



Young Lives India: 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 opportunities and life outcomes, across generations. The unprecedented combination of COVID-19 and climate change is affecting many areas of young people's lives, including health and nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, education, employment, and mental health. Those living in the poorest households and from marginalised backgrounds are typically 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 rare.

Moreover, existing research often concentrates on specific sectors, like health or education, rather than providing a **holistic life course perspective**.

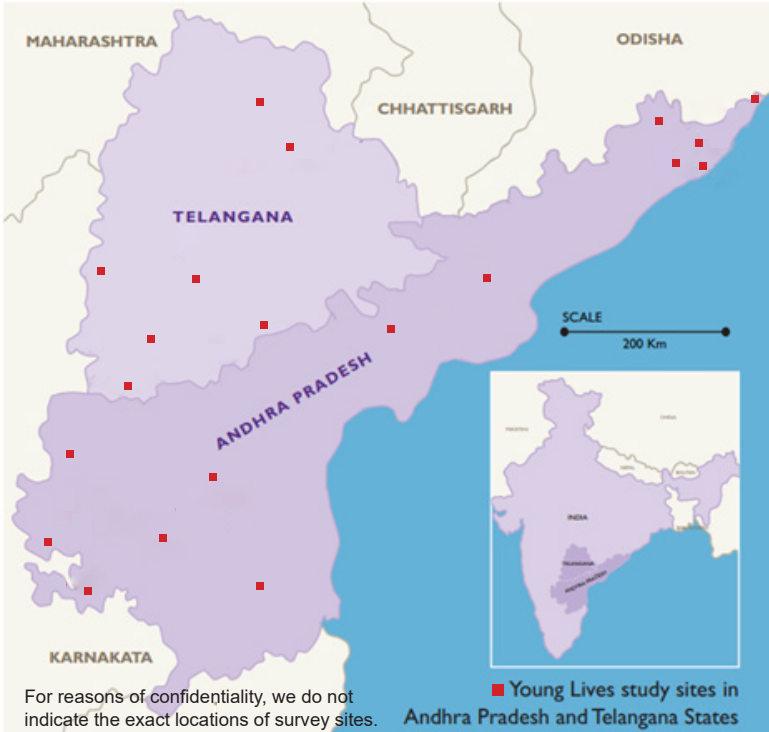
These knowledge gaps impede effective action to prevent crises from exacerbating poverty and inequalities. With less than six years to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement climate targets, now is the time to equip India's thought-leaders and policy-makers with robust 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 India, YL works in partnership with Young Lives India and the Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS) Hyderabad, following the lives of 3,000 young people located in 20 sentinel sites across the States of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The study was set up using a pro-poor sample including an almost equal number of boys and girls, located in both rural and urban communities. Our research provides comprehensive insights into every phase of childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, covering all aspects of child development across two age cohorts: 1,000 children born in 1994-5, tracked since age 8 and 2,000 children born in 2001-2, tracked since age 1.

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 of 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 economic growth and improvements in the overall living standards of YL families in India over the last two decades, the compounding crises of COVID-19, climate change, gender inequality, unemployment, and mental health are threatening progress towards the SDGs.

- **The pandemic has exacerbated poverty levels with those from poorer households and marginalised groups hardest hit:** the proportion of young people belonging to Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes reporting that their households were poor or destitute, increased from 12 per cent pre-pandemic to 19 per cent by late 2021, compared to 7 per cent across all other groups, despite government initiatives to reduce financial hardships.
- **The pandemic has disproportionately affected education,** particularly for students from poorer and marginalised backgrounds; nearly half (47 per cent) of all 19-year-old students who remained enrolled reported a decline in the quality of their learning compared to pre-pandemic levels.

- **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.
- **Importantly, early growth stunting can be reversed well beyond the first 1,000 days,** even into adolescence. Our research shows that social protection and school feeding programmes can mitigate the negative effects of climate shocks and malnutrition. Evidence from India's Midday Meal Scheme shows that children undernourished due to severe droughts in infancy can achieve significant growth recovery by age six.
- **Gender norms and discrimination have a profound effect on later life outcomes, especially during adolescence.** Unpaid care and domestic work, and early marriage and pregnancy present significant barriers to girl's education and women's economic empowerment, particularly in times of crises. During the pandemic, 67 per cent of young women spent increased time on childcare and household duties, compared to only 37 per cent of young men.
- **Young women are 1.4 times more likely to drop out of higher education than men and are 59% less likely to have regular salaried jobs.** Engagement in domestic work at age 12 is linked to a lower likelihood of completing higher education, and early marriage accounts for over 98% of the gender gap in regular salaried employment.
- **Global crises significantly impact young people's mental health, with young women disproportionately affected by interrupted education and increased domestic work:** 21 per cent of young women who spent more time on childcare during the pandemic reported symptoms of anxiety, compared to only 10 per cent of those who did not. Job losses also contribute to anxiety, with those losing jobs twice as likely to experience anxiety symptoms (20 per cent) compared to those who did not lose their job (11 per cent).



Why Partner with Young Lives in India?

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 India, the YL study stands out as one of the only longitudinal studies to have collected data during the pandemic, through an innovative COVID-19 phone survey (2020-21), and we have recently completed our in-person Round 7 survey. For over twenty years, respondents have welcomed our researchers, sharing their life-trajectories across areas such as health, education, employment and family-formation.

YL is internationally renowned for research excellence, with an impressive track record of innovative research and survey methodology, and findings extensively published in high-ranked and high-impact journals. The study has had a significant impact on policy, both internationally and within India, with more than two hundred [published 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 Renu Singh](#), and YL Country Principle Investigator, [Prof Revathi Ellanki](#), to establish exceptional long-term partnerships based on trust and collaboration, including with a wide range of government ministries at national and state level, international agencies, NGOs and donors; this includes:

- **High-Level Government Engagement:** Dr Renu Singh continues to engage with a wide range of government ministries, including the Ministries of Education, Women and Child Development, Social Justice and Empowerment, Youth and

Skills Development, Health and Family Welfare, and Labour and Employment, as well as with [NITI Aayog](#), the Government of India's public policy think tank.

- **YL India was appointed as a technical partner to the [National Commission for Protection of Child Rights \(NCPCR\)](#) in 2019**, reflecting our renown expertise on gender and child protection.
- **Presentations of YL evidence at national and regional conferences and high-level meetings** have influenced the design of successive national plans and policies on children and youth issues, including on child marriage, child labour, gender inequality, transitions to the labour market, climate change and mental health. For example, Dr Renu Singh was invited to [present evidence](#) to the Indian Parliamentary Standing Committee in 2022, examining a new bill to increase the legal age of marriage for women from 18 to 21 years of age.

Investment Opportunity

Young Lives India seeks partnerships with individuals, corporations, or foundations sharing our vision to conduct new, policy-relevant research addressing the multifaceted challenges in India and advancing progress towards meeting the SDGs. This includes exploring opportunities for consortium funding.

We have received core funding from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO, formerly DFID) since 2001, with additional support in India from a broad range of funders over the last two decades, including UNICEF, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), the Hewlett Foundation, the Oak Foundation, the Bernard van Leer Foundation, and the Wellcome Trust (among others).

We look forward to taking the conversation forward.

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