's health improved?

*No. he has high blood pressure caused by diabetes and now he has nerve problems so he can't work any more; he needs a stick to walk with. He used to be a mechanic but now he can't even work as a guard.”*

On top of this, prices for essentials have gone up, so the family's situation continues to deteriorate:

*“There is inflation. There isn't much cooking oil available. Coffee and corn are very expensive.*

What do you do to cope with this?

*Sometimes the children have to miss breakfast or lunch.*

Teje didn't feature in the first book of Young Lives children's stories, although we have been following her, like the other children, since 2002.

Did that happen before?

*No, they would at least eat bread for breakfast. I used to buy 30 or 40 kilos of teff [a type of flour] but now I can only afford to buy 25 kilos and it doesn't even last a month.*

Has the crisis affected your daughter?

*Yes, she worries like an adult."*

Teje says she was shocked when her father first became ill. She was only 5. The other things that have been difficult for her have been her grandmother's illness and the death of her uncle.

Teje goes to the local school, where she is in Grade 3. She says she is a much better student than she was last time Young Lives visited. "Back then, I was not very good but now I am a clever student." The Young Lives team notes that she is very logical. "She spoke out loud and had a nice smile. She raised interesting issues, and discussed things like an adult."

Her mother thinks Teje is getting a better education than she did herself. She left school early to marry and regrets this.

"How would you compare the quality of your education with hers?

*She has a better quality of education than I did. For example, we didn't get to learn English until 7th grade but they learn it from 1st grade.*

How would you compare your knowledge at her age with hers?

*She knows a lot more than I did. She draws good pictures and wants to learn.*

Do you believe education is important for her?

*Education is necessary for everyone; they don't even employ guards without an education these days."*

But what Teje really wants is to go to a private school, which her parents cannot afford.

"What kind of school do you want to attend?

*I want to learn in a private school.*

Does your mother want to send you to private school?

*Yes, she does.*

Do you know why she can't send you there?

*Yes, it is because we have economic problems."*

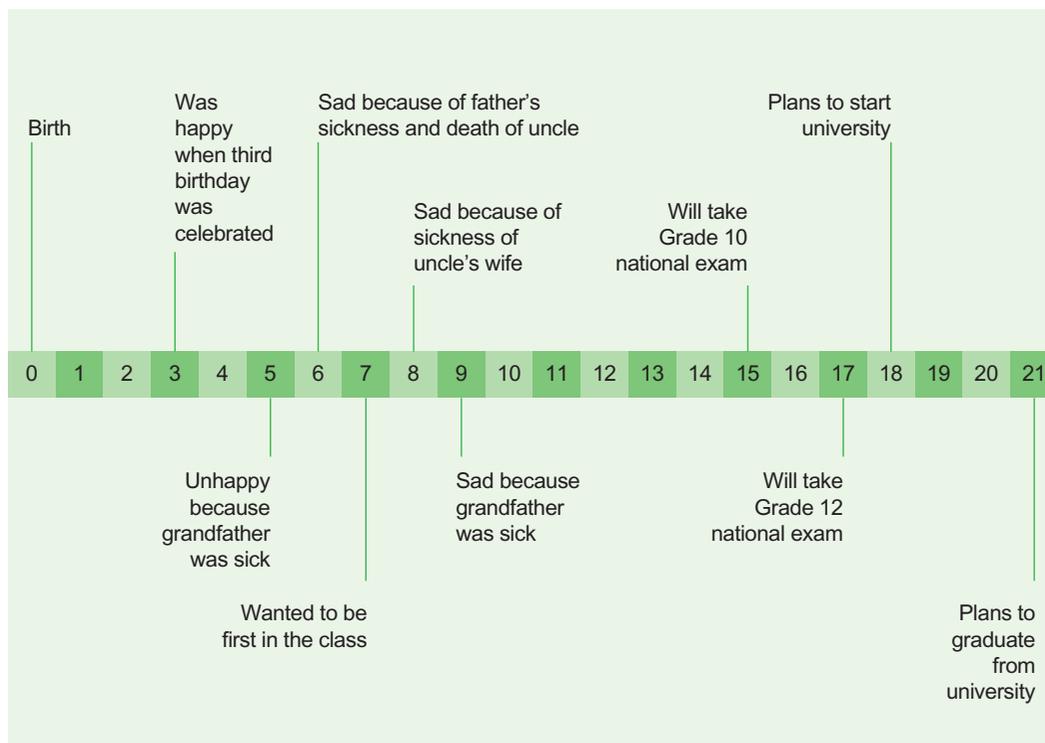
Despite this, both Teje and her mother have high ambitions for her. Her mother wants Teje to have a degree and a masters and to be a doctor. Teje says she wants to learn how to fly a plane and be a pilot. They both want her to go to America. Teje's mother is asked:

"Do you think children are always able to have what they dream of?

*It might not work out for her if she doesn't make every effort to be where she wants to be. We don't know what she will think when she grows up so it is difficult to predict her future. I wanted to be a doctor as well when I was a child but I got married and had children. I think it's a matter of luck."*

## Teje's timeline

The timeline Teje drew shows the high amount of sickness in her family.



## Poverty and ill health

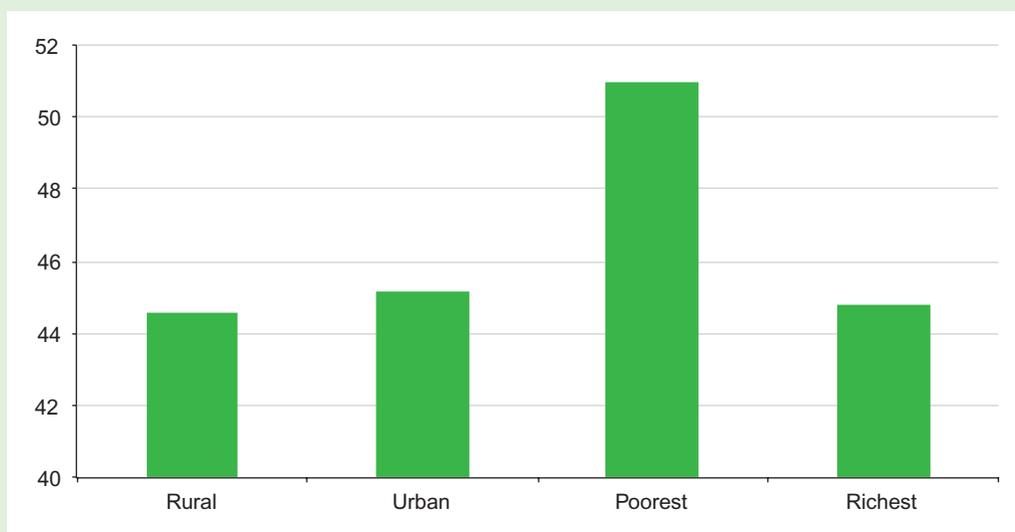
Ethiopian families seem to be ill more often than families in the other Young Lives countries. Between 2006 and 2009, reported illness among Young Lives families was 44 per cent in Ethiopia, 31 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, India, 29 per cent in Vietnam and 21 per cent in Peru. As we see from the table below, urban families like Teje's in Ethiopia reported marginally more illness than rural families and as might be expected, poorer families were sicker than richer ones.<sup>1</sup>

We have found that illness is both a cause and consequence of poverty, caused by poor living environments and exacerbated by the indirect and direct costs of being ill. The entire household, including children, is involved in managing ill-health, which is a considerable source of anxiety for poor families.

<sup>1</sup> Poor families in the lowest fifth of Young Lives households by income and richer families in the top fifth.

## Poverty and ill health *continued*

### Families reporting illness between 2006 and 2009, by location and poverty level (%)



In addition, we see that ill-health tends to co-occur with other types of adverse events (often called 'shocks') such as food price increases, crop failure or droughts, which also disproportionately affect poor households. In Ethiopia, 53 per cent of households reporting an environmental shock also reported experiencing a family illness or death, and 54 per cent of households reporting an economic shock also reported experiencing a family illness or death.

Like Teje's family, people use a range of strategies to deal with illness and crises. They may simply eat less, they may sell animals or other goods, they may use any savings they have. Children or other members of the family may do the sick person's work. Or they may borrow or seek help from relatives, neighbours or local organisations, or use government social protection schemes.

What is clear from our research is that there is a direct link between poverty and illness that has clear indications for policy: governments need to target the root causes of children's poor life chances, namely poverty and inequalities, rather than just the symptoms.

Source: Kirrily Pells (2011) *Poverty, Risk and Families' Responses: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 4.

*"I wanted to be a doctor when I was a child but I got married and had children. I think it's a matter of luck."*

Teje's mother



# Country context:

## India

India has a population of more than 1.2 billion people. It is a country of huge inequalities, with the second-largest number of billionaires in the world but also 25 per cent of the world's poor. It ranks 134 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index.

Over the last five years, India has seen impressive economic growth. Even during the global recession in 2009, the economy grew at a rate of 7 per cent of GDP. But inflation is a big problem, especially for poor people.

- 76 per cent of the population lives on less than two dollars per day.
- Malnutrition is more common in India than in sub-Saharan Africa.
- More children under 5 die from preventable and treatable diseases than in any other country.

Many of India's inequalities are tied to gender and caste: women and girls still face multiple discrimination and India ranks 129th out of 187 in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. The caste system, which dates back many thousands of years, is still extremely important in everyday life, with what the Government calls Scheduled Castes (otherwise known as *Dalits* or formerly 'untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes (otherwise known as *adivasis*, India's indigenous peoples) the most disadvantaged communities. This is despite the fact that discrimination on the basis of caste is now illegal, and various measures have been introduced to empower disadvantaged groups and give them better access to opportunities.

Andhra Pradesh, in south India, is its fifth-largest state and has a population of 84.6 million. It is still largely agricultural, although its capital, Hyderabad, is one of the leading centres of the technology revolution. The state was the role model for several new government initiatives during the 1990s to eliminate poverty and has made considerable progress on child development indicators since the mid-1990s.

- Rural poverty went down from 48 per cent in 1973/4 to 11 per cent in 2004/5.
- Unlike in the other Young Lives countries, poverty is higher in urban than in rural areas.
- Adult literacy went up from 61 per cent in 2001 to 67 per cent in 2011.
- But 76 per cent of men were literate compared with 60 per cent of women. And only 66 per cent of girls aged 6 to 17 attend school, compared with 77 per cent of boys.

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**Sources:** [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk); UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report*; S. Galab et al. (2011) *Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children*.



# Deepak's story

**Deepak is now about 8 or 9 years old. He is much happier. His father has remarried and he has a new stepmother and baby brother and is boarding at a boys' hostel so he can go to school.**

In the last interview, Deepak had tried going to the hostel but had not liked it, complaining of insects in the food. But although he was nervous at first, now he enjoys the hostel and seems very happy with the school. He is in Grade 4, where there are 54 students, all boys. He says he has five good friends.

*"I like my school now.*

**Why? What have you found there?**

*I mix with others well. The food is nice and the school is good."*

Conditions in the hostel are basic, but Deepak doesn't seem to mind. The boys sleep in the classroom at night and sit on the floor in the same room to do their lessons. They say they prefer the floor to sitting on a bench. He has four teachers, and learns science and social affairs, Telugu, Maths and English. He says he likes Telugu best because the teacher "teaches us well" and because "[t]here are lots of pictures, and I know Telugu better than the other subjects". In his previous school he only learned two subjects, he says.

Deepak wakes up at 4am. He makes his bed, brushes his hair and takes a bath, usually in the stream near the school. Then he puts on his uniform. He has breakfast when the bell rings at 6am and goes to class by 7am. At 12.30, he has lunch. He says that he is studying well, better than before. In the break, he goes to the playground to play cricket and *kabbadi*.<sup>1</sup> He has a little money from his parents so he can buy things in the school shop.

At home in the holidays, things are very different too. His older brother, Anand, has gone to live with his aunt. His new mother, who is his father's fourth wife, looks after the other children, including their new baby. The first three wives, who were also relatives, all died, two in childbirth.

Last time we interviewed Deepak, he was about 6 years old, though no-one was sure of his exact age. He belongs to one of India's indigenous tribal groups, and lives in a remote rural community with his father, two younger sisters and older half-brother. His mother died in childbirth. His father was a day labourer and often away. He and his stepbrother were trying to look after the family with the help of his grandmother. His health was not good and his grandmother was worried about him. He was going to the local school but often skipped classes.

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<sup>1</sup> A team game, a combination of wrestling and rugby.

Deepak's father was sterilised after this last baby so there will be no more children.

Deepak's stepmother says all the children call her *Amma* (Mother), and that things are fine: "My husband is OK, I am OK with the children and the children are OK with me."

The only problem is that Deepak's grandmother, who Deepak used to be very close to, is not happy with the new marriage. Deepak's father explains: "My old mother-in-law is angry with her [the new wife] because I got remarried! She will not talk with me or come here often."

He feels concerned that this is affecting the children's relationship with their grandmother. "I feel bad [about this]. But we cannot change it."

Deepak's father says he is earning a little more money now than he was before, around 100 rupees (about two dollars) for a day's agricultural work. He mainly works growing groundnuts before the monsoon because they do not require much water, and then after the monsoon he works in the paddy fields.

He talks a little about his own childhood. He grew up in another village and came to this village ten years ago. His father died when he was young. So he left school and worked looking after cattle in return for food. He thinks life now is better than it was then. For example, now there are medical services. Before, if there was an emergency: "We used to tie [the sick child] in a bedcover and carry them to the clinic. Now if we call 108 they will come and take you."

Even ten years ago, he says, there were no cement roads, or wells or taps. There was not even a bridge across the river, and if people wanted to go to the market, they had to cross via a makeshift and dangerous bridge made of wires and ropes. There was no government ration shop, where poor people could get food more cheaply. There were no school hostels like the one Deepak goes to. There were no government schemes (see below), which Deepak's father thinks has been beneficial for poor people like him and his family.

Because they are poor, school is free. His younger children are now also in the local school. Deepak's father says it was Deepak's decision to join the hostel and that he is happy there. "The facilities are OK, the master is there, and the hostel warden is there – they will look after him and tell us if he is sick." He feels Deepak is getting a better education than he would have in the local school. Deepak is asked what he would like to do when he grows up but just says he wants a job so he can earn money to buy clothes.

## The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

India has a range of social protection schemes to help poor families. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is the biggest social security programme for the informal sector. It provides 100 days of unskilled manual work a year for each household, a legal commitment on the part of the Government to provide employment for those who seek work. As such, the scheme is one of the most important ways of alleviating poverty in India.

The programme covers all 22 districts in Andhra Pradesh. By 2009, 78 per cent of people in 15 of the 20 Young Lives study sites were involved. The Young Lives research team found that:

- poorer and lower-caste households were more likely to register, as were those affected by drought
- having more than five influential relatives increased the probability of registration by 10 per cent
- registration reduced the probability of a boy working by 13 per cent and programme take up reduced it for girls by 8 per cent.

In general the programme seems to offer a viable security net for households and a range of employment opportunities. It also seems to have an important effect on children.

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Source: Vinayak Uppal (2009) *Is the NREGS a Safety Net for Children? Studying Access to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for Young Lives Families and its Impact on Child Outcomes in Andhra Pradesh*, Young Lives Student Paper.

*“I like my school now. ... I mix with others well. The food is nice and the school is good. There are lots of pictures, and I know Telugu better than the other subjects.”*

## The impact of India's Midday Meal Scheme on nutrition and learning among Young Lives children

The Midday Meal Scheme is the largest school meal programme in the world, covering an estimated 139 million primary school children. It has now been extended to high school. It aims to enhance enrolment, retention and attendance and improve levels of nutrition.

This is very important, as 45 per cent of children under the age of 5 in India are stunted (which means they are shorter than they should be for their age). This is a higher percentage than in the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A high percentage of Young Lives children also experience thinness and underweight – all of which are signs of long-term malnutrition.<sup>2</sup>

Although started in 1995, the scheme was not introduced in all states in India until 2002, when it became mandatory to provide cooked meals for children in primary school. In 2004 a Supreme Court order also made it mandatory to provide midday meals during summer vacations in 'drought-affected areas'. Drought has affected large sections of India's rural population – among Young Lives children, almost 35 per cent of rural households suffered from drought between 2002 and 2006, when there was a severe lack of rainfall. In Andhra Pradesh, the scheme reaches 7.26 million children in primary schools. Of the Young Lives children enrolled in government schools, over 9 in 10 benefit.

Assessing the impact of the scheme and how it could be improved is of crucial importance, though it is not easy because children in government schools who receive the meals are typically from poorer, more disadvantaged households than children in private schools, who do not get the meal. But our research has found significant impacts on both nutrition and learning:

### Impact on children's nutrition

- Children aged 4 to 5 are taller and heavier than might otherwise be expected, suggesting that the midday meal helps reduce serious malnutrition.
- The school meals have most impact on nutrition in areas affected by drought. For younger children, there are large and significant gains in height-for-age and weight-for-age, which more than compensate for the negative effects of the drought.

### Impact on children's learning

- For children aged 11 to 12 there is evidence of significant positive impacts on their learning, although it is not clear if these are generated by less hunger or by improved school attendance.

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**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Caitlin Porter et al. (2010) *The Impact of the Midday Meal Scheme on Nutrition and Learning*, Young Lives Policy Brief 8.

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<sup>2</sup> Thinness is low body mass index (BMI-for-age) and underweight is low weight-for-age.



# Salman's story

**Salman is now 15 years old. He still lives in the city and is now working as a driver. Today, although the family still struggles to make ends meet, he says he is doing much better and he has high hopes for the future.**

Salman is currently working as a driver for a building company. His grandmother works in the company's office and got him the job. He drives his boss to and from work every day. He has been doing this for three months. He enjoys his work and says: "By the grace of Allah everyone is fine. I started working and my younger brother and sister are studying."

Because he is under 18, he is not legally allowed to drive so he had to pay a bribe to get a licence. He borrowed the money from the man who owns the hotel where his father used to work. He has now paid this back. He says he learns fast and learned to drive in two months, although he was nervous. "I was scared of hitting somebody. But later when I saw brake pedals at the teacher's feet, I felt all right."

In his new job, he earns 3,000 rupees a month (about 56 dollars). He gives 2,500 to his mother and keeps 500 for himself. They were able to buy a DVD player and he says he enjoys watching films. He also bought an expensive mobile phone but had to sell it because they were short of money. He then bought a cheap one but that was stolen – or possibly it fell out of his pocket, he admits.

He uses his own money to bet on cricket games that he plays with local college boys on Sundays. He has won up to 1,500 rupees (28 dollars) this way. He gets up at 8 and plays cricket until 3 or 4 in the afternoon. "After the game I come home, take a shower and sleep. Sometimes I play volleyball at night."

Salman says his best friend is his childhood friend, Ahmed. "He failed his exams so he did not go to college. Right now he just sits at home. We talk every night."

He says his mother works as a domestic servant for rich people. Her boss is a doctor. She earns between 1,500 and 2,000 rupees a month. His brother lost his job and is not working at the moment, though sometimes he does the driving instead of Salman.

The family had to leave their previous house because the landlord put the rent up. The rent in the new place is 3,000 rupees a month. They only have two rooms but to make ends meet they rent one of the rooms to a married couple for 2,000 rupees.

Salman's four uncles are living abroad. One is in Saudi Arabia, one is in Qatar, one is in Kuwait and

Last time we visited, Salman was 12 years old. He came from a Muslim family and had four siblings. His father died when he was 6. The family lived in a city. Salman had left school and was working in a shoe shop. His mother had found him the work to get him out of what she called "bad company".

one, he says, is in Africa. Salman says he likes it when they come to visit because they bring chocolates, crisps and clothes.

His sister, who lives nearby with their grandmother, is engaged to someone who is working in Saudi Arabia and plans are going ahead for her wedding, which their uncle says he will finance.

Salman's mother is really pleased with him now. She used to worry about him but she feels that in the past months he has grown up a lot.

*“He is becoming aware. He understands everything now. He is more intelligent and caring. The children have seen me working hard since their childhood. They understand that their mother goes out and works hard to pay the rent and to feed them. Naturally they have sympathy for me.”*

She says he is a caring son.

*“He worries a lot about me. If I lie down, he asks if I am OK and offers to make me tea and get something to eat.”*

When you see all this, how do you feel about Salman?

*I am happy that Allah has given him intelligence. And he takes care of his mother. What else can a mother want, when she gets happiness through her children? To a mother, her children are more precious than the wealth of the whole world.”*

Salman says that looking after his family is his main preoccupation at the moment, but he would like to go and work as a driver abroad where he can earn a lot more money. He has applied for a passport and says that his uncle will find him work. He says he knows that he will have to learn to drive on the left side of the road rather than the right and to get a new driving licence and take a test:

*“They will see if I can drive or not. They drive very fast in that country. There are no small streets. To turn right, you have to indicate. You can't turn suddenly like we do here. If you do that, there will be accidents.”*

But once this is sorted he has many plans. He thinks his brother will also work abroad: “Me and my brother will save money and build a house. I will educate my younger brother. I want to send my mother on the *Haj* [Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca].”

Salman says he will get married when he is around 25, and that he already has someone in mind. He has a girlfriend (although he hasn't told his mother yet). She wants to continue studying. Her parents both work in an office.

*“Once she called me by my name and asked me to come up. So I went up to her house. She said, ‘I love you.’ I said, ‘I love you too.’”*

When your mother comes to know about this, what will she say?

Salman laughs: *“She will beat me!”*

He says he only wants two or three children. He wants to send them to school and college and for them to become engineers or something similar. He knows he will have to leave his wife and children in India when he goes abroad to work.

In general, Salman seems happy with his life and feels that it has improved a lot since last time.

*“I was crazy then. But now I am bit cleverer. I learn well. I have become aware of many things. I was childish. I did not know many things. I used to do stupid things. Now I don’t do those things any more.”*

### Children and work

Most children in India do some kind of work, paid or unpaid, including caring for siblings or doing chores around the house. We found that work among Young Lives children often increased in response to drops in household income, and was very sensitive to children’s gender and their age, and that in urban areas it varied according to women’s position in the family.

The younger children, who are 8 years old, are almost all in school for most of the day. But even at this young age, girls and boys both help out around the home – about 20 per cent of girls say they look after other family members and more than a third say they help with domestic chores. Fewer boys help care for other family members, but a fifth of them help with chores. Very few of the children are helping on the land or in the family business at this age, and only a handful work for pay outside the household.

Among the older children, the percentage working for pay has risen from 6 per cent in 2002 when they were aged 8, to 22 per cent in 2006 when they were 12, to 28 per cent by 2009 when they were 15.

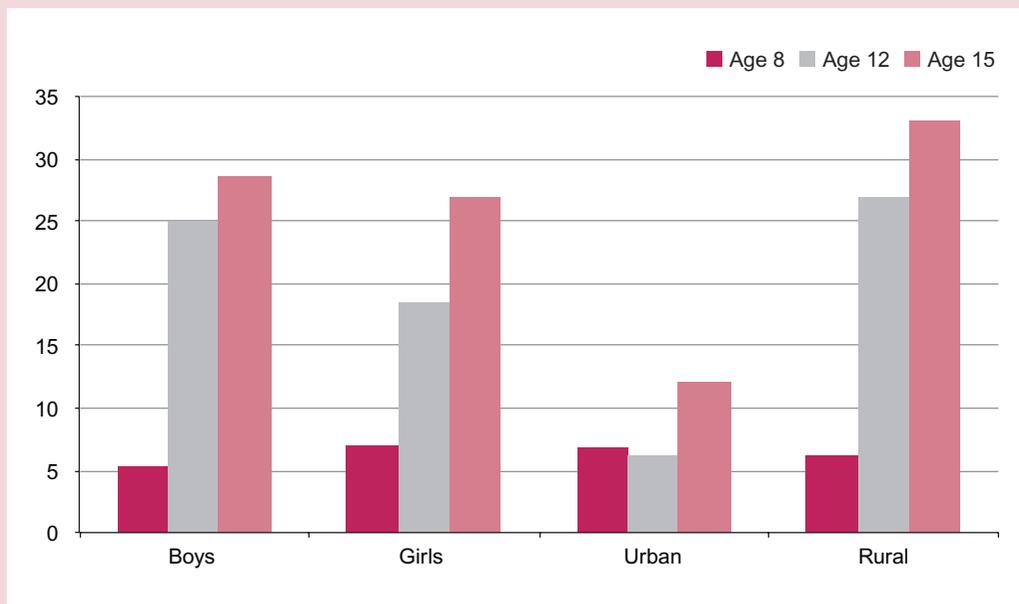
As the chart on the next page shows, slightly more boys than girls were working for pay. More children were working in rural areas (33 per cent) than in urban ones (12 per cent). Children from poor households were more likely to work than those from households that are not so poor. We also found that children from the disadvantaged Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were more likely to be working than children from the other castes.

*“What else can a mother want, when she gets happiness through her children? To a mother, her children are more precious than the wealth of the whole world.”*

Salman’s mother

## Children and work *continued*

### Children working for pay by age, gender and location (%)



As we see in a number of the children's and young people's stories, children from households with land often work on the family farm during the peak agricultural season, which affects time spent in school. Not only does this show the seasonal pressures on children, but it means that they may be formally enrolled in school and still miss class.

Work can be a way for children to learn new skills that equip them for adult life and build their feelings of self-reliance and self-esteem. However, work for pay under the age of 14, and work in hazardous situations, is illegal under international treaties governed by the International Labour Organization. We will be continuing to study child work and its effects as part of our research.

**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Kirrily Pells (2011) *Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 3; Sofya Krutikova (2009) *Determinants of Child Labour: The Case of Andhra Pradesh*, Young Lives Working Paper 48.

*“By the grace of Allah everyone is fine. I started working and my younger brother and sister are studying.”*



# Sarada's story

**Sarada is now 15. She has developed into a confident and outspoken young woman. She is determined to continue her studies and become a lawyer. She wants to make her own decisions in life, but this leads to conflict with her parents. The past few years have been very difficult for her and her family, as they have fallen into debt.**

Sarada lives with her father, mother, younger sister and stepbrother. Two of her older stepsisters and one stepbrother live in Mumbai. One sister is studying, and the other is married. Sarada's father also has another wife in Mumbai.

Sarada's family had been hoping to get a government grant under a housing scheme for a new house after their old one collapsed. This did not materialise so they took out a loan and have fallen heavily into debt.

As a result, Sarada and her siblings were taken out of school and sent to work in the cotton fields in order to pay off the debt. But Sarada became ill because her disability meant the work was too much for her. With the support of the self-help group for disabled people, her schoolteachers and her friend, Sarada lodged a complaint with the labour inspector against her parents and the landowner. As a result she was withdrawn from the work.

But her younger sister and older brother are still working on the cotton farm to clear the debt. So it is not surprising that there have been arguments between Sarada and her parents. In addition, she used to get a scholarship from the Government (for disabled children) which she used to give to her parents, but now she keeps the money for herself.

*"Since 9th grade, I do not obey my parents any more. I do what I want to do. If I feel like eating fritters, I get the ingredients and make them. I make chapattis for myself. On Sundays I get an egg. On festivals I bring good things for the house. Sometimes I buy pictures of gods. I also buy plates and glasses. My family members tell me off for wasting money. But I don't care what they say.*

*I know I spend a lot of money and I feel bad that I am not thinking of my parents' problems. Sometimes when my mother asks for money for tea and my father asks for beedis [cigarettes], I give them money."*

But she also thinks that her new confidence has to do with being educated. On one level, she says, her parents understand this: "They must realise that this is the age that I should be enjoying myself. Maybe that's why they let me have the freedom. I think they understand my pain, feelings and my ambitions much better now than before."

Last time we interviewed Sarada, she was 12 years old. She lives in a village and has been disabled since birth – though she can walk short distances, she has problems standing for any length of time. The family belongs to a low-caste community that washes clothes for a living.

She says she often argues with her father.

*“Sometimes my father says that I come home late on purpose to avoid doing the household chores. Class is over at 5.30 and it is 6 by the time we come home. Since there is no bus at that time, we all try to work out how to come home, because none of us have money to come in a taxi. When he accuses me of coming home late on purpose, the next day I do come home late on purpose.”*

In terms of her disability, she does not complain, but describes how it affects her life in a matter-of-fact way:

*“I cannot walk very far. Even when I walk from here to the bus stop, my leg hurts a lot. I keep telling myself that I will get used to the pain and I have to bear it. On Sundays if I go out walking, my leg starts to hurt a lot. Or if I lift the water pot too many times, or do the same work repetitively, it aches so much that I can't sleep at night.”*

On Saturdays, she goes to classes at the Disabled People's Association, Daroor Mandalam. She has been going there for three years. Sometimes she takes her non-disabled friends with her. She learns about disabled people's rights.

*“We have facilities in buses, trains, schools and hostels. Employment opportunities are also given to us. We can get loans to start a small shop or something like that.”*

**Are any jobs reserved for disabled people?**

*Yes. Disabled people who have finished intermediate education are given teaching jobs. They don't have to pay examination fees. They have special classes every Sunday. They don't have to pay college or hostel fees. They get blankets and clothes and books. They also receive scholarships.*

**How did you get all this information?**

*Our teacher at the association told us. The law says that disabled people have the right to all these facilities. He tells us about all these rights and motivates us to use them to improve ourselves.”*

The association is also a place where she can read newspapers.

*“I learn lots of new things by reading the newspaper. I learn what's happening in the world. For example, the American president came to India. They wrote about what he said, who he met and his wife's name. He met our president and said that India is developing fast and it is in the top place in many things and he likes India.”*

In the future, Sarada says she wants to become a lawyer, although she recognises that she is by no means at the top of her class. Last time we spoke to her, she said she wanted to become a judge, but then a man told her that judges believe what lawyers tell them so lawyers are the ones who can really see that justice is served.

*“My main ambition is to become a lawyer. I have been thinking about it since 8th grade. Even when girls accomplish great things, the world still treats women as slaves and looks down on them. People are not willing to educate them, saying: ‘Girls will get married so why should they be educated?’ If I become a lawyer, I can help women when they face problems. It will change our society for the better.”*

How do you know that women are facing discrimination?

*“I read it in the newspaper. I read that husbands falsely accuse their wives of various things and hit them. I also read that men get addicted to alcohol and destroy children’s lives. I always wonder who will stand up for the women who are suffering, especially tribal women. They are still being exploited. I thought, ‘If I become a lawyer, I could help at least few of them.’”*

But she is also worried that her family won’t let her go to college to study law. Sometimes, she says, she thinks about:

*“Severing all family relationships and going to a faraway place, staying in a hostel, and working hard to become a good lawyer. But other times I don’t feel like leaving my mother. And then I think about stopping my studies and staying with my mother. But if I do that, I cannot serve other people. I won’t be useful to the country. And I have to study just to support myself.”*

*“I learn lots of new things by reading the newspaper. I learn what’s happening in the world. For example, the American President came to India. He met our President and said ... that he likes India.”*

## The role of self-help groups

Sarada talked a lot about how much the Disabled People's Association had helped and supported her. Among other things, it enabled her to return to school, although her siblings had had to drop out to pay off the family debt. In Andhra Pradesh, there are over 700,000 self-help groups, funded by national and state-level government, non-governmental organisations and international donors, including the World Bank.

Our research shows positive effects for families who belong to such groups and have strong social networks. In Andhra Pradesh, children who live in households that don't belong to such groups are half as likely to be enrolled in school and 40 per cent less likely to have a healthy BMI for their age.

The Girl Child Protection Scheme, implemented by the Women and Child Welfare Department of Andhra Pradesh, is another way families can access support. The scheme is targeted at families with one or two daughters. Its primary aims are to eliminate prejudice and discrimination against girls, particularly through encouraging the enrolment of girls in school and trying to ensure they continue to the end of high school. It also aims to protect their rights, empower them socially and financially and eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.

The scheme is open to families who have used family planning services, and whose total annual household income is below 20,000 rupees (about 370 dollars) in rural areas and 24,000 rupees (440 dollars) in urban ones. The state Government will deposit 5,000 rupees (90 dollars) in a bank account for eligible girls on birth, which can be accessed on completion of Grade 10 or when the child is 18.

Around 15 per cent of Young Lives households that have at least one girl child aged between 5 and 17 years old (not necessarily the Young Lives child) have benefited from financial support for her education through the scheme. This proportion is highest among the Scheduled Castes and lowest among the Other Castes, which probably reflects their relative economic status.

Little other research is available on the impact of the Girl Child Protection Scheme. Young Lives is well placed to help to evaluate its impact over time as the children grow up.

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**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Kirrily Pells (2011) *Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 3; Kirrily Pells (2011) *Poverty, Risk and Families' Responses: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 4.

*“If I become a lawyer, I can help women when they face problems. It will change our society for the better.”*



# Ravi's story

**Ravi is now 16 and is working in the fields. There is no discussion of school for him now. He says he is proud to earn money and help his parents out. Although he no longer talks about violence between his parents, he describes how he was drawn into fighting his brother-in-law to protect his sister and nephew. He says there is no place in his own future for the alcohol and violence that have blighted his family's life.**

According to his parents, Ravi was never motivated to go to school. But he says that people laughed at him when he reached a certain age and said that he was too old to go. In fact, we know from last time that he left school in order to help pay family debts. He says he prefers to work. In this way he can contribute to the household.

Neither of Ravi's parents went to school. But they say that the increasing opportunities for education is one of the positive changes they have seen since they were young. However, only Ravi's older brother continued with school beyond 4th grade, and he has now failed his exams and gone to Bangalore to work. Ravi's parents still hope that he might take his exams again so that there is one educated person in the family.

Recently, when there was no work in the village, Ravi was sent to work in a neighbouring town where one of his sisters lives. He was very lonely because there was no-one his own age there. But he helped to pay for a television and now spends a lot of his spare time watching it. He is keen on films and was very excited when at a religious festival his father bought a photo taken of the family.

Ravi says he likes working in the groundnut fields near his village. He can be with his parents. He earns money. And he has a daily routine.

Time	Activities
6.30am	Wake up and go to work
9.00am	Have breakfast
2.00pm	Come home, have lunch and sleep
3.30pm	Go out
4.30pm	Come back, watch television
8.00pm	Go to bed

Ravi was 13 years old last time we interviewed him. He comes from a Scheduled Caste family (also known as *Dalits*). He had dropped out of school to pay a family debt and was working on a farm but said he hoped to go back one day. He was distressed about the violence his father inflicted on his mother but didn't know what to do about it.

He likes the fact that everyone works together:

*“We children, the older people and the married ones, all of us, we become very enthusiastic and competitive and rush to be the first to go to work. After work is over, we come back with the same spirit, happily together. On our way home we talk about our lives. We ask each other: ‘Look, man, how is life? How are things going?’ and so on.”*

But he says that no-one talks about the difficult things in their lives: “Even if we have difficulties, we don’t like to share them. We prefer to share only our happiness.”

Ravi has plenty of difficult things in his life, though he finds it hard to talk about them. Last time we came, he was concerned about his father beating his mother. This is no longer mentioned, but Ravi’s mother says she is very worried about both his married sisters, whose husbands beat them. During his recent stay with his sister he came home one day to find his brother-in-law hitting her. He intervened and was caught up in the violence.

*“I was provoked and angry. I hit him back. I beat him with my bare hands. He fell down flat. He was in bed for three days. We thought that he wouldn’t come back. We moved out and rented another room but he turned up, saying, ‘How dare you hit me?’ And again he picked on me.”*

What happened then?

*My sister intervened and told me to calm down. She told me not to get involved and to go inside. He pulled me out and started hitting me. Then he started hitting my sister. I had to free her.*

What happened after that?

*He went away and did not come back home for a week. But then he came and caught hold of my nephew’s neck and held him against the wall. I tried to stop him. I said, ‘Take your hands off him.’ Then he said, ‘This is my son and I’ll do as I please.’ But he released him anyway. And after that he never came back. He hasn’t turned into a good man. Whenever he came he fought with my sister and he would go away for a few days and come back again only to hit her again.”*

Not surprisingly, Ravi says he hates people who drink and that his own future will be different. He wants to earn money, get married to a good-looking woman from the same background, chosen by his parents. He says he wants one child. If he has a daughter he will only pay a small dowry, as he does not believe in large dowries.

He would like to learn to be a mason so that if something happens to his house he can repair it. He would also like to learn to drive a tractor and maybe buy some bullocks. He wants to work and be able to support himself and his family and no longer to ask his father for money. In fact, neither of his parents are very well and he would like to be able to support them as they grow older. “In future I shall put on weight and have a beard or moustache. I shall be well dressed. I shall wear trousers and a shirt and new and trendy clothes during festivals and on other occasions.”

But he feels the weight of responsibility; he says when he is older he will no longer be able to play: “If I still play people will laugh at me and say ‘Look, you have grown up and look like a donkey. Do you still want to play?’ That’s why I ought to work.”

## The extent of domestic violence against women in India

A research study in five Indian States, including Andhra Pradesh, found that the incidence of violence against women was extremely high. Physical violence was defined as 'any action of the perpetrator used against a woman with the intention of causing her physical injury'.

Of the 1,250 respondents, a shocking 84 per cent had experienced physical violence in one form or another. About 59 per cent had been beaten, slapped, pushed and kicked; about 14 per cent had been beaten with canes, burnt with rods or had objects thrown at them; about 5 per cent had been assaulted with weapons; and about 10 per cent were the victims of sexual coercion and abuse.

- In 15 per cent of cases the violence took place practically every day.
- Around 90 per cent were victims of emotional abuse. This was higher in lower middle class and middle class families than in upper class, higher middle class and lower class families and families below the poverty line.
- About 89 per cent were victims of economic abuse. This includes 'preventing a woman from taking a job, forcing her to leave the existing job, collecting full amount of her salary under force, pressurising her to bring money from her parents' family, and prohibiting her from making purchases of her choice.'
- The husband's alcoholism was reported as a major cause of violence by victims from rural areas and those belonging to lower class families in urban areas.
- Nearly half the respondents were either illiterate or had only been educated to primary school level.
- About 39 per cent identified the husband as the principal instigator of violence. Thirty per cent said it was their mother-in-law; 12 per cent, their sister-in-law; 7 per cent, their brother-in-law, and 8 per cent, their father-in-law.
- A significantly large number of women in all five states were totally unaware of the laws providing protection and relief to women in distress.

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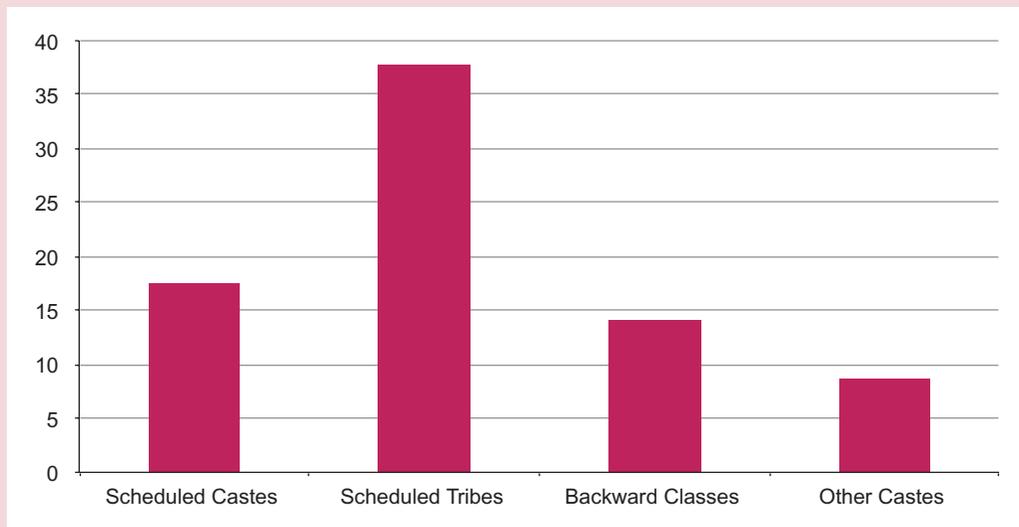
**Source:** Yugantar Education Society (2003) 'The Nature, Extent, Incidence and Impact of Domestic Violence Against Women in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra', study report submitted to the Planning Commission, Government of India.

*“Even if we have difficulties, we don’t like to share them.  
We prefer to share only our happiness.”*

## Tribal and Scheduled Caste children are still disadvantaged

Ravi's family come from a Scheduled Caste group (see Country context page). Young Lives children from Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes fare worse than other children on almost all indicators. In rural areas 16 per cent of households from these groups are living below the national poverty line and 41 per cent in urban areas, a higher rate than for all other groups.

### Young Lives children living in households below the poverty line (%)



- They also have high levels of malnutrition relative to other groups. Between 2002 and 2009, stunting rates went down for the Other Caste group and for the Backward Classes, but hardly moved for the Scheduled Castes and actually increased for children from Scheduled Tribes.
- Fewer than one in five Scheduled Tribe households reported access to improved sanitation, compared to around two-thirds of Other Caste households.
- Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe children were also more likely to be working.
- They were less likely than other groups to describe themselves as having a 'good' life.

**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Kिरिली Pells (2011) *Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 3.



# Harika's story

**Harika is now 16. She is no longer working in the cotton fields but has returned to school, and is staying at a girls' hostel. She found it hard at first to be away from home, but now she has made friends and says she would like to continue her studies and become a doctor.**

Harika missed school in 8th grade for a couple of months, and went back for the 9th and 10th grades to finish high school. A new school building had been constructed and six new government teachers were recruited, whom she felt were much better than the previous ones.

She says it was not easy to persuade her parents to let her go back to school:

*"I wanted to study but my parents said no at first. Then when I insisted, they agreed.*

Who said no?

*Mainly my mother.*

Your father?

*He left it to me."*

She has been supported in her desire for education by her three older female cousins. "They told my parents that it would be good to send me for more schooling." Her older brother also supported her.

After she completed Grade 10, she had to go to the city to carry on with her education. So she then went to a girls' boarding hostel. At first, she says she found this difficult. After three days she and a friend went home. "We got scared and we decided not to stay there and we came back to our village." But after seeing their families they felt better and went back to the hostel. Harika says she was worried what people in the village would think if they just left school.

Now she is less homesick. She has a number of friends, and two best friends in particular. She says: "If I had gone alone, I would not have stayed there. Because I went with my friends, we could support each other."

Of the five girls who continued with her to the end of high school, two are now in the hostel with Harika, one is at home, and the other one is already married. Harika says she was determined to continue her studies because:

*"You get better jobs if you study and you have a better life and can marry an educated husband. If your husband is in agriculture, you have to go to the fields and work. If he is educated, you can be happy. We see our parents working and we feel that we do not want to be like them. They work in the fields and work hard every day."*

At the time of the last interview, Harika was 13 years old and had been missing classes to help her family in the cotton fields. This had affected her health. She was a good student and had won a national scholarship and was worried about not being in school.

Harika says she used to want to be a teacher but now she wants to be a doctor.

Her mother, however, is worried about cost. Harika's current school costs 500 to 600 rupees (8 to 10 dollars) a month. The family also had to pay an initial 3,600 rupees (58 dollars). This is a lot of money for them, particularly as Harika's brother had been ill and hospital and medical fees were expensive.

*“We wanted to stop her going on to further studies because we didn't have the money. We have to pay interest on loans. How can we afford all the expenses, my son's hospital expenses and her fees? Will she give us money once she starts working? We won't make anything from her; she is better off working here.”*

Last time we visited, Harika had won a scholarship, but apparently it never materialised because the headteacher moved to another school.

Harika's mother says the decision to continue studying was entirely Harika's: “She has gone [back to school] of her own accord. It is her decision and she is scared that we will stop paying for her if she complains.”

Harika's mother did not go to school herself. In fact, Harika is the first girl in the whole family to be educated up to 10th grade. “Girls don't go [to school] here. Only three girls went and people scold us, asking, ‘What is the point of educating girls? They will get spoilt.’”

The family is already getting marriage proposals for Harika but they have said that she will not get married for four or five years because she is studying. Harika's mother says she was married at around 18 or 19 but “Now girls are getting married earlier”. She cites a number of girls around Harika's age who are married already and one who is already pregnant despite wanting to study.

In other interviews in the community, one person said that most villagers preferred sending their children to work in the cotton fields to sending them to school. Another noted that most of the teenage girls were working in the fields. All the farmers grow cotton in the same season, which means there is a lot of demand for labour and wages rise accordingly.

But while Harika's mother is ambivalent about her education, she is also clear that it is Harika who will decide. “We have given her permission to study and we cannot cut her throat halfway through. She can study as long as she wants to study and after that it's her wish. That's all.”

*“I wanted to study but my parents said no at first. Then when I insisted, they agreed.”*

### The importance of maternal education

Our research is beginning to demonstrate what has been shown in many other studies – that having an educated mother improves a child’s chances of going to school and has a positive effect on health, nutrition and well-being.

In India, we have found that the percentage of children in school increases with each level of schooling obtained by their mothers. Children whose mothers had no education were less likely to have attended preschool (44 per cent compared to 72 per cent of children whose mothers had received 10 or more years of education), and were four times more likely to have repeated a grade by the age of 8.

Only 68 per cent of children from the older group whose mothers had received no formal education were in school, compared with 92 per cent whose mothers had received secondary education.

Maternal education also has an effect on nutrition: children whose caregivers had completed primary school were much less likely to be thin (low BMI-for-age), stunted (low height-for-age), or underweight (low weight-for-age), which are all indications of under-nutrition and malnutrition.

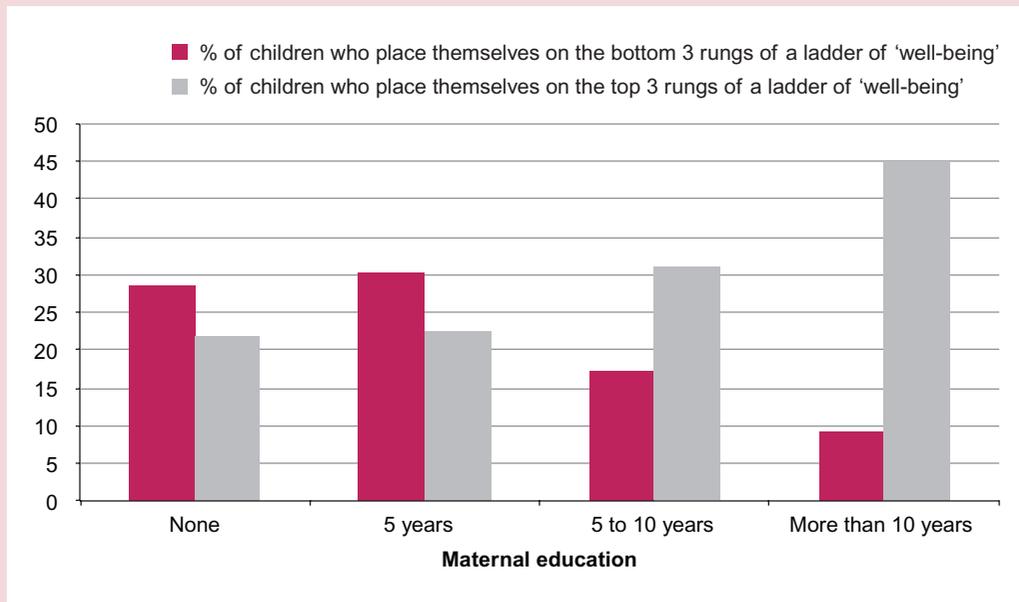
There also appears to be a link between maternal education and children working for pay. The proportion of children with uneducated mothers who were working increased from less than 1 in 10 to about 2 in 5 between 2002 and 2009, but fell from 5 per cent to zero for children whose mothers had been to secondary school. However, maternal education is also connected with other factors, including whether you live in an urban or rural area, and consumption levels, which are also likely to be important determinants of child work.

*“She has gone [back to school] of her own accord.  
It is her decision.”*

Harika’s mother

## The importance of maternal education *continued*

### Maternal education and children's perceptions of their own well-being



Children were also asked to place themselves on a 'ladder' of well-being. In Andhra Pradesh, we found that children whose mothers had more education put themselves on the top 3 rungs of the ladder, whereas those whose mothers had no education or low levels of education put themselves on the bottom 3 rungs.

**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Kिर्रिली Pells (2011) *Poverty and Gender Inequalities: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 3.

*“If I had gone alone [to study in the hostel], I would not have stayed there. Because I went with my friends, we could support each other.”*



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# Shanmuka Priya's story

Shanmuka Priya is 8 years old. She is a lively and communicative child. She learned to be independent at an early age. When she was about 5, her parents had to go and work in the fields for much of the day. They took her baby brother with them and left her at home. Sometimes she was looked after by her grandmother or a neighbour and sometimes she played with friends. But often she was alone.

Shanmuka Priya's family used to live in a big house with her grandfather, grandmother, uncle and aunt. But last year her parents argued with her grandparents and moved into a rented house. She says she does not like it.

*"Before, we used to stay in a big house. The house was very clean and neat. Now this house is all messy. I don't like it at all."*

Who is living in the old house?

*"My grandmother and grandfather. We don't have any buffalos now. My chinna tata [grandfather's younger brother] took them."*

Shanmuka Priya and her little brother both attended the village *anganwadi* (pre-school). When she started primary school, her mother was worried that the quality of the education was not good. But Shanmuka Priya says she likes to learn. She prefers some teachers to others. She says she doesn't like the male teachers because they hit the children: "Once I got hurt when the teacher hit me. I wrote in letters that were too small, so he hit me."

She explains how she protected her younger brother: "If I was not at school, somebody would hit him. He would come home and say: 'This boy hit me, or that boy hit me.' So I kicked them after the teacher went out."

In 2009 her parents decided to send Shanmuka Priya to a private school that teaches in English in a town about 15 kilometres away. But she only attended for four days. Her father says they missed her too much as she was away all day, and her mother says it was too expensive. It cost 5,000 rupees (95 dollars) a year.

So she is back in the local school and now in 4th grade, where she says she has to work much harder than before.

*"Since coming to this class they give us more homework. In the 3rd class I used to finish it in a jiffy and then play."*

And now?

*"Now they give us more homework, I don't have time to play."*

Who is helping you with your homework?

Shanmuka Priya did not feature in the first book of Young Lives children's stories, although we have been following her, like the other children, since 2002.

*No one helps me. No one in my house knows how to write.”*

Shanmuka Priya’s mother cannot read or write. She was married at 12 and had her daughter when she was 15, although her brothers were educated, and one is now in college. Shanmuka Priya’s father attended school until he was 10, when he had to drop out to help his family. He has been doing agricultural work ever since.

Her mother notes that there has been a change in attitudes to education for both boys and girls since she was young.

*“Earlier, people never used to send their children to school. Now even girls go. Everybody wants to be educated. What is so good about agriculture? There is hardly any reward for working so hard. I think only education is important; children can get a job and live happily when they grow up.”*

Her mother has noticed that Shanmuka Priya is working harder now.

*“Her studies are better than last year. Now, when her father asks her questions about her lessons, she can answer them. Before, she used to say that she didn’t know the answer. Her father says she has all the right answers and she is getting cleverer.”*

What do you think is the reason for her improvement?

*Her teacher. Her teacher is teaching her well.”*

Shanmuka Priya says there are currently 58 children in her current class, but only 15 are girls. The class is divided into three groups: A, B and C. She is much exercised about the fact that she is only in Group B and that there is only one girl in the top group.

*“Boys are in A group. I am a good student. But the teacher said there were no girls in A group so I had to go to B group.”*

What did you say?

*I said: ‘Why did you put me in B group? I am a good student.’ He said: ‘There are no girls in Group A.’ I said: ‘Pavitra is in Group A.’ He said they were keeping her there for two days and then they were going to move her too.”*

Shanmuka Priya says the other thing that has changed is that she no longer plays with boys.

*“I am afraid of them now, I don’t know why.”*

Did someone tell you not to play with them?

*My mother told me not to play with boys.”*

Her younger brother, Prashant, now goes to a private school. Her mother told Young Lives that most people in the village are not interested in girls staying on at school, but will make sure the boys attend because their sons will look after them when they are old, while girls leave for their husband’s family.

Shanmuka Priya’s parents say they want their son to go on to higher education:

*“Shanmuka Priya is a girl; we won’t give her higher education. And in the case of Prashant we will make him study as much as we can. We want our only son to get a good education.”*

*We have up to 10th grade in the village school for Shanmuka Priya. We will see what happens after that.”*

Her father says:

*“Some people say that girls are just like boys and they should be educated well. And others say: ‘What are they going to do with higher education since they will be going to somebody else’s house?’ They also say: ‘Since we can’t benefit, why spend money on a girl’s education?’*

*But I want Shanmuka Priya to get a good education. We think that if she studies well, her life will be good. We know what it is like to work hard. Why should our children suffer like us? We want them to have a better life. We all like to see our children happy and comfortable. I hope our dreams come true.”*

### **The rise in private education and its potential effect on gender equality**

Andhra Pradesh has seen a huge rise in the private education system in the past few years. This appears to be driven by strong parental demand for services, which are often thought to be of better quality and likely to lead to better job prospects. This is especially because private schools typically teach in English, while government schools tend to teach in Telugu or the local language (with some schools teaching also in Urdu, which some parents like as the children are able to learn to read the Qu’ran).

This overall increase in children attending private school can also be seen among the Young Lives children. Private schooling of 8-year-olds increased from 24 per cent to 44 per cent between 2002 and 2009. In urban areas, the private sector is now a major provider of primary education, but even in rural areas, its growth has been considerable.

Research is already showing that children in private schools do considerably better than those in government schools, a divergence that is also visible in Young Lives test score data from both older and younger children. While this could represent the fact that children in private schools are from wealthier households, it is possible that part of the effect is institutional.

Young Lives research is also showing a growing gender divide, with more boys being sent to private school while more girls stay in the government system. This is true in Shanmuka Priya’s family. Among the older children, 50 per cent of boys and 37 per cent of girls have been moved to private school.

*“No one helps me [with my homework]. No one in my house knows how to write.”*

## The rise in private education and its potential effect on gender equality *continued*

There is also a huge difference between urban and rural areas, with 80 per cent of older children from urban areas attending private schools but only 31 per cent of those from rural areas. And those from tribal groups or lower castes are also more likely to stay in government schools, despite the fact that 25 per cent of places in private schools are reserved for local children from poor and marginalised backgrounds, and subsidised by the Government.

This raises important questions for policy and research. Most challenging for policymakers is the risk that a growing and unregulated private sector may encourage greater inequalities between households able to afford private education and those not able to, or the fact that households may need to make choices between siblings, especially between boys and girls. These differentials are central areas of research for Young Lives.

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**Sources:** S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Pratham (2010) *Annual Status of Education Report 2010*; Martin Woodhead et al. (2012) 'Does Growth in Private Schooling Contribute to Education for All? Evidence from a Longitudinal, Two Cohort Study in Andhra Pradesh, India', *International Journal of Education and Development*.

*“Why should our children suffer like us? We want them to have a better life. ... I hope our dreams come true.”*

Shanmuka Priya's father



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# Country context:

## Peru

Peru is now considered a 'high human development' country, rich in natural resources. It currently ranks 80 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index. It has a population of 29.4 million people. For the last decade, the economy has been growing at over 5 per cent each year. Even during 2009, when most of the world economy stagnated or deteriorated, growth continued in Peru, although at a lower rate.

But the country's strong economic performance has not been matched in terms of poverty reduction. There are widening gaps between different sectors of the population (especially between Spanish-speaking and indigenous populations and between people living in urban and rural areas). Social expenditure is low, although there are a number of government programmes targeted at the poor.

- The overall poverty rate decreased by 17 per cent between 2004 and 2010, but a third of the population still lives in poverty.
- While 19 per cent of people in towns are poor, this rises to 51 per cent of people in rural areas.
- Migration from rural to urban areas is common. About 30 per cent of the population lives in the capital city, Lima, and 55 per cent lives on the narrow coastline (including Lima).
- Levels of poverty, infant mortality, maternal mortality and malnourishment among indigenous groups are twice as high as national averages.

### Children

- Of the 3.8 million Peruvians living in extreme poverty, 2.1 million are children.
- Children in the poorest areas – city slums, the Andean Highlands and the Amazon rainforest – are ten times more likely to die before the age of 5 than the children from the richest 20 per cent of families.
- Almost all children now go to primary school. Enrolment in secondary school is low compared to primary, but it is growing.
- But repetition of grades and temporary drop-out from school are common, leading to a high percentage of children who are 'over-age', or older than the norm for the grade they are in.
- The number of children who work in is high. Boys are more likely to be employed in paid activities and girls more likely to work in the home.

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**Sources:** [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk); UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report*; Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.



# Elmer's story

Elmer is now 16 years old. After living in Lima with his sister, he came home shortly before his parents bought some land in a place many miles away. So Elmer had to move again. During the week he and his younger brother and sister live in a village some three hours' walk from the farm where his parents work. At weekends the children go to the farm to be with their parents. Elmer has clearly found these moves very difficult. He says he misses his old friends.

Elmer has lived in the village he is in now since 2009. He lives in one part of a rented house with his younger sister, aged 15, and his younger brother who is 8. Elmer and his sister share the responsibility for the household chores. Other tenants live in the rest of the building. He says it has not been easy moving and complains about the excessive heat.

The three children go to school. But because Elmer goes to school in the morning, and his little brother in the afternoon, his brother spends a lot of time alone.

"In the morning, who stays to take care of your little brother?"

*He's alone.*

Who else lives here? Are there other people?

*No, only the three of us live here.*

He stays here by himself? Nothing happens to him?

*No.*

Are there neighbours who watch over him?

*Yes, they keep an eye on him.*

Are there other children there?

*Yes.*

What time does he go to school?

*He has to be there just before 1 o'clock.*

So you don't see him when you get back.

*Yes, hardly at all. When he goes, I am coming back.*

So who makes his lunch?

*Sometimes the woman at the back gives him lunch; if not we leave some breakfast for his lunch."*

Every weekend, the children walk to the family farm and Elmer works there. He says he has been helping his parents since he was 10 and he has learned a lot about farming.

Last time the Young Lives team visited, Elmer was living in Lima with his older sister, going to school in the morning and looking after her two young children while she worked in the afternoons. He liked Lima but was missing home and family.

“What things did you do on the farm [when you were younger]?”

*Husking and cleaning coffee.*

And now you can do more things? What else do you do?

*Now I also sow plants. Coffee, cocoa, cassava, plantain, corn. I can harvest too.*

Any fruit?

*Oranges, mandarins, tangerines.”*

Elmer says his father occasionally gives him pocket money which he uses to buy treats, but generally he is not paid. He says his sister helps their mother with household chores, and his younger brother “just plays” because he is very young. Elmer says he has had two accidents working with a machete: he cut his leg and his finger, but fortunately neither incident was very serious.

He says has made many new friends in the new place, including a girlfriend, but they split up two months ago.

“Do you miss her?”

*No. Well just a little.”*

However, he says he really misses his old friends. Last year he visited his former village for a week during the summer holidays. As he no longer has a home there, he stayed at a friend's house. They had a good time.

Elmer has a close relationship with his mother, and says that he goes to her when he has a problem or needs advice. The worst thing recently was that his mother went to Lima for six months to support his older sister, who had health problems. But one good thing was that he got to know his father better during that time.

“Has something happened to you that you didn't like?”

*Yes, last year my mother was in Lima. She went for half a year. It was to visit my sister. I spent half a year without her.*

Half a year ... and you stayed here all alone?

*Yes, with my father.*

And you didn't like that very much?

*No*

You missed your mother?

*Yes.*

Besides that, what other changes have there been in your family?

*Nothing, apart from moving house.*

Have there been difficult moments in your family in these last two years?

*Yes, getting used to being here. I haven't liked it.*

Why not?

*Where I used to live, it wasn't as hot as it is here.*

And school, do you like it better here or there?

*I liked it better there.*

Would you like to go back?

*Yes, I want to go back.”*

While he enjoys working on the farm, he says does not want to do this for the rest of his life. He wants to be a mechanic. He says that he still does not know which college he will attend. He feels a bit nervous about the change and has mixed feelings about the end of school. On the one hand, he is eager to finish school so he can start work, but on the other hand, he regrets that he will not see his friends as often. He believes that higher education will be more difficult than secondary school and he says would like to be taught more maths at school, even though it is his least favourite subject, as this would help him with his future studies. He says his parents support him in his ambitions.

### The effects of migration on young people in Peru

Peru has high levels of both internal and international migration. People move from rural to urban areas in search of work – Lima, the capital city, where Elmer lived with his sister for a time, has around a third of the country's population. And 10 per cent of Peruvians live abroad and send back a total of 3,000 million dollars to their families, which is almost three times the amount received by the country in development aid.

A third of Young Lives children from the older group, and over half their mothers, are migrants in their current communities; in other words, they were born elsewhere. Over 9 per cent of families moved district between 2002 and 2006.

Elmer's family moved in search of agricultural work just before he was born. They moved again when he was in 3rd to 6th grades of school to work on a ranch, which meant he had to attend a poorer-quality school. And then shortly before starting secondary school, he moved to Lima. It is quite common for parents to send their children to stay with a relative. Elmer and his older brother, who no longer lives with the family, each moved at different times to stay with their sister in Lima, not only to help her out but also because their parents believed that they would get a better education in the city.

So the current move is the third time he has had to start all over again. And this time he is not living with his parents during the week, but is effectively in charge of his two younger siblings.

For Young Lives, migration presents a particular problem, as we are following families over 15 years. In Peru in particular, many families move, and some move long distances. We follow the children using contact people in the communities, which means that we have only lost track of 4.4 per cent overall. This is low compared with other long-term studies, but is higher in Peru than in the other Young Lives countries.

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**Source:** Gina Crivello (2009) *'Becoming Somebody': Youth Transitions Through Education and Migration. Evidence from Young Lives, Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 43.



# Lupe's story

**Lupe has recently had her 10th birthday. The main change in her life since we last visited has been that her mother moved out of the family home because of fights with her father. Although Lupe says it is better now because the violence has stopped, she misses her mother, who only visits at weekends.**

Lupe lives in Lima with her father, older sister, who is 15, and maternal grandparents. Her aunt, who used to live with them, has got married and moved into a new room they built in the courtyard with her husband and their baby, aged 2. Lupe's grandmother says that at first it was not easy for Lupe to get used to her aunt's husband.

Lupe shares her room with her older sister. Each has her own bed, although during the winter they sleep together because they feel cold. Lupe has a little dog that she loves very much.

Her father and her grandmother look after her, she says, but her father is out a lot. He delivers propane gas tanks and earns 700 soles (263 dollars) a month. Her grandmother, who is 58, used to look after them but broke her hip. It is taking a long time to heal. Her grandfather is also unwell. He has pancreatic cancer and is having chemotherapy. So Lupe and her sister now look after her grandparents and do many of the household chores as well.

Lupe thinks she has changed a lot in the last four years. She says she had to grow up when her mother left home.

*"I wasn't so – how can I say it – I wasn't so obedient. But when my mother left, I started feeling that I should ... that I have to continue ... as there had been so much violence [...]. With the trauma of all this, I began to educate myself, to listen, to have a little more respect."*

Lupe's grandmother, interviewed without Lupe present, tells a different story. She says that since her mother left, Lupe has become irritable and bitter. In a whisper, she says that she would like Lupe to be a happy child, but feels that her parents' separation has affected her a lot. Lupe is very quiet, and her grandmother wishes she would talk a bit more, like other girls do. But Lupe seems quite chatty with the Young Lives interviewer.

"How else have you changed?"

*I'm no longer shy.*

Before, were you shy?

*I didn't have many friends.*

And how many friends do you have now?

*Almost the whole class!"*

Lupe tells us she enjoys school and has friends of both genders. But she feels a distance from them because, "since the majority of their parents haven't

When she was 6, Lupe was quite shy. She lived with her family in Lima. Her grandmother looked after her and her sister while her parents were at work. She had just started primary school after going to kindergarten.

separated, they don't understand. In my class there are only three children whose parents have separated."

She says the other children see her as a leader and she has been made "brigadier" of her class. The teacher is thinking of putting her forward to be brigadier of the whole primary school. She says she enjoys being brigadier, "although sometimes it's very tiring, very demanding. There are many problems."

"What subject do you like best?"

*Science*

And which do you like least?"

*Mathematics. I hate numbers. They hurt my head.*

And who helps you when you don't understand?"

*My uncle used to help me, but not any more. If I did something wrong, he used to hit me. My grandmother also beats me, so I said ... 'Better if I don't ask.' Now I do it alone, but sometimes I ask my sister."*

Lupe says that because her grandmother has been recuperating from her broken hip, she and her sister do a lot around the house.

"What things do you do? You said you wash your clothes.

*Yes. Since my mother left, I've been taught to do things on my own.*

What other things do you do here at home?"

*Before, with my grandmother, I used to sweep the stairs. Now I have to mop and wash.*

How often do you clean the house?"

*I don't know. Before, when my grandmother was healthy, we'd clean every week, but now it hurts her. And we have school and a lot of homework."*

Lupe says the housework leaves her little time for leisure. And there is so much housework to do at the weekend that sometimes she finds it hard to wake up for school on Monday mornings. On Sundays, she says, "brothers from Jehovah's Witnesses come to the house". Her family are not Jehovah's Witnesses, but she is interested because: "They teach me about the religion that they know, the one they believe in." She says she also enjoys playing with her dog. And when her father can afford it, she goes with her sister to an internet café where she can check her Facebook page.

"What do you do on the internet?"

*I play some games or I chat with my friends from school. They also have Facebook."*

Lupe says she will continue going to school in future, though she has yet to decide which secondary school to go to. There is one where she has heard there are a lot of gang members so she doesn't want to go there:

*"My sister's friend lives near there, but she doesn't like to go there often because there are a lot of gang members. They say there is graffiti all over the place; everything is ugly.*

What would happen if you stopped going to school?

*I wouldn't learn things, and in secondary school, I'd be zero.*

And how would your be life be if you never went to secondary school?

*It would be very hard because when you don't study, it's very difficult to find a job."*

Her grandmother agrees that it is important for Lupe to continue school as it is the beginning of the path that will lead to higher studies. She also points out that education in private schools is better than in government schools like Lupe and her sister attend. She believes: "a good girl should be studious, polite, listen to the advice of parents, and be respectful".

## Adolescence and growing up

The young people in our study see themselves in different ways – some as children (*niños/niñas*), others as young people (*jóvenes*) and others in more biological terms related to puberty (*púber*). As a group they are moving out of childhood and into early adulthood. This involves taking on more responsibility at home, moving from primary to secondary school, and in some cases dropping out of school altogether.

Some of the younger children, like Lupe, have to make that transition faster or earlier than their years might dictate. The departure of Lupe's mother, the absence of her father, and the illness of her grandparents have thrown her into responsibilities that would normally be beyond her actual age. As we can see, Lupe spends a lot of time doing housework and looking after her grandparents, which leaves her little time for leisure.

All children negotiate competing expectations and demands, but many, particularly those like Lupe from poorer families, face major pressures on their time. This affects not only their space for leisure but their expectations for the future. But many young people and their families see education as essential for a better future and their key to 'becoming somebody'.

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**Sources:** Gina Crivello (2009) *'Becoming Somebody': Youth Transitions Through Education and Migration. Evidence from Young Lives, Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 43; Gina Crivello and Jo Boyden (2011) *Situating Risk in Young People's Social and Moral Relationships: Young Lives Research in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 66

*"[if I stopped going to school] I wouldn't learn things, and in secondary school, I'd be zero ... when you don't study, it's very difficult to find a job."*

### Child's play

We found that rural children's leisure activities were playing football, climbing trees, riding bikes, making and playing with handmade kites or going out with friends for a walk. In the Andean community we visited, some children had very few toys. They used bottle tops, trolleys and empty cans. A few had DVD players at home and watched videos (films, TV series, music clips, soap operas, etc.). In the Amazonian villages, children said more families owned and watched TV than the previous year because most households now had electricity. Some children also had access to mobile phones because there were more networks in the community.

Children in urban areas said most of their activities occurred within the home: watching TV, listening to music, doing homework, and playing (with friends or alone; some boys mentioned using a PlayStation at home). They had more access to technology, such as computers, the internet and video games, than rural children, although sometimes, like Lupe, they had to go to an internet café. There were more marked gender differences: boys went out and played with friends (football or basketball) in the park or even in another neighbourhood. Girls, on the other hand, played at home with their siblings. They were not allowed to 'hang around' in the streets because parents feared they could be attacked or robbed.

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**Source:** Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

*“A good girl should be studious, polite, listen to the advice of parents, and be respectful.”*

Lupe's grandmother



# Manuel's story

**Manuel is now a young man of 16. The Young Lives team was not able to interview him this time because he is away for several months working with his father harvesting coffee. So we spoke to his mother instead, using a Quechua translator.**

Manuel's mother is sitting on the patio of her house. She says she wants to take advantage of the good weather. She puts a woven blanket on a log and offers it to us as a seat. A few of her eight children are playing in the yard. The oldest is making torches out of reeds for a parade.

Their house is quite small and slightly tilted to one side; the roof is made of tin and the walls of adobe (sun-dried earth). The interview is often interrupted by the noise of the sheep. Sometimes a child will answer a question for their mother if she seems unsure of her response.

Last time we visited, Manuel's mother had been very worried because her husband had taken Manuel to work with him in the rainforest for a period and they had not returned. Finally, Manuel had sent a message that he was on his own and so she had gone to fetch him. Manuel's father did eventually turn up, but by this time his wife had officially registered his disappearance.

This time, Manuel has gone again with his father to pick coffee in the rainforest. He has been away for several months. His mother says he is studying at a private school at weekends.

She says he is lazy and cannot cook, but also that when he is home he is happy to look after his younger siblings and take them around. She is worried that because he is only studying at weekends, he is falling behind with his education.

*"I worry about my son because we're not together.*

**And you are not able to talk with his teacher where he is? You don't know if he's doing well or not?**

*No."*

She says that Manuel's father is not interested in their children's education: "Their father doesn't care at all about the children's studies. I'm the only one telling them to study." She says that if Manuel left school altogether, it would be because he didn't have his father's support:

*"His father tells him that if he wants to study, he'll support him, but he doesn't say he'll work and make sacrifices so that Manuel and the others can go to school. They can study if they want to, or not study. It's not his problem, he says."*

Manuel was 12 years old last time we visited him. His family are Quechua, the largest of 42 indigenous groups in Peru. Like many Quechua people, Manuel's family live in a rural area in the Andes mountains. Manuel had missed a lot of school and was older than the usual age for his school grade. He said that he liked school and thought he lived in a beautiful place.

She herself worked in the fields from the age of 15. "I worked even harder than people do today. I worked on the farm. I carried more potatoes. I liked the work, probably because I hadn't been to school."

Manuel's mother says that when she was a child, she felt her father loved her more than her mother, as he was always worried about whether she had enough to eat. She attended 1st grade, but then had an accident while playing with another girl and injured one of her legs. After that she was afraid, and refused to stay on at school, so she went work on the farm.

She met the father of her oldest daughter when she was 16 and had the baby at 17. He left her shortly afterwards. At 20 she got together with her current husband and they had seven children together, almost one a year. The youngest is now 3 years old. Her oldest daughter is now a mother of twins.

She says her husband spends long periods in the forest. They have separated, and he no longer sends her money. She says she no longer loves him. She doesn't want to have any more children with him. But she believes the family situation has improved because her children are growing up and her eldest son is helping financially. He works as a day labourer and on the family farm. She weaves blankets and buys and sells sheep, although her health is not good.

"What would you like your children to be like?"

*They should be respectful.*

When he's grown up, what would you like Manuel to be like?"

*I want him to be affectionate and caring and when he's asked to do something, I want him to listen to me."*

She says that Manuel told her he wanted to be an engineer in the navy. She will support him in whatever he wants to do in future, but the initiative must come from Manuel himself.

"And if he decides to stay and live here for his whole life, what would happen? Would he be well here?"

*He will stay poor, like me, if he stays here."*

*"I want him to be affectionate and caring and when he's asked to do something, I want him to listen to me."*

Manuel's mother

## Indigenous children and education

The country's original inhabitants, the Quechua and Aymara and other indigenous groups, have their own unique cultures and languages. Like Manuel's family, Quechua-speaking people mainly live in rural areas, especially in the Andes and the rainforest, which means that they are likely to lack public services such as running water, electricity and sewage. They also face social and economic disadvantages. They have the highest levels of poverty: 78 per cent, compared with 40 per cent of children who have Spanish as their mother tongue – and the lowest numbers of children attending school at all levels.

Indigenous children were excluded from schooling until the mid-twentieth century. Even today, many children from indigenous groups do not have access to bilingual education, which by law should be available at primary level. The schools they attend are often poorly equipped and resourced. This in turn has a negative effect on their learning – only 6 per cent of Quechua children performed at the expected level for their grade in reading comprehension in their mother tongue and only 19 per cent performed at the expected level in reading comprehension in Spanish.

More than 20 per cent of Young Lives children are Quechua, and our research also shows that they face significant educational disadvantages. A UNICEF study using information from the 2007 national census found that only 72 per cent of the older Quechua children (aged 15) finished primary school, compared with 87 per cent of Spanish-speaking children. And only one in three finished secondary school, compared with two-thirds of Spanish speakers. Indigenous children are also more likely to have repeated one or more years and be above the usual age for their grade – something that Manuel also experienced while he was in school.

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**Sources:** Patricia Ames (2012) 'Language, Culture and Identity in the Transition to Primary School: Challenges to Indigenous Children's Rights to Education in Peru', *International Journal of Educational Development* 32.3; UNICEF (2010) *Estado de la niñez indígena en el Perú [State of indigenous children in Peru]*.

*“He will stay poor, like me, if he stays here.”*

Manuel's mother



# Luz's story

**Luz is now a mature young woman of 17. She is at college studying accountancy. She is very close to her family and misses her aunts, who used to live with them. The best thing that has happened to her recently is her parents' wedding...**

Luz says she is pleased to see the Young Lives interviewer again. She says she thinks she has grown up a lot since last time.

The best thing that has happened to Luz recently is her parents' marriage. Couples in Peru often don't get married until later, when they feel they can afford it, and Luz's parents had a big celebration. The wedding ceremony lasted two days. Luz and her sister served lunch and gave presents to the guests. She remembers that they stayed up until midnight and then some of the family went home and continued to celebrate. Meanwhile, Luz, her sister and her aunt slept in the workshop in order to make sure the presents were safe. It smelled of beer, laughs Luz.

"They got married and that was the nicest thing that's happened to me. The first day we had the civil and religious ceremonies. The second day was to celebrate, as they say here, the '*chalach*' of the gifts.

**Is that an Aymara word?**

*Yes, I think so. People bring gifts and beer."*

Luz's grandparents belong to the Aymara indigenous people but Luz herself does not speak Aymara.

Luz laughs a lot. She talks about another party that she enjoyed, the school prom: "Everyone was there. I was dancing with my classmates. We stayed until late. 'Let's go!' my father said. 'No, a little while longer,' I replied. I didn't want to leave."

But she is more serious when she talks about her biggest disappointment: failing the college entrance exams.

*"I was so nervous, I was so afraid. I went to the classroom, and then sat there in fear ... I saw that the exam had things in it that even in school I hadn't been able to do. I said to myself then that I wouldn't get in. And I didn't."*

However, her father then enrolled her on a three-month crash course and she got in second time around. She is now in her first semester, studying accountancy. She says she is enjoying it. She decided to study accountancy on the advice of one of her favourite aunts. My aunt told me, "You can work in banks, in municipalities, do administration. You can go to different places ... you can even go to Lima to work."

Luz was 14 when we last spoke to her. She still lives with her family in a quiet neighbourhood where her parents run a small tailoring business. Since she was 9, Luz has helped them by washing clothes and sewing in her spare time, as well as going to school

Luz says that one day she would like to travel and see other places in Peru. She knows that she will miss her family but thinks that she will enjoy working elsewhere.

The aunt who advised her now lives quite far away and Luz says she misses her a lot. She misses the discussions and advice: "We got along well. We'd talk. She'd tell me things, like things that had happened to her when she was my age."

Her other aunt and her cousin, who lived with the family for seven years, have also moved out of the house. Her aunt's current partner is very jealous and does not allow her to work or go out much. Luz says that she does not like him because he makes her aunt sad, although he does not hit her like her previous partner did.

She says she talked more to her aunts than her mother. She also talked to her best friend but hasn't seen her since they left school. Luz says she gets on well with her parents, but that her father is strict and does not like his daughters leaving the house. This is partly because he believes there is more theft in the area since the new prison was built nearby. Luz says she is afraid of staying at home alone.

She then tells the story of a dog that the family bought as a watchdog but which her father killed three months later.

*"My father wanted a dog to guard the house when there was no one here. 'A dog to make noise,' he said. 'Let's go and buy a dog. Let's buy it on a Sunday at the fair.' He was desperate to buy a dog ... But when we went, we only saw puppies. Then we saw this small St Bernard. It looked like a little bear. We took it with us.... But then it grew. It made a mess, it got dirty. When it ate, it would get everything dirty, and my father didn't like it, so he killed it. He poisoned it."*

She was angry and upset with her father about this, but mostly she is proud of him. He used to be a carpenter, she says, and started the tailoring business from scratch and gradually improved it. These improvements are visible. The first time the Young Lives team visited, the house and workshop were all on one floor. There was a second floor, but it had no roof. The next time, the second floor was complete, and this time a third floor had been built, though it was not yet ready for use.

Luz is excited about having her own room for the first time in her life, and space to study. She believes she will stay with her family for a number of years yet. There are things she would still like to change – they still do not have hot water, and so they have to go to a place with showers a few blocks away to bathe. And in the neighbourhood, she says she would like the streets to be paved so that when cars drive by there is not so much dust, and when it rains it does not all turn to mud. She would also like buses to stop closer to her house. And she would like her neighbours not to make so much noise, because she always hears them screaming and fighting at night. Because of this, she does not consider her community a nice place to live in, but she does like living there.

## Poverty reduction and young people's views of what it means to be poor in Peru

However we measured it, we found that poverty had fallen among Young Lives families between 2006 and 2009. Absolute poverty<sup>1</sup> had gone down by 16 per cent, with the largest reduction happening in urban areas. Urban areas are already better off in terms of services than rural areas, and it is in cities where economic growth has been highest, probably because there are more opportunities for income generation.

If we look at what families thought had improved, we find that they listed housing quality, consumer goods and services. Housing quality – like the additions made by Luz's father – improved by 9 per cent between 2006 and 2009, while possession of consumer durables increased by 25 per cent, and access to services by 21 per cent. We also saw overall improvements in access to safe water (24 per cent), improved sanitation (8 per cent), and electricity (15 per cent).

We asked older children how they defined poverty. They were clear that it was a lack of basic necessities such as food, clothing and housing.

*"[Poverty is] when [people] do not have anything to eat, they don't have farmland, or they do not have a house to live in,"* says Marta, age 12, from a rural area.

*"A poor person does not have any resources, and does not have anything to eat. ... The children do not have clothes to wear,"* says Carmen, age 14, from urban area.

We also know that being poor is not just a question of money. For example, in urban areas, children mentioned isolation as part of being poor. In rural areas, children mention the lack of land or houses. In the upper Amazon, people who lived in rented houses were considered poor, because those who rent are usually daily labourers.

Children also understand that households can move into and out of poverty. In particular, they worry about families becoming too large. Another concern is losing a parent or parents, or being sent away from home because of family conflict. Most children are clear that their families too are a resource: having no family is synonymous with being poor.

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**Source:** Santiago Cueto et al. (2011) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

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1 See Louam's profile (page 16), which explains in more detail the different ways we measure poverty.

*"We [my aunt and I] got along well. We'd talk. She'd tell me things that had happened to her when she was my age."*



# Fabricio's story

**Fabricio is now 9 years old and has grown up a lot. He still lives on the family farm, and was interviewed twice, once while he was looking after the family's two cows, and once at home. He still enjoys school and playing with his dogs but worries about his parents' health and about climate change.**

Fabricio is the youngest of six children. His older brother is 24 and sometimes sends money home. His oldest sister is 22 and married and lives and works in Lima. His other sisters are away at secondary school so he lives alone with his parents. But he says he doesn't mind because his siblings come home at the weekends and bring him sweets.

Fabricio is an affectionate boy. He was happy to do the interview although sometimes he became sad when talking about his father's health and the effects of climate change on the people in his village.

Since we last visited, Fabricio says that his best moments have been with his sister and his parents, from whom he has learned about household activities and farming. He helps to graze the cows, collects food for the guinea pigs, and helps in the kitchen. He is proud that he has learned to cook and wash his own clothes. He sometimes earns a little money harvesting potatoes for his uncle. He gives the money to his mother. On Sundays he goes shopping with her in the local town.

"What does your mother do in town?

*She buys produce, vegetables and fruit. She buys everything.*

Do you like going to town?

*Yes.*

Would you like to stay there?

*No."*

He says he prefers to study, and lists what he has learned at school – maths, reading and writing. He likes school a lot, especially learning how to multiply and divide. He says that if he does not finish his work, he is punished by the teacher.

He thinks that if he studies hard he can go to university; otherwise he will have to stay in the village to work on the farm. His mother says she wants her children to be professionals, and education is the best way to achieve this. His older brother is studying business administration.

Fabricio was only 5 years old when we last interviewed him. He comes from an indigenous Quechua-speaking family. He had recently started primary school and liked it a lot. He spent a lot of time playing on his own because his siblings were at school in another place. Sometimes he helped his mother by collecting firewood and feeding the guinea pigs. He said he loved animals, especially their cow Francisca.

Fabricio loves animals. Last time Young Lives visited, he was very proud of his cow, Francisca. He is sad because she became ill.

“What happened to your cow?

*Her tummy became swollen.*

And then what happened?

*She had a tummy ache and later we sold her to my uncle.*

Did you care a lot about her?

Yes”

But now, he says, he has two dogs instead. He plays with them a lot, more than with other children.

*“I play ball with my dogs. They really like playing with the ball.*

What are they called?

*Sharu and Chens.”*

Fabricio tells us that he does not like the rain and cold weather. It stops children going to school and spoils the crops. This makes him sad because people suffer and go hungry. Many people have respiratory diseases.

“What do people do when it hails?

*They are sad.*

And what do you do when there’s a hailstorm?

*When it hails, I get scared. It hurts. It ruins the crops and spoils the produce.*

And what happens then?

*When it is time for harvest, there isn’t any.”*

Fabricio also worries about his father’s health. He tells of an occasion when the rains prevented his father from coming home on time and he thought he had been in an accident. He says that his father has back pain because he works so hard. He remembers when his older brother took his father to the nearest town to be treated.

“Were you worried when your father was ill? What did you think?

*That he was going to die.*

And what did your mother do when your father became ill?

*She cried and bought remedies; she bought pills from the clinic.*

But he got better?

Yes.”

In fact, neither of his parents is very healthy. His father was ill three times with bronchial pneumonia and his mother suffers from gallbladder disease. This has also had an effect on the family’s income. His mother says that one of his sisters has mental health problems and has been to a doctor and a healer.

On a more positive note, Fabricio says since we last visited there have been some good changes in his home because his family joined the Government’s *Juntos* programme, which

helps poor families provide education and basic care for their children. The main change he has noticed is that the house is much cleaner – which he said was one of the requirements of the programme.<sup>1</sup> The family also bought some tables for the house which, he says, allows him more space for doing his homework.

He says he would like to study in town when he is older but he is afraid of cars.

“Why do you want to go to the town?”

*It’s good to study, but I’m frightened by the traffic. There are many cars in the city. But here there are only a few.”*

It is not until later that Fabricio’s mother tells us that her oldest son died in a car accident in Lima.

### The Peruvian Government’s *Juntos* programme

Almost a third of Peru’s people still live in poverty, and several studies have shown that children are more likely to be poor than adults. The Government has introduced a number of programmes to try and improve the situation. One of the largest, reaching almost half a million people, is *Juntos* (which means ‘Together’ in Spanish).

*Juntos* aims to stop poverty being handed down through the generations. It is what is known as a ‘conditional cash transfer’ programme, which gives money to poor families each month if they agree to certain conditions. *Juntos* is aimed at families like Fabricio’s, who live in rural areas and are both poor and indigenous. The conditions are:

- Parents must send their children to school and make sure they attend at least 85 per cent of classes.
- Parents must ensure children get all their vaccinations and take them for regular health check-ups.
- Pregnant women must have medical care before and after the birth of their baby.
- All adults must have national identification cards and they must make sure that their children are registered at birth.

*“I play ball with my dogs. They really like playing with the ball.”*

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1 Keeping the house clean is not one of the requirements, but sometimes the *Juntos* supervisors add additional requirements.

### The Peruvian Government's *Juntos* programme *continued*

The money is usually given to mothers, in order to improve their bargaining power within the household by reducing their economic dependence. But if they do not fulfil all the conditions, the payment can be suspended. Every three months, local coordinators visit the families, and cross-check the information they get with records of school attendance and healthcare visits.

Twenty-seven per cent of Young Lives families with younger children knew about *Juntos*. It provides these families with around 30 per cent of their monthly income. Although only 57 per cent of families knew about *Juntos*, this was higher among mothers with low levels of education.

Around 60 per cent of Young Lives families in *Juntos* say that the programme is 'good' or 'very good'. Some mothers say the monitoring is oppressive: "*Juntos* is everywhere. We need to be careful and do what they say, otherwise we lose the money." They are also worried about whether the programme will last long enough to help them in the future. And some children make comments about others who aren't in the programme, for example: "he hasn't had his vaccinations", "she never has pencils and rubbers", "he looks untidy and dirty all the time", leading to divisions between families in the programme and those who aren't.

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**Sources:** Natalia Streuli (2012) 'Child Protection: A Role for Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes?' *Development in Practice* 22.4; Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

*“When it hails, I get scared. ... It ruins the crops and spoils the produce. ... When it is time for harvest, there isn't any.”*



# Cecilia's story

Cecilia is 9, and the youngest of seven children. She is closest to her 15-year-old sister, who looks after her. Four of her siblings no longer live with the family. Cecilia is already an aunt, as two of her sisters have babies themselves. She is now in 4th grade at school. Although she is an active child, and enjoys games like volleyball, she says she is teased at school and this makes her sad.

Cecilia's family moved house last year. They now live in a rented house with a tin roof. She says she likes the current house best because it has plants. They share the house with the owner and another family. Her mother says they may have to move again because the owner may ask them to leave. This is not the first time the family has had to move.

"Who did you like better? Your neighbours there or here?"

*There.*

There? Why?

*Because they were good.*

And how were they good? What did they do?

*They gave us biscuits."*

Cecilia's father does not have a steady job. Sometimes he works as a shoemaker and sometimes he drives a tricycle taxi. Cecilia's mother is a housewife.

Her father was educated up to 7th grade and her mother to 2nd grade. Her brothers and sisters have all been to government schools. Cecilia has no identity documents because she was not registered at birth.

Cecilia still sleeps in the same room as her parents. Three of her sisters sleep with her older sister's son, who is 2, in the next room, and her grandfather sleeps in another room. She says sometimes she has bad dreams.

*"Sometimes I pray to God that I won't dream about anything.*

What scares you about your dreams?

*Sometimes I dream about monsters that eat people. Sometimes I dream about an earthquake. Sometimes I dream that a crazy person comes to me. Sometimes I dream that my dolls walk and I'm afraid."*

Cecilia usually bathes in a bathtub in the backyard of her house with hot water, and her sister helps her. At home she cleans her room, sweeps and helps her mother to cook by peeling potatoes, beans, carrots, and other vegetables. It was her mother who taught her how to do these things. She says that she likes

Cecilia did not feature in the first book about the Young Lives children, although we have been following her, like the other children, since 2002.

helping, and when her mother tells her to do something, she does it immediately. She knows how to turn on the gas stove and light the mud oven.

At school, Cecilia says she likes her classmates apart from two who tease her by calling her fat. She has not told her teacher because he has told them he does not want to know anything about their fights, but she has told her mother and said she wants to change her teacher. She does not like going to school when she has gym class.

“Have they done anything to you? Do they do things, do they tease you?”

*Yes.*

What do they say? When do they tease you? At break or in class?

*In class and at break.*

And how do you feel?

*Bad.*

And have you told your teacher?

*He doesn't want to know.”*

Otherwise she thinks she is an average student. She does her homework by herself and sometimes her sisters help her. Her father helps her with maths. She says that in 1st grade she had a teacher who did not let them out during breaks and who hit them on their legs with a whip.

At weekends she goes to the field with her older sisters and they roll in the grass. Sometimes in the evenings they fly kites. She also plays volleyball with her sisters, and sometimes with her father.

*“He plays sometimes; when he doesn't go to work.*

And do you like playing with him?

*Yes.*

When he plays, does he play just with you, or with your sister as well?

*With my sister. I'm with her, he's alone.*

And who wins?

*My father [laughs].”*

Apart from volleyball and flying kites, she says she likes to play shop.

“And what do you sell when you play?”

*Rice, noodles, sugar, sweets, everything.*

And, do you use real rice or not?

*No, a bit of dirt.*

Who taught you how to play?

*My sister.”*

Cecilia remembers that when she was 6, she used to go to the local market when there was no school and sell jelly in a bag. Each bag was sold for 50 Peruvian cents (about 20 US cents) and usually they sold about 20 jellies. They gave the money to their mother and she used it to go to the market and to buy things for the house. She gave them 10 cents and with that they bought sweets.

Cecilia says her father sometimes comes home drunk. “Sometimes my father works, sometimes he doesn’t. When he gets tired, sometimes he comes home drunk.” She says she does not like this because her mother becomes sad and cries. She says that although they argue, her dad does not hit her mum.

She also complains about her little nephew, who hits her and throws water and stones at her. Her sister defends her.

Asked what she would like to be when she grows up, she says she wants to go to secondary school and then become a doctor.

“And would you like to leave school, or to finish it?”

*I’d like to finish.*

What do you think secondary school will be like?

*Difficult.*

What would you like to be when you grow up?

*A doctor.*

And who would you like to cure?

*Those who are sick.”*

## The importance of birth registration

Not being registered at birth, like Cecilia, has important consequences in later life. Without a birth certificate, you cannot get the National Identity Document (NID) that needed for any civil, commercial, administrative or legal transaction. You need it to vote, and to access government health insurance, healthcare and education – although because primary education is a constitutional right, schools will often accept children and then pressure them to get an identity card.

Of the Young Lives children in Peru, 54 per cent of the younger group and 40 per cent of the older group did not have a national identity document. The number of children with identity documents has increased in recent years, because of a Government campaign. But in April 2010, 15 per cent of Peruvian children under 18 were still without these documents.

**Source:** Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

## Bullying and violence in schools

One of the issues that emerged most strongly from interviews with children and young people in Peru about their schooling was the frequent use of physical punishment by teachers. Many of them reported that their teacher punished them physically for not doing their homework, or for getting it wrong.

A number of children and teachers justified the use of violence as a normal part of school and said it was to encourage hard work. In Peru, negotiating is not part of school relationships; obeying is. School is understood as an institution that has the authority to discipline the students in its own way, even if this is unfair or arbitrary. And violence or name-calling can also extend to treatment by peers, as we have seen in Cecilia's case.

In our study, we found that older children received less physical punishment than younger ones, and girls received less intense and less frequent physical punishment than boys. Such practices reinforce gender stereotypes – a boy is supposed to be strong and accept and endure pain as he grows up.

UNICEF estimates that every day, hundreds of Peruvian children are physically punished by their parents, teachers or anyone who considers this conduct normal and necessary. This is despite the fact that Peru has a number of laws to prevent such violence against children. It would seem that the levels of violence found in many schools attended by Young Lives children is reflected in the Peruvian education system and in society as a whole.

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**Sources:** Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Vanessa Rojas Arangoitia (2011) *"I'd rather be hit with a stick... Grades are sacred": Students' Perceptions of Discipline and Authority in a Public High School in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 70.

*“Sometimes I pray to God that I won’t dream about anything. ... Sometimes I dream about monsters that eat people. Sometimes I dream about an earthquake. Sometimes I dream that my dolls walk and I’m afraid.”*

# Country context: Vietnam

Over 88 million people from 54 different ethnic groups live in Vietnam. For most, living conditions have steadily improved since the 1990s. Vietnam is now considered a 'medium human development' country, and ranks 128 out of 187 in the United Nations Human Development Index. Average life expectancy is 75.

The Government has been gradually moving the country from being a centrally planned Communist state to a market-oriented economy. It has introduced a number of programmes to address poverty and social deprivation, and much foreign aid has also been targeted at poverty reduction.

The country was badly affected by the global recession in 2009. Food prices increased and exports went down. There are widening gaps between rich and poor, and between the majority ethnic Kinh and the country's many minority populations.

- The number of people living below the official poverty line continues to decline, from 16 per cent in 2006 to 11 per cent in 2010.
- This masks a big gap in poverty rates between majority and minority groups. In 2008, only 9 per cent of the ethnic majority population was poor, but almost half the ethnic minority population.
- Gender discrimination continues to undermine the well-being of women and children.

## Children

- About 2.6 million children are classified as being in need of special protection, including those with disabilities, orphans and those in poverty.
- The Government has made efforts to improve healthcare services for women and children, and Vietnam now ranks 90th in the world for under-5 mortality.
- Among under-5s, 5 per cent are underweight, 8 per cent are wasted (thin for their height) and 32 per cent stunted (short for their age).
- Enrolment rates at primary school are 97 per cent. In Vietnam, boys are more likely to drop out of secondary school than girls.

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**Sources:** [www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk); UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report 2011*; Le Thuc Duc et al. (2011) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children 2012*.



# Lien's story

**Lien is now 16 and is a hard-working girl and keen on her studies. But because her family are poor, she feels she needs to earn money. And there are other family complications ...**

Lien lives in the kind of house where people are always dropping in. The Young Lives interviewer notes that:

*“The children often called their house ‘the common house’. I found this to be true especially at around 8 in the evening. Many people come here to chat. They all sit down on the floor. Every morning, some old people with grey hair sit by the table next to the patio to talk endlessly about politics. The topic that they were discussing today was Libya. I noticed that the coffee table outside was always full of teapots, cups, lighters and pipe tobacco. Today, there were also some sweets that I brought from Hanoi as a gift for the family.”*

Lien's house has a small garden, to the right of the entrance. Each bed is sown with a different vegetable and Lien does all the hoeing. She showed us a new bed of water morning glory (a type of vegetable) which had just been planted. There were also two beautiful blossoming mango trees.

Lien is still a shy girl. Her mother says she has grown up a lot in the last three years, and has nothing but praise for her daughter. She says she is neat and tidy and the most hard-working and resourceful of her three children. She is good at drawing too, and makes beautiful origami figures to give to friends and family: “The one she likes the most is the paper peacock, which is very colourful and meticulously made.”

The Young Lives interviewer, who stayed with Lien and her family for several days, also had many complimentary things to say about her. “She is quiet and hard-working. She is independent and determined and helpful to others. She seldom smiles but she has a cheery smile every time she does.”

Two years ago, Lien had a great disappointment: she failed her high school entrance exam, which was a great shock to her as she had always been a good student. This affected her greatly, and happened at around the same time that her grandmother died. She cried a lot, said her sister.

But eventually Lien collected herself and decided to earn enough money to retake the exams. The next time, she passed. She was very proud of this. She now goes to the local high school. She enjoys her work and friends and hopes to go to university one day.

Lien was 13 when we last visited her. She lived with her parents and her brother and sisters in an economic development zone on the edge of Hanoi, the capital city. Even at the age of 13, Lien had to look after the house and family when her parents were at work, and take her siblings to school.

Lien has an older sister who was not at home last time we visited. Her sister went to university, which was a great achievement. But now she is at home and cannot find work and her mother embarrasses her by constantly asking anyone they meet if they can find her a job.

Lien also has a younger brother. Both parents say they were happy to have a boy after two girls. Her father says: "I was very happy when he was born. Like everyone else, I feel very happy having a son." Lien's mother worries about him, as she says he has started to behave badly. She points to his new hairstyle, which is shaved at the back and long on top. His sisters, however, say that nine out of ten boys have this hairstyle.

As well as going to school, Lien sews shopping bags for an international furniture chain. She uses the sewing machine that her parents bought her several years ago. At noon, after she gets home from school and has lunch, she sews until 4 or 5 in the afternoon with the help of her sister and sometimes her brother. There is a big pile of blue woven bags scattered on the floor. She is paid 450 dong (around 20 US cents) a bag. "The wage they pay is low but at least it's better than having nothing to do," says Lien's sister. "But sewing this kind of bag is a harmful job. Many people who work on them for a long time get bone and muscle pain." Lien's sister says that Lien is very good at sewing. "If she works for the whole Sunday, she can sew more than 200 bags and get a small salary of about 90,000 dong [around four dollars]."

Once she has finished sewing, Lien does her homework and helps her sister cook dinner. In the past, when her sister was still studying, she had to cook dinner for the whole family. In the evening, she studies for another half an hour. Lien says that next year when she has to prepare for university entrance she will focus more on her studies.

Lien's mother still works long hours, although now she is a construction worker. She wears a large patterned scarf to protect her from the sun and from debris falling on her head. She says she doesn't like her work, but the family needs the money and her husband contributes very little. The Young Lives interviewer eventually discovered why this was the case: Lien's father has a long-term mistress who used to be his boss. He has another daughter by her who is in primary school. He has also had a series of other affairs. He admits that he made many mistakes. He claims that it was his 'fate'. He repeats this many times during the interview.

**"When did you start loving another woman?"**

*In 1992.*

**Before Lien was born?**

*Yes, before she was born.*

**From then on, you have had one or more than one lover?**

*More, I have had many love affairs."*

Lien found out about her father's affairs when she was in Grade 3. She witnessed her mother's sadness and her father's frequent absences. Sometimes she saw her father hitting her mother. However, Lien and her sister told their mother to try to hide her feelings for the sake of the family.

Her husband's behaviour has put a major burden on Lien's mother, who has been the main financial supporter of the family for many years. This is partly why Lien has tried to work part time to have money to help her mother pay for the daily expenses and fund her own education.

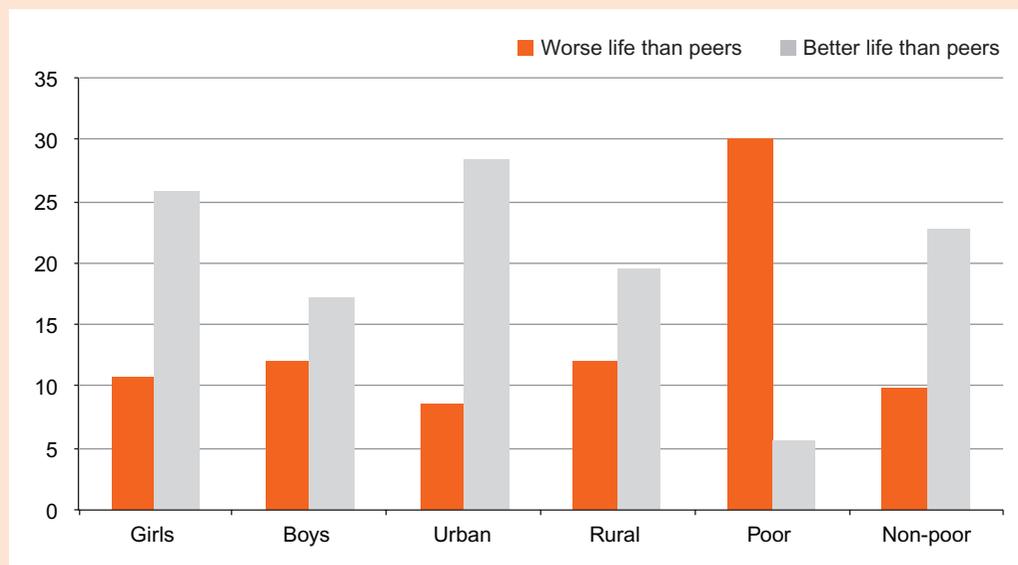
Lien's father claims that the problem is the difference in lifestyle between his and his wife's family. Lien's mother says she still loves her husband but his affairs have made her miserable. She also says that her children have tried to persuade their father to change his ways, but that it is too late.

She says her wish for her children's future is very simple. Drawing lessons from her difficult life, she just wants her daughters to find good husbands. She hopes that they will choose a suitable partner and find work easily.

## Children's views of their lives

Young Lives is unusual not only because we are following the children for such a long time, but also because we ask them what they think about their lives. We can see from the graph below that a quarter of older girls and 17 per cent of older boys think their lives are better than those of their peers. Young people who live in towns are more optimistic than those who live in the countryside. Only 6 per cent of those who are poor think they have a better life than their peers, while 30 per cent think their lives are worse. So there is a clear link between poverty and young people's perception of their own lives compared with those of others. We also found that ethnic majority children are more positive than ethnic minority children, and those whose parents completed primary school are more positive than those whose parents have little or no education.

### Young people's perceptions of their quality of life (%)



The younger group of children seems more optimistic than the older group; 40 per cent of both girls and boys think their life is better than that of their peers.

**Source:** Le Thuc Duc et al. (2012) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.



# Hung's story

Hung is now 17. Since we last visited, his family has suffered a series of disasters. Their orange crop was ruined by floods, their pigs contracted foot and mouth disease and had to be put down, and then his older brother fell ill. Hung has had to leave school and find work...

Hung has just turned 17. He lives with his mother, father, older brother and grandmother. His parents are farmers. He is friendly and easy-going and often cleans the house and cooks dinner for the family when his parents are out working. Hung says he talks to his mother quite a lot but rarely talks to his father. He buys things for his grandmother because she is old and going to the market to on her own is difficult for her.

In the evenings, Hung says he does not often spend time with friends even though his parents encourage him to. He says he prefers to stay at home listening to the Voice of Vietnam on the radio and playing games on the computer. He goes to bed around 9pm and wakes up at about 6am.

“Why don't you like going out?

*Because I am tired, I don't want to go.*

What is the most important reason?

*Because I have worked hard and I want to play computer games.”*

Hung may have a reason to be tired. He and his family have not had an easy few years. His mother explains that they lost their crop of orange trees in a flood in 2008.

*“The oranges were on branches close to the ground. In the afternoon, it rained slightly. My husband came to take care of them and stayed until the evening because of the rain. The following morning, the trees were all flooded. I felt very sad because all the oranges were rotten. After the flood, we only got one million dong (48 dollars) from selling the one tonne of oranges left on the very top of the trees. The others all dropped from the branches and the wind swept them to the edges [of the fields] in a big heap. It was a terrible sight.”*

And then in 2010 there was another disaster. They lost their pigs to foot and mouth disease.

When we last saw Hung, he was 13 years old. He lived in a village with his parents and older brother. His parents had a smallholding and Hung had been helping them on the farm since he was 10. He was going to a school three kilometres away, which meant getting up very early in the morning. His parents were keen for him to continue his studies because his older brother had already dropped out of school.

*“We had 45 pigs; each of them weighed about 50 to 60 kilogrammes. [They] were very big and as long as a shoulder pole.<sup>1</sup>*

Can you estimate how much you lost?

*About 120 million dong (5,715 dollars), not including the pigs' food. I burst into tears when counting how little money we earned that year.”*

Hung's mother has had a hard life. She was one of eight children and staying at school was never really an option even though there were government subsidies for pens and books and other supplies.

*“Because I had so many brothers and sisters, I didn't have the chance to study. My family was poor. My parents tried their best to bring up all their children but they couldn't afford for all of us to study.”*

When she got married her situation did not improve. She says:

*“We were extremely poor. When I got married, there was nothing in this house. It is very hard to imagine. I had to borrow money to buy food at a high rate of interest. If I borrowed a bucket of rice, I had to give back one and a half of buckets. It was a miserable life. I had to earn money to make ends meet even though I was pregnant ... However, God doesn't want to torture anyone. My children grew up healthy, and I sold groceries in the market in Hanoi. But I had to go on my bicycle at three o'clock in the morning...”*

Hung's mother has had her fair share of disasters. But she took courage from her son after the pigs died:

*“He told me that I didn't have to worry about anything because the most important thing is good health. A healthy man can do everything and earn a lot of money easily. I thought that he was right and it was no use worrying. They [her sons] behave even better than daughters. Although they were born in a farmer family, they are well behaved and hard-working. If at that time, I also had had to worry about my children's bad behaviour, I would have died of sorrow.”*

But then Hung's brother, who had never been a healthy boy, fell ill and needed surgery. This was worrying and costly. Hung had just failed his high school exams so he dropped out of school and started looking for a job. He says a number of his friends left school at the same time and that it was his decision and not his parents'.

He did a number of jobs, including sewing shoes, but work was not always available. Finally he found a job with a construction company. At first he was on an apprenticeship wage, but now his salary has improved and he is doing well.

“How much money do they pay you per day?

*120,000 dong [just under six dollars].*

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1 A yoke used for carrying a load, usually in baskets or pails.

How does this compare to the other people in your construction team?

*I am in the second-highest wage group."*

Hung has become a skilled construction worker. According to his employer, he is a sensible worker and knows how to learn from other workers to improve his own skills. He says he always obeys the rule of not drinking alcohol when working: "Construction work is kind of dangerous. If you don't drink alcohol during lunch, it is OK. If you drink some, it could be very dangerous because sometimes you have to climb high and the sun can dazzle you."

But Hung has other plans for his future. He says he doesn't want to work as a construction worker all his life. "Many people said construction work is a hard job and we are exposed to many types of weather. Driving is a relaxing job so I want to become a driver."

His mother says she has faith in her children. "Maybe they will not become rich, but they know how to manage their own finances." But she is worried about his plan to be a driver because there are so many traffic accidents. She also doesn't want him to get married too young: "Getting married early easily leads to an unhappy life. It means he must give up playing. It's crazy to get married early because having a family often makes people tired." Hung says he doesn't want to get married yet and only wants one or two children.

He is reluctant to talk about his future, and says that his plans may be disrupted because he will have to do compulsory military service.

"What is your dream? What do you hope to achieve in the future?"

*I'm afraid that if I talked about my dream, it would never come true."*

## Families' experiences of crises

We found that although Hung's family has had a particularly hard time, the majority of Young Lives families said they experienced adverse events or disasters, sometimes known as 'shocks'. These included the effect of food price rises, and environmental crises such as flooding or typhoons. Around 25 per cent also experienced an illness or death in the family.

### The rise in food prices

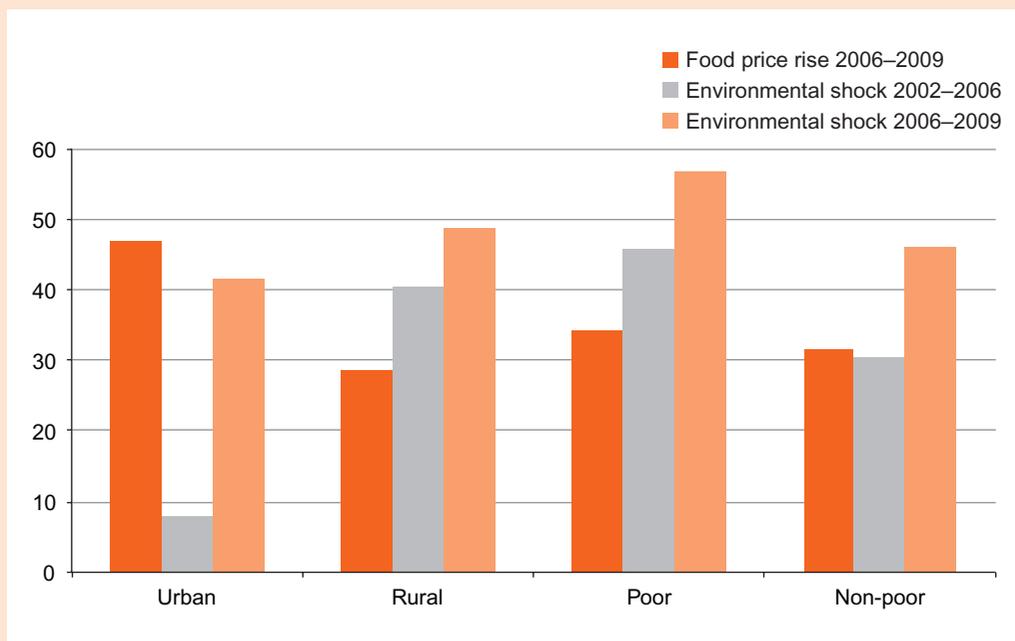
Despite huge improvements in health, life expectancy and income for the majority of Vietnamese people since the mid-1980s, the global economic recession and world food price crisis after 2008 led to a big increase in food prices. Nearly a third of all Young Lives families said that this had had a negative effect on their households. This varied considerably from region to region, with 57 per cent of families in the rural Central Coast area affected but only 15 per cent in the Northern Uplands.

## Families' experiences of crises *continued*

### Environmental crises

Between 2006 and 2009, there were also a higher number of environmental crises. Urban households in the Young Lives study are largely situated in the Central Coast region, often regarded as the 'typhoon belt', and this region was the worst affected. In other regions, poorer families were more likely to be affected than those which were not so poor, perhaps because better-off households had more resources to prevent their health or property from being damaged.

### Families experiencing adverse events (%)



**Source:** Le Thuc Duc et al. (2012) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

*“I’m afraid that if I talked about my dream, it would never come true.”*



# Duy's story

Duy is now 9 years old. His parents moved to a new house two years ago, which they built with help from his grandparents. He is settled in school and is very happy because he now has a room of his own. And his father had just taken him to visit the capital, Hanoi, to see some of the sights.

The Young Lives interviewer describes her visit:

*"I went to Duy's house at about 8am as arranged. When I arrived, I saw his grandfather shovelling sand for the floor. He invited me to drink some water and then told me to go upstairs to Duy's room. Duy was studying at his desk. The bookshelf was neatly organised. On his desk, there were Vietnamese, essay writing and science textbooks. He was concentrating on studying so much that he did not notice me. He was doing his Vietnamese homework on the topic of 'Enhancing Vocabulary: Optimism – Joy of Living'. Thirty minutes later, he finished his homework and we started our conversation sitting at his desk."*

Duy says his parents' new house is the most beautiful in the area. Previously, his family had to live in a small old house with a pigsty in the front yard, which he said was "very disgusting". He is most excited about having his own bedroom where he can study.

Duy's mother talks about the hail storm two years previously that severely damaged their orange trees as well as the fruit. Because of this, they switched to growing Bengal figs (a type of bonsai tree).

She explains how they came to have a new house:

*"My husband intended to move to the south to live, but my great uncle and grandfather said, 'What will you do there? If you have money, you should build a new house rather than moving there.' So we decided to build this house. We paid the masons a flat rate. We had to borrow a lot [of money]. My parents-in-law gave us some, and we borrowed the rest from others. Our brothers and sisters in-law lent some us as well."*

**Have you paid off all the debt?**

*Yes, there is only a little left."*

While the house was being built, Duy's mother went to market every day to sell pork, but she has stopped going now to focus on the family's bonsai business. She says that the building of the new house, along with her marriage and the birth of her children, was one of the happiest events of her life.

When we last spoke to Duy and his family, he was 6 years old. He lived in a quiet rural area with his younger sister and his parents and grandparents. He has an older brother who was already living away from home. He had just started primary school and was rather anxious about it.

When the Young Lives team last visited, Duy was enjoying school. He is still keen to learn, although he doesn't like his current teacher, who has replaced his former teacher, who is on maternity leave.

His mother says that he has got to the stage when she and his father can no longer help with Duy's homework:

*"I can't help him with his homework at his grade level. I could help him when he was in the 1st or 2nd grade. But the school programme now has changed a lot; I can't understand anything. I didn't study much, so I don't know anything. Occasionally, he finds the homework so difficult that he asks his father and grandfather but they can't always help him either. He often does his homework by himself but I don't know if it was right or wrong."*

Duy says he likes all his subjects but finds writing essays the hardest. His parents encourage him to study both in the morning and after school. His mother says: "Sometimes when he gets bad grades, I say, 'Perhaps you have played too much recently.'"

Duy agrees that he likes playing, in particular football and skipping and watching films and cartoons. Asked about what else he does in his spare time, he talks about a trip to Hanoi with his father, where they went to the zoo and saw many animals and to the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum. He calls Ho Chi Minh 'Uncle Ho'. He visited Uncle Ho's famous fishpond, where he saw many big golden fishes and fed them bread.

He had been to Hanoi before with his grandfather. That was the first time he had crossed the river on a boat. He remembered the trip because when the boat reached the middle of the river, it bobbed up and down, and scared him. He was very afraid and had to hold onto his grandfather tightly. They went to visit his little cousins' family. They had so many toys that Duy's parents had never bought for him – a tank and a plane and many others. When he had to go home, he was very sad and wanted to stay longer.

His mother thinks that schools in urban areas like Hanoi are better than those in rural areas like theirs:

*"For example, there are only so many computers. They have to take turns; they have to wait for a long time to use the computers. Schools in Hanoi have enough equipment, schools in the rural areas don't. In my opinion they don't teach very well in rural areas."*

Both Duy and his mother also talk about his journey to school, which is two kilometres away. They say that the road is not in good condition and that it is dangerous for children to go to school by themselves. Until he was in the 4th grade, Duy was not allowed to ride a bicycle to school, but now he does sometimes, although his mother prefers him not to. She says:

*"I see the children riding bikes carelessly and am a bit worried, but I can't fetch him all the time. He sometimes has to ride to school by himself. He is in Grade 4 now. He has known how to ride a bike since he was in the first grade, so he can ride very well, unlike other children who have learned recently. So I am not too worried about the way he rides his bike; I am just worried about other people."*

Duy agrees that he is a good bike rider, but he is still afraid riding on such a bad road, especially whenever a big truck passes by. He told the Young Lives team that one of his schoolmates was crushed to death by a truck because his bicycle hit a stone and he went under the back wheels of the truck.

Like many Vietnamese parents, Duy's mother and father pay for their son to have extra classes, especially in the summer holidays. His mother tells him to: "Concentrate on studying to have a good future. If you don't study, you will be like your father. He has to work hard every day. You should study to be happy and be better off in future."

Duy says his biggest dream is to become a doctor or a policeman. He wants to have a gun and wear uniform like the police in the drama 'Criminal Police' on TV. He hopes that if he studies hard he will win the 'good student' prize and his father will take him to the zoo again next summer.

### Education quality and the prevalence of extra classes in Vietnam

Vietnam spends a relatively high percentage of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education, and almost all children are enrolled in primary school. But there are a number of concerns about the quality of the education they receive. For example, teaching methods are seen as ineffective as they do not encourage creative thinking. The curriculum is out of date, and in many schools, the school day is only four and a half hours long at primary level and five and a half hours at upper secondary level.

In addition, teachers' salaries are low and many therefore also teach extra classes, which have become almost mandatory even for the poorest families. Of the children and young people in the Young Lives study who go to school, 75 per cent of older children and 65 per cent of younger children attend such classes. Among older children, 80 per cent of girls take extra classes compared with 70 per cent of boys. These classes are expensive for poor families, who make many sacrifices in order to be able to afford them. Among the younger children, the figures are almost equal for both boys and girls. However, the rate varies widely between regions, and according to the level of caregiver's education, ethnic group and poverty.

Ninety per cent of students say that they take extra classes to improve their academic performance. The next most important motivation is that they think the extra classes will help them in their exams. Only a few students say that they attend extra classes because they do not learn enough at their normal school.

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**Source:** Le Thuc Duc et al. (2012) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

*"If you don't study, you will be like your father.  
He has to work hard every day."*

Duy's mother



# H'Mai's story

H'Mai is now 16 years old. When we called at her house, her mother explained that we could not see her. The reason was a big surprise ...

H'Mai's mother told us her daughter was married and had just had a baby boy. She explained that it was the custom for the new mother not to leave the house, or have visitors, or keep new clothes in the house, or even to wash herself until the baby was a month old.

*"She can't eat raw food. She can eat meat, lean meat only, bitter melons, and string beans and cabbage.*

Is she allowed to shower or wash her hair?

*No. She can't shower or wash her hair for a month. After the confinement, I'll pick some leaves and make a pot for her to steam herself. Then she can shower as well. And according to tradition, we also can't buy any material for a pregnant woman. We could buy it and have it made into outfits but we can't leave it in the house. It's taboo.*

Is she allowed to go outside?

*No. She just stays in the house. She's not allowed to go out."*

Despite a number of attempts, the team did not succeed in meeting H'Mai. But they did talk in more detail with her mother and eventually to H'Mai's husband, although both were very busy and it took some time to arrange. And even then, the interview with H'Mai's mother was interrupted many times. Her husband needed money for petrol; her son asked her for some money to go out; her son-in-law asked her where the soap was ...

H'Mai's mother is clearly in charge of the family. She said she too was married at 16. She is responsible for herding four cows, taking care of H'Mai and her baby, preparing meals and washing clothes for the three younger children and doing all the housework. Every day, she wakes up at 4am and works hard until 7.30pm.

One of the things that the team discussed with H'Mai's mother was the cost of the wedding:

*"We had to borrow almost eight million dong (385 dollars) for the wedding. That was a lot of money.*

So you had to prepare feasts for the wedding?  
How many pigs did you kill?

*We bought them from my paternal grandmother for more than a million dong (48 dollars). We also bought around 20 kegs of beer. We also had to spend money on renting the wedding dress and other things, which cost more than a million dong.*

Last time we visited H'Mai she was 13, and she had dropped out of school because her family could not afford to pay the fees. H'Mai's family is from the H'Roi ethnic minority group. She is the second oldest of four children. They live in a rural area which is quite remote and where few people speak Vietnamese as their first language.

Did you have to borrow the money then? Who did you borrow from?

*I borrowed from Mr Tam, my uncle."*

H'Mai's husband, who is 20, was reluctant to talk at first, but perhaps it was because he didn't speak much Vietnamese as he had dropped out of school in 4th grade. He could not understand some of the things we said. When that happened, H'Mai's mother, who was cooking in the kitchen, would rush in to the rescue.

H'Mai's husband said he was the youngest of nine. He clearly got on well with H'Mai's siblings, the youngest of whom was jumping on and off his lap while he was being interviewed. H'Mai's mother came in from the kitchen to say how much he loved his new baby: "All he does when he comes home is to kiss and kiss and kiss the baby."

He talked in some detail about the wedding. In the morning, the groom's family came to pick up the bride at her house. H'Mai was wearing a blue wedding dress. The two bridesmaids and two groomsmen were all dressed up too. There was a small party at the bride's house. Then the bride changed into a red dress to go to his family's house where the ceremony was held. After the ceremony, a representative of the bride's family, and another for the groom's, clinked their glasses together. The two families also sounded two gongs, one from the groom's family and the other from the bride's. H'Mai's mother said it was believed that the young couple would live happily together forever if the two gongs coincided.

Shortly after the wedding, H'Mai became pregnant. Her mother said that she had had a difficult birth. She had had stomach cramps, and then:

*"We carried her to bed, and she was rolling, yelling, crying and pinching her aunt. Then she told her husband to take her to the medical centre, and told the doctor to do an examination ... When she was done giving birth, she stayed at the hospital for six days. Luckily she had insurance or it would have been very costly. As it was we had to pay for injections."*

But the baby was fine and weighed 3.4 kilogrammes. According to custom, they have not named him yet.

H'Mai's mother says that she hopes H'Mai and her husband will be as happy as she has been. "I think that if she could be happily married as I am... I may be lacking money, and food, but my husband loves me a lot."

She then talks about her husband's drinking... "When he drinks, no matter how drunk he gets, he'll never pick fights with me. I feel very good about that."

She is not sure if this is true of H'Mai's husband and says she is afraid: "I hope that H'Mai's husband will be like mine. As women, we are so miserable if our husbands don't behave. Once they're drunk, they start hitting and yelling. The husband even runs after the wife if she leaves carrying the baby..."

She says this has already happened with H'Mai and her husband. "I told her, 'If he doesn't drink a lot, then it's OK. He doesn't drink all day or all night. So what are you so worked up about? He just has one or two glasses with his friends...'"

She has some more advice for her daughter:

*“If there’s anything wrong, you should wait till you both get home then talk to each other. If you say it in front of others, they will say that you don’t allow your husband to hang out with friends. No matter how angry you are, wait till you and your husband are home then talk about it. You’re teaching each other. Don’t despise or show disrespect to your husband in front of friends.*”

So what do you expect H'Mai's life to be like in future?

*I just want her and her husband to love each other, and have a house, and children who go to school. That is all.”*

### Health insurance for poor families

The Vietnamese Government wants everyone in the country to have health insurance by 2015. It is already law for any employee to contribute to a health insurance scheme. Those who are working for themselves, and family members of those who are employed, can register voluntarily. The Government also has a targeted health insurance scheme for those who cannot afford the contributions. Under the law on health insurance, which came into effect in July 2009, children under 6 years old, ethnic minorities and poor people in rural areas are entitled to free health insurance, while students from low-income households pay less.

By 2010, it was recognised that families just above the income threshold for getting free insurance had not taken up the scheme. Although they pay only 20 per cent of the annual insurance fee, they have been reluctant to join. This may be partly because of cost, or because the process is complicated, or because lack of investment in clinic facilities and shortages of specific medicines also make the insurance seem less worthwhile.

The health insurance system has been helpful for many poor families. Some experts think the objective of universal health insurance unrealistic. But they are quite optimistic that by 2014 the Government could achieve universal basic health services, including maternal healthcare, free health services for children under 6, and access to clean water and sanitation.

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**Source:** Le Thuc Duc et al. (2012) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

*“I just want her [H'Mai] and her husband to love each other, and have a house, and children who go to school.”*

H'Mai's mother



# Y Sinh's story

Y Sinh is 9 years old but looks much younger. He is small and thin, but already supports his mother by working for money. He lives with his mother and little sister in a small house on stilts. The family come from the H'Roi ethnic minority and speak their own language. The Young Lives interviewer made a particularly detailed report, some of which is shared here.

It took some time to sit down with Y Sinh and his mother because they were both so busy. The Young Lives interviewer met them for the first time in the dark and she wasn't sure they would recognise her the following time they met:

*"When they saw me, both mother and child smiled. I was glad that they still recognised me even though yesterday we had only a quick meeting in the dim light of an almost-out-of-battery torch, which flickered like fireflies. I followed them back to their house: it was a relatively firmly tin-roofed one. Climbing up four wooden stairs, Y Sinh's mother opened the door, took out a small wooden chair and invited me to sit down. I noticed that the floor was wooden, and the chair was not cleaner than the floor and more importantly, there was only one chair in the house. So I decided to sit on the floor with both of them."*

She also noted: "Only after I came here could I understand the meaning of stilt houses. Sitting inside one in a boiling hot day like today, I still felt cool because the wind was blowing up from under the floor and in from all directions. It was really refreshing."

She also noticed that Y Sinh's family and their neighbours were very poor.

*"People here mostly use water from the public well. They wash their clothes and bathe in the stream. The majority of the families don't have toilets and bathrooms. People talk to each other in H'Roi. They talk to Kinh people in Vietnamese. At school, they speak Vietnamese. Most people say that it is not necessary to teach children Vietnamese before starting school, because they learn to speak it when school starts."*

But Y Sinh has only attended school for a few days and so only knows H'Roi.

Near Y Sinh's house there is a large piece of land fenced with new barbed wire, with a hole that people can crawl through. Y Sinh likes playing games here with his friends. The Young Lives interviewer came across him one day picking mangoes. The children's pockets were bulging. She talked to them about computer games and karaoke. She notes:

*"They were singing and laughing loudly, especially when I sang along with them. After that, the talk changed to the topic of love. They teased each other that this one was in love with that one. One pointed at Y Sinh's house and said that, 'Over there, there are two pretty girls, one is already married while the other is this boy's girlfriend.'*

Y Sinh did not feature in the first book of Young Lives children's stories, although we have been following him, like the other children, since 2002.

*They made fun of each other; the one who was teased wore a serious face, threatened the others and swore, while the ones who teased were excited. I said, 'You guys are too young to be in love,' but they argued back."*

Y Sinh laughed along with them. Once, he took the catapult of the boy sitting next to him and shot it a few times. Sometimes, he hugged one of the boys. The children were running and jumping around, joking and poking at each other.

The interviewer also spoke with Y Sinh's mother who says that she had her first child with a Kinh man who left her soon after their daughter was born. Some time later, she had a relationship with Y Sinh's father. When she was three months pregnant, Y Sinh's father abandoned her to have an affair with a friend of hers. So she gave birth to Y Sinh with the support of her mother, sisters and brothers.

Y Sinh's mother said after that she had to work wherever anyone hired her. She went panning for gold and did a number of other jobs. When she was working, her children stayed with their grandmother.

When Y Sinh was around 2 years old, his mother married her current husband. Her family was not happy about it, but she married him because she felt that "living alone was unhappy". Y Sinh's little sister was born in 2005. By now Y Sinh's mother's mother had died and her husband was treating her badly, but she didn't want to divorce him. He had affairs with other women and he drank. He also beat her and her children. Her husband's family then threw her out and she had to seek help from her own relatives. By this time she was pregnant for the fourth time. She had a difficult birth and she had to go to hospital for emergency surgery. She lost the baby.

Her husband continues to be violent and rarely comes home. So Y Sinh lives with his mother and little sister. His older sister lives with her husband's family but sometimes comes back or lives with her aunt because her husband is away in the army and her in-laws are always arguing. She is about 16 years old.

Y Sinh's mother says she doesn't know what she would do without her son, and that he earns money to feed the family. The older he grows, the closer they are. She says:

*"I rely on Y Sinh. If I didn't have him, I would die.*

**He helps you with a lot of work, doesn't he?**

*Yes, he does. When I was tired and could not cut more canes ... I was sick ... he took a sickle and went to cut sugar cane ... He cut 69 bundles of sugar cane in two days."*

But she adds that she would love him anyway because he is her son: "He is my child, so I take care of him, of course. If he is ugly, he is my child, if he is handsome, he is still my child."

The interview with Y Sinh himself is quite difficult because Y Sinh doesn't want to be without his mother and she keeps interrupting. Because he doesn't speak Vietnamese there also needs to be an interpreter. Even the simplest questions are painstakingly slow.

Y Sinh says he doesn't know how old he is, or the name of his village. But he does know how to sing. A neighbour says that: "He doesn't know the alphabet but he knows a lot of songs." In the evening, she hears him singing loudly: "He sings very loudly, all the way from the main

street until he gets home. It seems that he sings in order to overcome his fear [because the lane is very dark].”

His mother agrees that he is a good singer:

*“He knows how to sing karaoke, songs in movies and songs on TV. At home, when I was preparing meals, he often sang. I asked him how he knew how to sing those songs, and he said, ‘You don’t know anything. I can sing.’”*

Y Sinh’s mother worries about what will become of her children if she dies. She says that although she is not very old, her life is over.

*“I think about their future because I am already on the other side of the hill; there is no need to think about my future any more. In the future when he grows up, he can go to work for others to earn money.”*

She says she wants her children to have an easier life than she has had.

### **Ethnic minority groups in Vietnam**

If you come from an ethnic minority family in Vietnam, as Y Sinh does, you are more likely to be poor and less educated, less likely to have access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation, and your children are more likely to be underweight or small for their age than if you are from the ethnic majority.

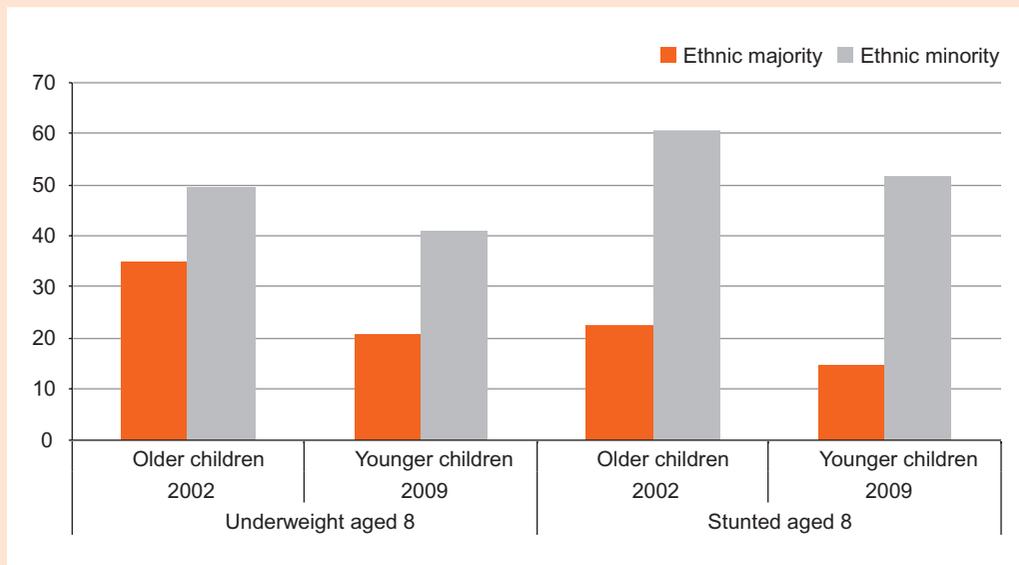
We found that 60 per cent of Young Lives children from ethnic minority groups were poor, but only 17 per cent from the ethnic majority group. The Government has a number of programmes for poverty reduction that target poor communities with lots of ethnic minority inhabitants. Poverty rates among Young Lives children are dropping faster for ethnic minority groups (down 31 per cent between 2006 and 2009) than they are for ethnic majority ones (down 9 per cent), although the ethnic minority communities are also more affected by economic crises.

*“He doesn’t know the alphabet but he knows a lot of songs”*

Y Sinh’s neighbour

## Ethnic minority groups in Vietnam *continued*

### Malnutrition indicators among 8-year-old children (%)



However, if we look at the incidence of children who are underweight or small for their age, we find not only that ethnic minority children fare much worse than those from the ethnic majority group, but that their rate of improvement over the years is lower. Most ethnic minority families live in rural areas, which highlights the need for policies targeted at poor families in these areas and the importance of government programmes aimed at poor rural families.

**Source:** Le Thuc Duc et al. (2012) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

*“I rely on Y Sinh. If I didn’t have him, I would die.  
If he is ugly, he is my child, if he is handsome,  
he is still my child.”*

Y Sinh’s mother



# Dao's story

Dao is 10 years old. He lives with his parents whom he loves dearly. He is quite shy and only gave short answers to the questions he was asked. His parents want Duy's life to be better than their own.

Dao is the youngest of five sons. His oldest brother is now 32 and married, the second and third brothers dropped out school and are working (one is a baker); the fourth brother is studying journalism.

Dao likes having his photo taken and going to the park, but says he prefers to stay in and watch cartoons. Otherwise he enjoys playing games with his friends, such as hide-and-seek, tag and crocodile. He says his friends are important to him. At home, he sometimes helps his mother sweep and mop the floor. Because there are only two bedrooms, he sleeps in his parents' room. He clearly has a close relationship with both.

*"My mother loves me. Whatever I say ... my mother agrees with me and never hits me.*

What does she do for you?

*In the evening, my mother often prepares orange juice for me to drink and other things as well.*

What does your father do for you?

*My father often helps me study, buys books for me, and takes me to school. My father buys breakfast for me.*

Does your mother never buy breakfast for you?

*No. My mother has to go to work early.*

Do you want your mother to stay at home so that you can be close to her?

*If my mother stays at home, we will have no money to buy food."*

Dao's father is a barber. His mother works grinding fish at the market. She says she has done many jobs in her life. She came from a poor family and her mother died so she was sent to work as a servant in another family's house as a young girl. She has also worked as a porter at the airport, selling lottery tickets, as a hairdresser, cleaning baskets and now for more than 30 years as a fish grinder. She also has a harrowing story to tell about the violence she experienced at the hands of her husband's family (see box below).

She says she likes working as a fish grinder best:

*"... because I don't have to compete with anyone; I am the only person who works as a fish grinder in the market. But if I work for others, for example, cleaning baskets, they might shout at me, 'How*

Dao did not feature in the first book of Young Lives children's stories, although we have been following him, like the other children, since 2002.

*did you do that? It is still dirty!' Working as a fish grinder, if they want to have their fish ground, they give it to me, and I do it for them."*

But she also says that the work hurts her hands as she gets older and she would like to do something else. She doesn't know what because she can't read and write.

She says she shares the financial responsibilities for the household with her husband: "He is responsible for electricity and water bills, and hygiene costs. I am responsible for rice and other food (meat or fish and vegetables) and the children's tuition fees."

In school, Dao says he is generally second in his class. His friends and his father help him with his homework. It is too difficult for his mother because she didn't go to school. His mother says that all her sons are clever boys.

**"Do you show off to your family when you get top grades?"**

*No. Just sometimes.*

**To whom do you show off?**

*To my mother.*

**What did your mother say when you showed off your grades?**

*She said, 'Well done!'"*

Dao's father was always disappointed that he himself had to leave school and go into the family's barber business: "Having to leave school was unfortunate for me. But I had no choice, so I had to accept it." After his apprenticeship he joined the army for four years. Dao's parents hope that unlike his three oldest brothers, Dao will be able to stay on at school and even go to university one day.

## Government subsidies

The Vietnamese Government has a number of programmes and subsidies for poor families like Dao's, which are especially useful in the light of the current economic crisis. Programme 135 supports poor households and the economic development of poor communities. It covers access to credit, health insurance, education, housing, clean water, and agricultural extension services, and develops infrastructure in poor communities.

Dao's father says:

*"We get school fees, and construction fees are waived or reduced [for a house]. At the end of each year, we receive about ten kilogrammes of rice.*

**What are the criteria for a poor household?**

*Difficult financial conditions – if the family has many children and a low income.*

**Are there many poor households like yours in your local community?**

*Quite a few. But they have been gradually reduced. I guess my family will no longer qualify for subsidies by next year. I only have to pay for two children's education now. The oldest sons are working. But both my income and my wife's do not amount to much and our sons earn only enough to cover their own expenses. We still have to feed them."*

## Domestic violence

Interviews with the Young Lives families have revealed high levels of domestic violence. Dao's mother talked about the abuse she suffered at the hands of her husband's family. She says her sister did not want her to marry her husband and warned her that his family were violent, but she was desperate for some stability. She told the Young Lives team of a number of incidents where she was badly beaten by her husband's sisters. She was covered in scratches and bruises. She went back to her parents' house and told her father she had been hit by a bicycle, but then:

*“That night, when I turned up my shirt to breastfeed my son, my father looked at my back and asked me what had happened. I had to tell him the truth and asked him not to send me back, as I was afraid of being beaten.*

*I went back in the end and my back was painful. I couldn't do the housework, so my sister-in-law hit me more. My husband hit me too ... I had to have my hair cut short to avoid their grabbing my hair and beating me ... My father-in-law tried his best to dissuade my husband from hitting me. But he pushed him away as he was stronger than him. Poor old man, I felt sorry for him ...”*

Eventually she left her husband's family's house. She stayed away for some time, living with her parents, then sleeping at the market and eventually renting a house. Ten years later, she and her husband were reconciled. Since Dao was born, she says, things have been better between her and her husband, though they still eat separately and she knows he has affairs.

She thinks her oldest son has been affected by what he saw. She says he remembers his aunt hitting her with a stick. He said: “I was standing there and crying. I was a little boy, standing and crying. And I still remember it now, I will never forget it ...” Dao has not seen the violence that his older brother has witnessed. But when asked how he would like his future to be, he says, “I want my family to live together in harmony, and everybody to love each other.”

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**Source:** Le Thuc Duc et al. (2012) *How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium? Initial Findings from Vietnam*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

*“My mother loves me. Whatever I say ... my mother agrees with me and never hits me.”*

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The profiles were written by Nikki van der Gaag with Kirrily Pells and Caroline Knowles, based on extensive research interviews with the children and their families.

## Confidentiality

The children and their families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed in these profiles. The accompanying photos are of children in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

## Photo credits

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## About Young Lives

Young Lives is a long-term study of childhood poverty following the lives of 12,000 children over 15 years in 4 developing countries: Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. Young Lives is a collaborative partnership between research and government institutes in the four study countries with the international NGO Save the Children, and led by a team at the University of Oxford.

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The views expressed here are those of the respondents and the author(s). They are not necessarily those of Young Lives, the University of Oxford, DFID or other funders.



# Changing Lives in a Changing World

Young Lives children growing up

Young Lives is a research study following 12,000 children and young people in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam over 15 years in order to examine the causes and consequences of child poverty.

This is the second book charting the lives and the aspirations of 24 of these children. The first was called: *“Nothing is impossible for me”*: *Stories from Young Lives Children*. The same children now give us a unique insight into how their lives are changing as they are growing up. They reveal what they think it means to be poor or rich, how they see their families, friends and communities, the importance of education, what is different between their generation and previous one, and their dreams for the future. Their stories are accompanied by themed boxes that give more detail on the context in which the children are living.

The profiles show the children to be hard-working, resilient and adaptable. Much of what they say is very relevant to those making policy on poverty and development. We will continue to follow them as they go through school, grow into adults and face the challenges of marriage, parenthood, and earning a living in a constantly changing world.



**Young Lives**   
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

[www.younglives.org.uk](http://www.younglives.org.uk)

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