'We're not going to suffer like this in the mud': educational aspirations, social mobility and independent child migration among populations living in poverty

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Summary
This article examines the association between formal education, social mobility and independent child migration in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam and draws on data from Young Lives, a longitudinal study of childhood poverty and schooling. It argues that among resource-poor populations, child migration sustains kin relations across generations and households and also facilitates children's progression through the life-course, thus it is fundamental to social reproduction. It reasons that formal education has greatly amplified this trend. Schooling has acquired symbolic value as the prime means of escaping household poverty and realising ambitions for social mobility. As such, elevated educational aspirations combine with systems shortcomings to stimulate school selection, school transfer and school-related child migration. The article concludes by examining the implications for children, for social reproduction and for policy.

Keywords: social mobility; child migration; social reproduction; educational aspirations; Young Lives

Introduction

The link globally between school education and childhood mobility is becoming ever more apparent. Yet in orthodox scholarly accounts this association unsettles cherished ideals with regard to the child, the family and the school and the role of family and formal education in the care and socialisation of the young. Parental proximity and the residentially fixed home having become naturalised as essential to child wellbeing, child movement away from the home is represented through discourses of family rupture and dysfunction (critiqued in Ni Laoire et al. 2010; Serra 2009; Whitehead, Hashim, and Iversen 2007). Likewise, the relationship between child mobility and formal education, when it is considered, is most often framed in the negative, as precipitating educational failure or school abandonment (for example, McKenzie and Rapoport 2006; Smita 2008). In effect, only in the boarding school tradition is separation from parents for didactic purposes accepted as legitimate practice.

Drawing on qualitative data from Young Lives,(1) a mixed-methods cohort study of childhood poverty and schooling in Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam, this article explores the relationship between schooling and child mobility from a rather different perspective. It maintains that in contexts of poverty, child mobility is less an

anathema and more a fundamental feature of social reproduction, the recent expansion of formal education magnifying this circumstance. The article makes an analytical link between poverty, educational aspirations, ambitions for social mobility and children's physical mobility. In doing so, it uses the terms 'mobility' and 'migration' interchangeably to refer both to children departing solo from the natal home and to non-parental residence.(2) It finds that familial social mobility is increasingly thought to depend on children's education, raised educational aspirations producing a demand for schooling that is relevant, of good quality and has social worth. In this way, school systems inadequacies, perceived and actual, have led to the commoditisation of education, manifested in dual enrolment, extra tuition, school selection, school transfers and school-related child migration. The article concludes that education can therefore be less a casualty than a driver of child migration.

Section 1 outlines the case for conceptualising child mobility as a central feature of social reproduction and highlights the part played by formal education. Section 2 briefly describes the Young Lives research design. Section 3 examines educational aspirations and delivery in the study countries. Section 4 outlines the evidence on school selection, school transfers and school-related child migration. The final section highlights the implications of these processes for children's social integration and learning, for social reproduction and for educational planning more broadly.

1. Independent child migration: a theoretical challenge?

Migration has become a major area of social science enquiry in recent decades, recognised as associated with widespread societal transformation and economic development (Maddox 2010). Yet migration research has taken little account of children's mobility (Ni Laoire et al. 2010; Whitehead, Hashim, and Iversen 2007). The assumption has been that, as household dependents, children remain with their biological parents under all normal circumstances, either accompanying them during relocation or continuing in the natal home when a parent stays behind. Underlying this assumption is the idea that children's physical immaturity is invariably coupled with developmental vulnerability, their healthy growth and social adjustment contingent upon sustained emotional attachments and physical proximity with parents (Schaffer 1999). In this way, child relocation from the natal home is repeatedly conflated in the literature with familial crisis, child exploitation, trafficking and developmental risk (for example Boonpala and Kane 2001; for a critique, Boyden and Howard 2013).

Recent empirical work has presented a very different picture, making clear that, in practice, childhood is envisioned, structured and experienced in divergent ways across the globe. Specifically, research within geography, anthropology and related disciplines has highlighted the spatiality of childhood experience and provided plentiful evidence that both child mobility and non-parental residence are customary in many parts of the world (see, for example, Ansell and van Blerk 2004; Hashim 2007; Hashim and Thorsen 2011; Heissler 2013; Huijsmans 2008; Leinaweaver 2008; Punch 2007; Whitehead, Hashim, and Iversen 2007).

Child mobility is closely associated with rural modes of social organisation and commonly prevails in areas that cannot guarantee household subsistence or meet young people's social ambitions (Rao 2010b). Indeed, in parts of West Africa it is so widespread that there can be shame in young people remaining at home (Akua Anyidoho and Ainsworth 2009). This evidence brings into question the 'powerful ideologies that place idealised childhoods in fixed and bounded spaces' (Ni Laoire et al. 2010, 157), as well as the depiction of children as mere family dependents, or 'luggage' (Orellana et al. 2001), during migration. It also provides important insights for theorising the association between household poverty, child migration and school education.

To better appreciate this link, it is necessary to understand the wider logic underlying child relocation and non-parental residence among populations experiencing poverty. Briefly, inasmuch as it safeguards the care, development and economic contribution of the young, children's migration plays a central role in both the individual life-course and the domestic cycle and is therefore less an expression of familial dysfunction than a fundamental attribute of social reproduction. Starting with its part in the life-course, independent migration has long been one of the chief means by which boys and girls fulfil their multiple responsibilities towards their family.

The young are seldom simply household dependents in contexts of poverty and more often active participants in domestic economic and care regimes (Robson et al. 2006; Spittler and Bourdillon 2012). Particularly significant for the present discussion, contributing to the household not only supports young people's learning and development (Bourdillon et al. 2010) but also enables them to demonstrate respect for parents and elders (Heissler and Porter forthcoming). Children's familial contributions have both instrumental and symbolic value, helping fulfil immediate domestic requirements and also serving collective ambitions for the future, through the prospect of a financial or social return to their future employment or marriage.

Less disruptive to domestic economies and organisation than whole families moving away, independent child migration is especially common in rural areas with low or declining agricultural productivity and limited employment opportunities. Children's movement is commonly articulated through close ties of kinship, friendship and shared community of origin (Giani 2006; Heissler 2013). Since it entails leaving the natal home alone and/or assuming proto-adult roles at the place of destination, child relocation can occasion significant life-course changes. For example, it may facilitate entry into paid work (Iversen 2002), the learning of new trades and skills (Ansell and van Blerk 2004; Dobson 2009; Dougnon 2012; Hashim 2007) or autonomous living (Rao 2010a). This evidence has led to the theorisation of independent child migration as a life transition event (Punch 2007). In terms of the part played by child mobility in the domestic cycle, young people relocating is very often an outcome of dispersed familial networks in which separate households are interdependent economically and socially and to varying degrees, pool labour, income, goods and social care (for example Alber 2003; Ansell and van Blerk 2004; van Blerk 2005; Boyden and Howard 2013; Hashim 2007). So, the young may move to a household that offers nurturance, sponsorship or learning opportunities that are not available in the natal home or, alternatively, to augment the labour of a host household that has shortages. In this way, child relocation sustains productive and reproductive labour and reinforces familial ties across both generations and households.

The main thesis of this article is that the recent expansion of school systems and associated escalation in educational aspirations have intensified child mobility among populations living in poverty. Within the context of the global rise of the 'knowledge economy', formal education has become the defining feature of modern childhood (Crivello 2009, 395–396), commonly perceived of as the prime path out of poverty, to expanded opportunity and to broader societal transformation (Froerer 2011; Rao 2010a). In providing a major focus for collective social aspirations, schooling increasingly competes with, and is gradually superseding, work as children's prime familial responsibility. At the same time, with uneven education access, quality and relevance and with individual schools being awarded different social worth, schooling has become progressively more commoditised, the subject of preferences and choice that give impetus to school transfers and, ultimately, independent child migration.

The education-related motives for boys and girls migrating are very varied. They include the search for better quality schooling (Bano 2007; Giani 2006), the possibility, especially in rural areas, of entering secondary school (Ansell 2004; Porter et al. 2011) or of working to cover school expenses (Punch 2007). Rural schooling may also prompt relocation when it fails to

serve employment aspirations or is perceived as needlessly prolonging dependence (Ofosu-Kusi and Mizen 2012). Often children relocate to families that are better able to sponsor their schooling (Zimmerman 2003) or willing to support their education in exchange for their labour (Hashim 2007). Migration for education may give rise to social parenthood through fosterage (Alber 2003) and in some contexts fostered children are more likely than others to attend school (Zimmerman 2003, 558). Thus, the literature points to school-related incentives for child migration as ranging from economic or mentoring opportunities to constraints in the natal home and systems shortcomings in the immediate locality. This article focuses on the part played by educational aspirations and systems weaknesses in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh and Peru (and to a lesser extent Vietnam). Before providing the evidence and analysis, it briefly outlines the Young Lives research design.

2. Young Lives(3)

In each of the study countries, Young Lives is following 2000 boys and girls born in 2001–2002 and up to 1000 born in 1994–1995 over 15 years. The children were selected randomly from 20 rural and urban sites per country that were chosen from amongst the poorest regions nationally. So far, three survey rounds have been administered to the full sample of children, their caregivers and community representatives, in 2002, 2006 and 2009 and three rounds of qualitative data have been gathered from a subsample of children from both age cohorts, in 2007, 2008 and 2011. The qualitative methods comprise semi-structured interviews, focus groups, drawing (including community mapping and life-course draw-and-tell), writing (a daily activity diary) and photo elicitation. In the survey, questions on schooling history, parental involvement in children's education and parental aspirations for children's education are complemented by information on children's time use and academic achievement and, in rounds two and three, desired levels of education. The qualitative research covers children's attitudes towards and experiences of poverty, their sense of well-being and ill-being and hopes for the future, as well as their roles and social and institutional transitions. School-based research was introduced in 2010, enabling examination of the educational experiences of Young Lives children at key stages in their educational careers.

Child migration was not central to the initial research design and at the time of recruitment into the study the child respondents were all living with their families. Moreover, across the sample, the majority of boys and girls who attend school have remained within the catchment area. However, a number of children, some of whom are in the qualitative sub-sample, have relocated for their studies and many have siblings who are studying elsewhere. Also, many express a desire to migrate, either to be able to continue their education or to access a better school, and in Andhra Pradesh many are either enrolled in more than one school or have transferred between schools several times, while some are boarding. It is not possible to determine the incidence or trends in school transfers or school-related mobility from the survey data because the broad reach of topics covered limits the opportunity for detailed questioning on specific subjects and also because the wide variation in the duration, nature and conceptualisation of migratory processes leads to significant underreporting. Therefore, this article draws on qualitative data obtained mainly from the older cohort and their caregivers.

3. The drivers of mobility

Educational aspirations and delivery
The economies of the four study countries grew significantly between 2002 and 2009. In all cases, economic growth has been associated with national expansion of formal education and with high levels of school enrolment among children in the Young Lives sample. Thus, in 2002, at 97% or above, primary school enrolment was near-universal across Andhra Pradesh, Peru and Vietnam (Murray 2012). Systems expansion has been complemented by

a range of measures to boost school participation, including advocacy, compulsion and incentives. In line with these promotional efforts and with schooling progressively serving wider social ambitions, Young Lives children and caregivers express high levels of commitment to formal education. Thus, for example, even though it is a pro-poor sample, more than half of the parents of eight-year-olds in Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam wanted their child to complete university (Pells 2011). Moreover, the survey data reveal considerable coherence between caregivers' ambitions for their children's education and children's own educational ambitions in all four study countries. Dercon and Singh (2013) found a striking association between caregivers' educational aspirations for children when they were aged 8 and children's aspirations for themselves at age 15. They also observed that children with higher aspirations at age 15 were more likely to be enrolled at that age.

One of the most notable features of raised aspirations is the perception that school education is both the sole means of escaping poverty and the prime vector for social mobility. For girls in Andhra Pradesh, this is often about obtaining sufficient education to enhance their prospects of marrying an educated man. This reasoning was clearly articulated by Harika, who is from the cotton growing area of Poompuhar and recently moved to a government hostel so that she could attend college:

> 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.

In Andhra Pradesh there is considerable diversity in types of school and a recent escalation in low-fee private options has elevated educational aspirations, greatly influencing school choice. Measuring the educational level and job parents would like their children to obtain, Galab et al. (forthcoming) find that the children whose parents aspire for them to remain longer in education are more likely to attend private school. They also report that the magnitude of the increase in probability of private school enrolment is much higher when parents plan for their children to go to university and/or work in a high-status or high-income occupation.

Elevated educational aspirations are evident among children and caregivers throughout the qualitative sub-sample, across all four countries. The most consistent narrative along these lines comes from rural Peru. Crivello (2010) argues that, though most rely on their children's work, there is widespread consensus among rural caregivers in Peru that school education offers an escape from the drudgery of herding and farming, a path to wealth and material security and a means of releasing future generations from the hardship and suffering that they have endured. Recognised as the channel through which to become a 'professional', or somebody of social significance, education is also understood to enable children to better defend themselves and cope with life's challenges. One caregiver used the metaphor of footwear to symbolise the potential for inter-generational social transformation that he associates with education: 'I … walk in the fields with sandals. At least he will go with shoes if he gets a good head with education' (Crivello 2010, 404).

A second Peruvian caregiver indicated that, '[children] have to study. I don't want [him] to be like me …', while a third remarked: 'senora, my daughter is not meant to work in the field'. Children in Peru share these perceptions. One girl articulated displeasure at having to work on her family's farm, which she finds tiring, and wants to be a nurse. She told her mother, 'We're not going to suffer like this in the mud … it's better that I go and study.' Another remarked that she finds working on her parents' farm disagreeable because her clothes get dirty and she feels 'shattered' at the end of the day. Though she acknowledges that her parents are reliant on her help, she stated, 'I am not going to be a peasant' and was

adamant that, given her ambition to study nursing in Lima, the skills she has acquired through farm work will not serve her in the future.

Many parents make significant sacrifices to furnish their children with an education, as illustrated by two cases from Andhra Pradesh. At age 16, Harika gave up paid work in the cotton fields to return to school. The school entrance fee was 3600 rupees and the family spends a further 500–600 rupees monthly on her education, these being significant outgoings given their poverty. Likewise, despite facing many hardships, all of the children in Preethi's family, including Preethi herself, are studying and none are working. Preethi is from one of the many tribal groups in India that remain highly marginalised economically and socially, despite numerous measures of positive discrimination by government. Her mother described the family as being 'in a lot of trouble' financially. Her father is an alcoholic and when last interviewed the family had experienced several major setbacks – they would normally benefit from the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, but this was suspended due to the heavy rains, and the grandfather's pension payments had also been stopped. Their eldest daughter was ill with malaria and typhoid and paying for her treatment, together with expenses incurred by building their house and conducting several ceremonies, had pushed the family into debt. So, to keep the children in school, the mother had to halt the construction work and sell some land and goats.

Whatever the ambitions, actual school attendance hinges on perceptions of the costs and benefits, which may vary according to a wide range of factors, including the attributes of the local labour market and opportunities for marriage. Choices may differ according to a child's gender or birth order, this revealing an invidious dimension to demand for formal education wherein families do not always place a high value on schooling for all (see also Alber 2012). In Andhra Pradesh, the returns to girls' education are felt to be much lower than for boys because girls are less likely to obtain well-paid jobs and more likely to cease to contribute to the natal home when they marry, which can be at quite a young age. As a consequence, Andhra Pradesh is the one context in the study where a systematic gender bias in educational investments is observed, with girls increasingly disadvantaged as compared with boys as they grow older (Dercon and Singh 2013).

Harika's mother was explicit about the disincentives involved: We wanted to stop her from further studies. … Will she give us money once she starts working? Who will she give it to? We won't make anything from her. She is better off working here ….. She made reference to the financial problems the family faced, which included the interest they were paying on loans, their inability to plant cotton because of heavy rains and the hospitalisation of a son. She went on to underline the social pressures against educating girls: '… people are scolding us. They say: "What is the need to educate girls? They will get spoilt."' Accordingly, Harika struggled to convince her parents to let her stay on at school and delay marriage. Harika's case is quite unusual for the children in the sub-sample for in interviews with adults and children across all four countries the prevailing perception is that educational investments and associated returns are fundamental to mutual relations between generations. Understood as the path to poverty relief and social mobility for the whole family, school success is fast becoming children's chief familial responsibility. A boy from Peru outlined this logic in terms of rewarding the sacrifices made by parents and elders to get their children educated:

> The young man who does well is studious, diligent and responsible, and has outstanding grades. He dreams of completing his higher education to have a career and to 'return the favour' of his parents, helping them when they are older.

That schooling is now key to sustaining kinship reciprocity with the promise of lifting families out of poverty can be seen in the case of Fanus, from the very different setting of Ethiopia. Fanus explained, 'I have to learn, be in a better position and improve my family's life.' She

hopes to achieve this aim by becoming a doctor and has moved to a nearby town, to live in rented accommodation with her sister, so that she can remain at school. Her mother, who has been a single parent since the father abandoned the family some years back, is determined to ensure that her daughters complete their schooling and remarked that when she does so, Fanus must, 'pay her debt as I have done to her'. Thus, doing well at school is in large part about honouring children's responsibilities towards their parents.

The educational landscape
Strategies for realising educational aspirations are strongly contingent on the nature of the educational landscape, which varies hugely both between and within countries and according to a range of other factors, including national policies on migration. Key to the current discussion is that with educational expectations running so high, uneven coverage, quality and relevance of formal education, together with variations in perceived social worth of specific institutions, can stimulate school selection, school transfers and school-related child mobility. There are official constraints on migration in Ethiopia and most pupils attend local public schools, many in half-day shifts that allow them to work. However, children tend to enrol late, attend intermittently, progress slowly and leave early having acquired few skills (Frost and Rolleston 2011). Thus, for example, while enrolment among Young Lives children at age 8 increased from 66% in 2002 to 77% in 2009 in Ethiopia, the literacy rate increased by only 2 percentage points during the same period (Woldehanna et al. 2011). Moreover, though 89.6% of the older cohort of children was still enrolled at age 15 to 16 years, only 18% had completed primary education at that point (Woldehanna et al. 2011). Due to severe limitations on coverage and quality, a growing proportion of rural children relocate for secondary schooling, even if only informally, or by moving short distances, or seasonally.

In Vietnam there is an explicit policy of universal provision that is relatively uniform in quality nationally. Also, migration for education is curbed by restrictions on access to schools in destination communities. Most pupils attend government schools and half-day shifts are common, with private tuition more customary than mobility as a means of supplementing local provision. Ethnic minority children living in the remote and mountainous northern region of Vietnam are the one population group that is encouraged to migrate to attend government hostel schools. Moreover, it is possible that sizeable disparities in school experience between ethnic majority and ethnic minority children in the Young Lives sample (Le Thuc et al. 2011) could constitute an added incentive for school-related migration among minority children. Thus, in both age groups, ethnic-minority children fare far less well in the acquisition of mathematics and reading skills than ethnic-majority Kinh children (Glewwe, Chen, and Katare 2012). Vu (forthcoming, 20) points to the use of an unfamiliar language, poor teaching methods, unwelcoming school environments and family poverty as key determinants of poor performance among Cham H'roi children.

Peru has a well-established public education system and most children go to government schools, with some, in urban areas especially, attending private schools. Though public education coverage is practically universal at the primary level, rural children may be forced to migrate to towns for secondary education. This has become a part of a much wider trend of abandonment of the countryside and rural ways of life as people move to urban areas in search of enhanced opportunities for themselves and their children. At the same time, serious disparities in education quality, which consistently advantage better-off children in the Young Lives sample (Cueto, Leon, and Muňoz forthcoming, 15), are likely to be a factor in school selection and school-related migration in a proportion of cases.

Though the policy in India has long been that every village should have a school within a kilometre's distance, boarding school education for social elites is an important feature of the country's colonial heritage. There exist a number of elite boarding schools (some of which are public) that have long been seen as a gold standard worth travelling for. Further, the Government implicitly encourages school movement and independent child migration in two

specific ways. First, the sheer multiplicity of schools, many of which lie outside the catchment area and/or the public sector, combines with wide variation in school experiences to boost both school selection and mobility between schools. In Andhra Pradesh, attendance and progression to secondary and tertiary education levels are major challenges among disadvantaged groups and regions and completion of primary education is no guarantee of mastery of basic literacy and numeracy (Rolleston and James forthcoming). Consequently, parents strive to identify schools across private and government sectors that they can afford and believe will deliver on their aspirations (James and Woodhead forthcoming). Seemingly, the highest incidence of school selection and movement occurs in urban areas, where there is a greater supply of more diverse schools in the vicinity and households have larger income to cover fees (James and Woodhead forthcoming). Second, tribal and other socially marginalised groups living in remote rural areas can often only access education by moving into government hostel schools outside their communities. Consequently, child relocation for schooling appears to be more common in rural areas where it aligns with government policy on the national integration of minority groups.

Thus far it has been argued that with educational aspirations running so high, schooling has become an important feature of childhood. Yet government policies and school realities can result in very variable educational landscapes, in some cases presenting significant incentives for school selection, school transfers and school-related child migration. Andhra Pradesh has seen a rapid growth in low-fee private schools teaching through the medium of the English language. Bolstered by the belief that a command of English will enhance employment prospects and that private schools are superior to government facilities, this escalation has led to an upsurge in movement between schools and accelerated the commodification of education.

Already at pre-school level the majority of younger cohort children in urban areas of Andhra Pradesh, including 34% of those in the poorest quintile, were in private facilities (Streuli, Vennam, and Woodhead 2011; Woodhead and Streuli 2013). By the time they had reached around seven to eight years of age, 44% of these children were found to be attending private school, which was a rise from 24% of the older cohort who were in private facilities at the same age seven years earlier. James and Woodhead (forthcoming) report a threefold increase in the incidence of younger cohort children being moved between schools by the age of eight, compared with the older cohort at the same age. These figures exclude all school moves linked to 'regular' school transitions and household relocation, as well as the many school moves during the pre-school years. Choices are being made between government and private schools, between different private schools and, in some cases, between different types of government school (1). James and
Woodhead conclude that in this context, selecting a school 'is not about a singular decision made at the transition points into pre-school or primary school. Instead, an increasing number of parents make multiple, successive choices even during their children's earliest schooling' (7–8). The provision of boarding facilities in government hostels and residential schools for Scheduled Tribe children and other groups living in remote areas of Andhra Pradesh has been an inducement for school-related child migration. Instruction, food, utensils, accommodation and healthcare are all free and quite a few of the children in the sample have taken advantage of this policy, some even at the primary level. Their motives vary, as can be seen from the three examples cited below.

Balakrishna, a Scheduled Tribe boy in the younger cohort, is currently in fourth grade and has switched school three times, most recently moving from a local government facility to an Ashram school some distance away. His parents felt he needed closer supervision: 'The problem is, we do not stay at home during the day and they keep roaming without studying when we are not there. That is why we put them there, so that they will study well.' They plan to send him to a government school in the city of Hyderabad when he reaches seventh

grade. Balakrishna was content to leave the village school since the food and teaching were poor and enjoys living in the hostel, where he sleeps on the floor with 30 other boys.

Likewise, Preethi is studying in a government school and lives in a hostel with two other girls from her village. She and her two brothers having moved away to continue their education, her elder sister is the only one living at home and helping their parents farm. While her mother regrets that her children have moved away, Preethi is more sanguine: 'They accuse us at home for remaining idle and for not doing any work. … It is a great relief to be in school….' On the other hand, she found it hard to adjust to hostel life and is quite ambivalent about her circumstances: '… it is a torture at school. … There the teachers keep chiding and taunting us. They accuse us for not studying. … Then we feel like coming back home as the nagging is unbearable for us.'

Balasubramanyam, who is in the younger cohort, was sent to an Ashram school when he reached fourth grade. He anticipated that the education would be better in this school and looked forward to living in the hostel with his older brother and cousin. However, his mother recalled the transition as being difficult: 'They cry for going to the distant school … they say that the food is not good … it doesn't suit them … they feel they can eat well at home and they can go to school from home.' Balasubramanyam conceded that the food made him sick, although he expressed disappointment at being forced to return to the village school following a bout of appendicitis. His parents want him to move away again to attend a fee-paying, English-language-medium school to benefit from the higher standards of education and his father expressed a willingness to use up to half of the family's meagre income for the fees. His mother explained that they would borrow money or mortgage their house if necessary and regards the payment of fees as ensuring accountability: 'We don't know whether they teach well or not [in government schools] but in private schools we pay the money so they take care.' Their poverty means that the youngest son will only go to private school when Balasubramanyam has completed his education, while the eldest is expected to leave school early to help on the family farm.

Even though parents generally hold strong views on their children's schooling, many have little or no education themselves and therefore have limited understanding of the kinds of knowledge or skills that best promote social advancement in adulthood. Thus the cost-benefit calculations around formal education are extremely precarious. Rural caregivers across diverse contexts articulated only vague ideas about what to expect from their children's schooling and many appeared quite detached from the experience of education more generally. For example, an illiterate mother in Peru explained that the only way she can judge how her children are doing at school is by the volume of red pen marks in their exercise books. Other parents in Peru seemed to be intimidated by teachers who, for instance, reprimand them for not assisting their children with their homework.

Across the wider sample, criticism of specific schools often focuses on the food and facilities rather than the quality of teaching, while the advantages of schooling are described in extremely generalised, idealistic terms, without reference to desired levels of attainment or competencies. For instance, in rural Ethiopia, where few in the parental or grandparental generation have much education, adults talked about schooling merely as ensuring that children are 'smart' or 'wiser' than their elders, preventing early marriage among girls or guaranteeing good employment. Clearly, a paucity of educational experience among adults could in itself be an impetus in education-related child migration inasmuch as parents aspire to give their children opportunities that they themselves lacked.

Sometimes children's preferences also focus more on facilities than pedagogic substance, as can be seen in examples from Patna, a tribal community in Andhra Pradesh. Poor food and hygiene were the most often cited reasons for returning home or changing school hostels in that community. Nevertheless, in many cases, boys and girls have a stronger

awareness of the criteria relevant to school choice than do their parents. Several of the children in Patna confirmed that moving away for school was about accessing better-quality teaching and exposure to the wider world, as one 12-year-old girl reasoned:

> [I]f one remains at home all the time it may not be possible to know anything about the outside world. So I want to go out. … One ought to know about the world outside. So, I want to join a hostel and know much more … I feel I might be able to live.

4. Social reproduction: interdependence and mutuality

Given the high levels of inter-generational dependence within families and the importance of respect for elders, it would be misleading to claim that school selection by children is a simple manifestation of individual agency. Nonetheless, respondents in the older cohort do repeatedly take the initiative in migration decisions. For example, Alvaro, who is from a village in Andahuaylas, one of the poorest regions in Peru, and has five brothers and sisters, chose to move into a children's home run by a former priest in a nearby town. His reasoning was that this was his only chance of attending a good school given his family's poverty and that living in Andahuaylas would enable him to access the Internet and libraries for homework. By the third round of qualitative data gathering, Alvaro had reached the fifth grade in an agricultural secondary school and was planning to study civil engineering in Lima.

Biritu, who is from Ethiopia's Oromia region and was aged 15 when last interviewed, also took the decision to search for a better school:

> It was me who made up the idea. You know my parents do not go to schools with me for that matter. Then they cannot judge whether I am learning or not. When I evaluated my grades in the past seven grades, I found out that I was not able to sit for the next year national examination because we were not taught very well. I told my parents about this and they agreed with me.

Her mother struggles financially, having raised five children with little support from her husband, who is an alcoholic. Even so, Biritu opted for a private school in a nearby town, where she lives with her older brother, who is studying nursing and helps with her homework and the purchase of school materials.

There are several examples among Young Lives respondents of children migrating to households willing to underwrite their education. Haftey, an orphan from Ethiopia's Tigray region, was raised initially by her grandmother, who is widowed and very poor. The grandmother has had a difficult life, having been unhappily married at the age of nine and going on to bear nine children by her second husband, only two of whom survived. Believing that her lack of 'worldliness' played a significant part in her troubles, she regards her granddaughter's future as contingent upon schooling and decided that Haftey should move to the regional capital to live with an aunt and uncle so that they could bankroll her education. The grandmother observed:

> … it is difficult for me to afford her expenses there. … You know how difficult it is to be orphaned? If she had lost only one parent, that parent would do everything, but I can't. I sent her there because I can't buy her exercise books, can't pay house rent, afford her food ….

In several instances across the sample, children's mobility clearly reinforces mutual relations between generations within extended families. When Buzunesh, a paternal orphan from Oromia in Ethiopia, reached the age of nine, her maternal grandmother fell sick and it was

agreed that she should move to live with and care for the old woman. The grandmother described the relocation as part of a reciprocal arrangement decided on by Buzunesh's mother: '... her mother decided that she shall stay here and take care of me until I die. She takes care of me and I take care of her schooling.' Migration also enables children to live in environments that are more conducive to learning, as can be seen from the very different setting of Vietnam. Huu was in eighth grade when his parents became concerned that his enthusiasm for playing video games was detracting from his education. They were both working and did not have the time to watch over him, so it was decided that he should live with his uncle, who agreed to discipline him and ensure that his school grades improved.

Nevertheless, though the young may be decisive about leaving home to expand their educational opportunities, their plans may be thwarted by deep familial responsibilities. When in his early teens, Rajesh, from Andhra Pradesh, had wanted to become a doctor and was studying in a hostel school. But he returned home due to poor health and because his family faced economic difficulties and needed his help on the farm. By the age of 15, he had given up his ambitions to study medicine, rationalising that he wanted to take care of his parents and was in any case unlikely to progress to higher education. Migration arrangements may also break down when expectations of reciprocity are not fulfilled, as when the host household makes unreasonable demands on the child migrant or fails to provide the opportunities that have been promised. In Vietnam, Huu was keen to succeed at school, so remained with his uncle for some time. However, he was required to work in his uncle's shop during term time and began to find high school hard and to fall behind. Eventually, when his brother departed for military service, Huu left school and returned home to support his mother and care for his sick father. This evidence reminds us that schooling can compete with other demands on children's time and that child migration is a complex process often involving reversals and uncertain outcomes.

This section has argued that caregivers and children in the Young Lives study set great store by education, with school selection and school transfers a growing feature of the educational landscape. Inasmuch as local schools are in short supply, or do not meet expectations, school-related child migration may increasingly outweigh considerations of parental proximity or residential fixity. What, then, are the implications for children's social integration and learning, for social reproduction and for educational planning more broadly? These questions are addressed in the concluding section.

5. School-related migration: a challenge to assumptions of residential fixity?

This article has argued that in the four Young Lives countries economic growth, societal transition and service expansion have raised educational aspirations to the point that schooling is, in effect, now perceived to be the sole means of escaping poverty and achieving social mobility. High educational aspirations, stimulated in some settings by wide variation in school accessibility, quality, relevance and social worth, have led to the commoditisation of formal education, which increasingly involves cost-benefit calculations and selection. Extra tuition classes, dual enrolment and school choice all play a part in efforts to maximise children's prospects, with migration for schooling being one consequence.

Child migration has often been problematised in the literature as an expression of disunity within the family and an impediment to children's learning, socialisation and care. Undeniably, this is the case for some children. Then again, from the evidence presented here, it is apparent that children's social and emotional connections to parents and immediate kin are not dependent on physical proximity or remaining within the natal home. Quite the opposite, in reinforcing the domestic economy, serving collective hopes for a better future and consolidating bonds between sending and host households, child relocation can serve to secure children's social integration by buttressing, rather than severing, relations

across households and generations of kin. Independent migration may also facilitate children's passage through the life-course by increasing their autonomy and opening up their social and economic horizons. This kind of evidence suggests a normative model of family and child life in contexts of poverty in which young people's mobility should be theorised as core to social reproduction instead of a familial catastrophe. This model has a clear economic logic as well as tremendous social power.

With formal education now a major component in children's repertoire of filial responsibilities, school choice has become a significant motivating factor in their relocation from the natal home, leading to a number of perverse outcomes. First, it has given rise to significant tension between the instrumental and symbolic contributions children make to the household. Serving the immediate material requirements of the domestic economy as well as collective ambitions for the future means that many children straddle their time precariously across school and work, with those who fall behind at school or are forced to leave early often being acutely aware of disappointing their families.
Second, the direct, indirect and opportunity costs of school-related migration sometimes exacerbate rather than alleviate family poverty. Moreover, adults and children with limited educational experience often lack the knowledge and expertise to make informed choices about which schools offer the best returns through future employment and other advantages in adulthood. Third, migratory arrangements can break down, disrupting children's transitions to adulthood. All things considered, despite the current buoyancy of many developing-country economies, school-related migration does not guarantee the kind of adulthood many children and families aspire to, especially given entrenched social hierarchies and restricted labour markets that frequently prevent the poor from accessing good employment. This raises the possibility that, increasingly, child migration for schooling may merely be reproducing or even heightening socio-economic inequalities, rather than mitigating poverty and economic insecurity.

What then, are the responsibilities of education planners? In India, expanding educational opportunities for the poorest and most disadvantaged groups via boarding provision for Scheduled Tribes and seemingly low-cost private options has stimulated educational choice, school mobility and independent child migration. In the other Young Lives countries, the expectation is that children will attend government schools within their localities, at least at primary level. In Ethiopia and Vietnam, there are also wider controls on migration. Therefore, in all cases save India, children accessing schools outside the catchment area is out of alignment with national policy objectives – indeed given the broad policy predisposition against independent child migration, it is surprising that this phenomenon has not attracted more attention as a cause for policy concern. It is important to recognise the part played by education planning in developing countries in encouraging child relocation, inasmuch as it can be attributed to expanding primary schooling and using advocacy and incentives to stimulate demand without at the same time assuring universal coverage, quality and relevance. It is perhaps inevitable that high levels of heterogeneity will encourage the exercise of choice. But school transfers involve risks and costs and choice is not a guarantee of improved outcomes for children or their families.

Undoubtedly, without further expanding supply, raising quality and ensuring curriculum relevance, planning around geographical catchment areas will have very little effect on child mobility. Reaching physically isolated and poorly served communities with more flexible systems, including mobile or distance learning facilities, may have a limited role. But school-related migration among children living in poverty is about social perceptions as much as school realities. This suggests that, ultimately, given the powerful societal processes at play in influencing educational aspirations, the growing commoditisation of schooling and the history of child relocation in many places, school-related child migration is largely beyond the scope of educational, or any other, policy.

Notes
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2. This does not necessarily mean that children who migrate independently are autonomous agents.

3. For details of the methodology see www.younglives.org.uk

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