



Young Lives Ethiopia: Enabling a better and fairer future for young people in times of crises

The Challenge

Growing up in poverty is full of challenges, but today's young people are facing multiple intersecting crises that are deepening inequalities and having a profound impact on their opportunities and life outcomes, and across generations. In Ethiopia, the unprecedented combination of COVID-19, climate change (notably severe droughts), high inflation and conflict are affecting many areas of young people's lives, including health and nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, education, employment and mental health, with those living in the poorest households hardest hit, especially women and girls.

However, despite the urgency of these issues, population-based evidence on the long-term and intergenerational impacts of poverty, inequalities and intersecting global crises is very scarce.

In Ethiopia, there has been a serious gap in cross-sectional data in recent years, with no recent national census, Demographic and Health, Household Income and Expenditure, or Welfare Monitoring surveys, and even less longitudinal evidence available. Moreover, existing research often concentrates on specific sectors, like health or education, rather than providing a **holistic perspective**.

These knowledge gaps impede effective action to prevent crises from exacerbating poverty and

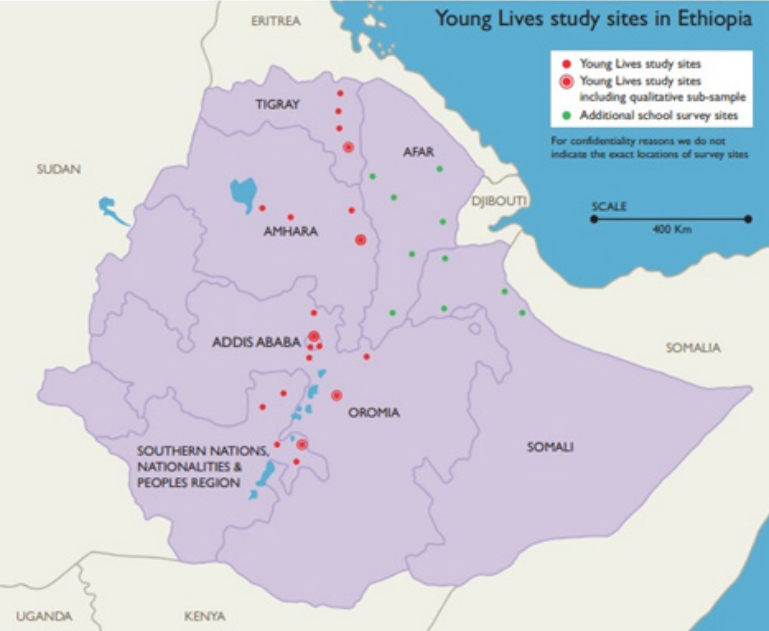
inequalities. With less than six years to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement climate targets, now is the time to equip Ethiopia's thought-leaders and policy-makers with robust longitudinal data and evidence to drive essential cross-sectoral policy action.

The Opportunity

As the largest and most comprehensive longitudinal study of poverty and inequality ever conducted in the Global South, [Young Lives](#) (YL) is uniquely positioned to address these critical evidence gaps. Led by the University of Oxford, we have been following the lives of 12,000 children, from infancy into adulthood, across four countries—Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam—delivering significant research to policy impact, since 2001.

In Ethiopia, Young Lives works in partnership with the Policy Studies Institute (PSI) and Pankhurst Development and Research Consulting (PDRC), following 3,000 young people located in 20 communities across seven regions¹, across two age cohorts: 1,000 children born in 1994-5, have been tracked since age 8, while 2,000 children born in 2001-2, have been tracked since age 1.

¹These include: Addis Ababa, Amhara, Central Ethiopia Regional State, Oromia, Sidama, Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNP) and Tigray.



Collecting in-depth information about the same individuals over time and assessing the cumulative effects of life experiences, provides a unique perspective and a better understanding on how early life circumstances affect later life outcomes, including intergenerational effects.

Building on over two decades of mixed-methods longitudinal data, our holistic approach enables us to investigate various inter-connecting aspects of young people's lives, including their physical and mental health, learning and cognition, and social and emotional functioning, with long-term repercussions for their health and well-being, education, employment and family lives.

What do we know already?

Our evidence has shown that despite significant improvements in the overall living standards of Young Lives families in Ethiopia over the last two decades, the compounding crises of COVID-19, climate change, inflation and conflict are threatening progress towards the SDGs.

- **Households tend to return to traditional gender roles in times of crises; [during the pandemic](#)**, women and girls shouldered the bulk of increased domestic work and child care, with implications for their education and future employment.
- **[Interrupted education](#) had a significant impact on young women's mental health**; 19-year-old girls whose education was interrupted by the pandemic were more than twice as likely to report symptoms consistent with anxiety or depression than those who were not enrolled.
- **[Early exposure to climate shocks](#) has profound long-term consequences for**

children's nutrition, physical growth, skills and learning, including intergenerational effects; maternal exposure to droughts, flooding or cyclones during pregnancy can impair a child's vocabulary by age five, with longer term effects on maths and social and emotional skills, as recently featured in the UK's [Financial Times](#) (June 2024) and showcased at COP26 (2022).

- **Importantly, early growth stunting can be reversed well beyond the first 1,000 days**, even into adolescence, and social protection can mitigate the negative effects of climate shocks and malnutrition; our [ground-breaking new research](#) shows that the **Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP)** can not only improve growth and nutrition, but can also have significant long-term benefits for children's cognitive skills and learning.
- As one of the only longitudinal studies able to collect data in Tigray and conflict-affected areas in Amhara, our evidence shows that young people have suffered multiple traumatic experiences, with **profound impacts on their [mental health and wellbeing](#)**, with young men particularly prone to increased anxiety, and young women experiencing increased depression.

Why Partner with Young Lives Ethiopia?

YL has created a unique dataset over the last two decades, derived from our unique mixed-methods, inter-cohort programme across four diverse LMICs. In Ethiopia, YL is one of the only longitudinal studies able to collect data in Tigray and conflict-affected areas in Amhara, collected during our innovative 2020-21 COVID-19 phone survey, and more recently through our in-person Round 7 survey.

YL is internationally renowned for research excellence, with an impressive track record of innovative research and survey methodology, with findings extensively published in high-ranked and high-impact journals. The study has had a significant impact on policy, both internationally and within Ethiopia, with more than one hundred published [policy papers](#), as well as numerous documented [impact case studies](#), comprising a distinguished record of over 900 publications on the [international website](#).

Our theory of change is built on a robust track record of exceptional research to policy impact, with active policy engagement enabled by a targeted influencing strategy and innovative communications. Being on the ground in Ethiopia for over twenty years has enabled our YL Country Director, [Dr](#)

[Alula Pankhurst](#), and YL Country Principle Investigator, [Prof Tassew Woldehanna](#), to establish exceptional long-term partnerships based on trust and collaboration, including with a wide range of government ministries, international agencies, NGOs and donors.

High-profile examples of how Young Lives continues to achieve significant research to policy engagement in Ethiopia includes:

- **Children, Youth and Women – Research and Practice Forum (CYW-RPF):** Established in 2010, Young Lives runs this influential monthly forum alongside UNICEF and the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA). It brings together key government ministries, leading researchers, programme implementers and NGOs, to present and discuss new evidence and government policies, with regular outputs shared to over 1,400 members.
- **High Level Government Engagement:** Dr Alula Pankhurst and Dr Tassew Woldehanna continue to engage with a wide range of government ministries, including the Ministries of Education, Health, Women, Children and Youth, and Labour and Social Affairs, and currently sit on the Independent Council of Economic Advisors (ICEA) set up by the Prime Minister in 2021, under the Ministry of Planning.
- **Presentations of Young Lives evidence** at regional and federal level workshops and high-level meetings have influenced the design of successive national plans on children and youth issues. Young Lives has informed numerous policies on children and youth, including on child labour, harmful traditional practices, reproductive health, and social protection.

Investment Opportunity

YL Ethiopia is looking to partner with like-minded individuals, corporations or foundations to help deliver new policy-relevant research to mitigate the impacts of multiple crises in Ethiopia, and meet the SDGs, including exploring opportunities for consortium funding.

Young Lives has been core funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO, formally DFID) since 2001, with additional support in Ethiopia from a broad range of funders including Irish Aid, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), the Hewlett Foundation, the OAK Foundation, and the Bernard van Leer Foundation (among others), and more recently from UNICEF, the Packard Foundation, and the Wellcome Trust.

We look forward to taking the conversation forward.



Contact:

Dr Alula Pankhurst
Country Director, Young Lives Ethiopia
Email: alulap@gmail.com

Dr Marta Favara
Director of Young Lives
Email: marta.favara@qeh.ox.ac.uk

Kath Ford
Senior Policy Advisor, Young Lives
Email: katherine.ford@qeh.ox.ac.uk

www.younglives.org.uk

Young Lives
Oxford Department of International
Development
University of Oxford
Queen Elizabeth House
3 Mansfield Road
Oxford
OX1 3TB

