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## Speaking Out and Changing Lives: The Young Lives study and you

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**This booklet is a thank you to the 12,000 children and young people and their families who have participated in the Young Lives study over the last 15 years.**

All the children and families participating in the study shared a great deal of information about their personal lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities are protected. For this reason, the names of the children quoted in this booklet have been changed. The photos are of children and young people living in similar situations in similar communities to those in the Young Lives study.

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## Why have we written this booklet?

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There are 2 billion children in the world today. What you have to say is important if we want to build a better future for the children and youth in our world.

We have visited and spoken to you, and to your families, several times over the past 15 years. We have asked you about your lives, about your hopes and fears, about school and work and your dreams for the future.

This booklet is to tell you about what the Young Lives study has found out and what effect this has had. Above all, it is to say thank you to all of you and your parents for being involved with us since we started 15 years ago.

*“It gives me hope in my everyday life when you come every three years. It helps me to know what I didn’t know.”*

Addisu, age 19 (Ethiopia).

### What is Young Lives?

Young Lives began in 2002. It has followed 12,000 children and young people in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. We wanted to find out about your lives so that we can tell people in government what they need to do to improve the lives of children and young people all over the world. One of the interesting things we found is that though you come from different communities in different countries, you have many things in common.



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● Ethiopia ● India ● Peru ● Vietnam



## What has changed?

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There have been many changes over the 15 years that we have been talking to you. In your countries and communities, economic growth has led to improvements in infrastructure, from new schools and health centres, to paved roads, piped water, sewage and electricity, mobile phones, the internet, and often cable TV.

Hadush is 19 and from Ethiopia. His father says many things have got better since he was young: *“This is a really good time to raise children. They have proper feeding and are sent to school. We can now drink clean water. If we are sick, we can be treated at the health centre. In the past, many people died due to a lack of health services. I am happy because of all these changes. The government is doing well.”*

Deepak, age 12, is from India. His father too thinks that things have improved. Even 10 years ago, he says, there were no cement roads or wells or taps. If people wanted to go to market they had to cross the river on a dangerous construction made of wires and ropes. There were no government schemes to help poor people. In an emergency: *“We used to tie [the sick child] in a bed cover and carry them to the clinic. Now we call 108 and the ambulance comes and takes you.”*

Lupe is 12, from Peru. She thinks her area has changed for the better because they repaired the football pitch and also improved the roads. But she also thinks there is more crime, which makes her afraid to leave the house on her own. She would like there to be a local police station, and more green areas and better bin collections because there is a lot of rubbish lying around. She thinks people should come together to do something for their community.



Dao, age 13, is from Vietnam.

He says: *"In the past, my parents had very difficult lives. Now, my life is much better... when my parents were small they had to work."*

Teje, age 13, from Ethiopia, thinks her community has improved in recent years: *"Young people without work are being organised into small-scale enterprises and have started businesses. Housing is improving. Roads are being built. People's income is increasing. In the past, it was only men who generated income but now women are actively involved, which means that household income has increased."*

She also thinks that the area has become safer for children, especially girls. *"Young men don't harass girls. They protect them. In addition, the community cooperates to protect girls' rights. They report [any problems] to the police. The police presence in the area has contributed to the reduction of rape and other kinds of crimes."*



## “If I study hard”: The importance of education

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You (and your parents) think education is important, for both girls and boys. Many of your parents did not have the chance to go to school when they were young. When you were 15, almost all of you agreed that: *“If I study hard at school, I will be rewarded with a better job in the future.”*

Tufa is 19, from Ethiopia. His father says: *“We understand the value of educating our children. In today’s world, an educated person is better than an uneducated one.”*

Dao is 13, from Vietnam. He has just started secondary school. His father says: *“Our future depends on our children. If our children are doing better economically, then our family will be better off.”*

Harika is 19 and from India. Her mother says: *“An uneducated person’s life stagnates in one place, while an educated person keeps growing and developing.”*

Shanmuka Priya, age 13, from India, says: *“We don’t know what is going around us if we aren’t educated. Suppose an uneducated friend doesn’t understand something, if I am educated I can explain.”* She thinks it is particularly important for girls. *“If a girl’s parents say that she shouldn’t study then they’re committing a mistake and a crime. Education is important.”*

Cecilia’s mother, from Peru, who left after primary school, says that she thinks going on to secondary school and college is important because you acquire more knowledge.

Education has brought many benefits. You have learned to read and write, have gained new skills and increased your confidence. You also know your rights. We found that those of you whose parents, especially mothers, went to school, were more likely to go to school yourselves.



But many of you have had to leave school before completing secondary education, while a few of you could not complete primary school or have never been to school at all. Large numbers of you have had to repeat grades, meaning that you are over-age for your class. In Ethiopia, this included more than half of 12-year-old children and in Peru it is almost a third. Parents everywhere complain of the poor quality of education and lack of teachers.

But leaving school doesn't necessarily mean the end of studying. Harika, age 19 from India, left school and is now married with a child. But she wants to continue her studies. Her mother says: *"If she goes on to further education, we will take care of the baby. We want her to be happy. If she studies, her life will improve."*



## What does being poor mean to you?

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We found that your lives have not been without difficulties. Many of your families and communities have suffered from bad weather, or crop failure, or other disasters. Tufa, from Ethiopia, had to leave school at 13 when his house burned down. His mother said that the fire from a lamp jumped onto their grass roof: *“All his exercise books were burned and his clothes too.”*

When Hung, from Vietnam was 16, his family lost their whole crop of orange trees in a flood. Y Sinh’s family in Vietnam experienced storms where they lost all they had: *“When the storms swept through the village, in huts like ours, sometimes everything was blown away... Clothes, possessions, everything.”*

In all these situations, often the poorest families suffer the most, especially those from rural areas or minority groups. In Ethiopia, we found that between 2002 and 2006 almost 9 out of 10 of the poorest households had experienced at least one disaster like this.

Some of you have had family members who have been ill or have even died – in Ethiopia, one in five of you had lost a parent by the time you were 15. Some of you have also experienced violence. When Ravi, from India, was 13, his father was often violent towards his mother. He said: *“When my mum and dad fight I feel very bad. When my dad beats my mum, we cry and stop him.”*





In school, although corporal punishment is outlawed, it is still common. Many of you told us this is the main reason you dislike school and it can mean that children do less well in school or even leave school altogether. The number of 8-year-old children who said they had been hit in school ranged from 4 out of 5 in India, to 2 out of 5 in Ethiopia, to 1 out of 3 in Peru, and 1 out of 5 in Vietnam.

When we asked you what it meant to be poor, you talked about a lack of basic necessities like food, clothing and housing. Marta, aged 12, from Peru, said: it was when people *“do not have anything to eat, they don’t have farmland, or they don’t have a house to live in.”* But you also said that it was not just about money. Social networks like friends and relatives are extremely important, and households can move in and out of poverty.



## New challenges and opportunities for the future

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Many of you have combined school and work, both paid and unpaid, since you are small. Manuel, from Peru, was 12 when he told us that he liked to work as well as going to school because he gave the money he earned to his mother and this made him feel good. However, he finally had to leave school altogether, when economic necessity meant he had to join his father working on a coffee plantation. Poverty forces many children and young people to leave school.

The differences between young women and young men are starting to show more strongly now that you are growing up. For example, some of the girls in each country have already married and some have had children. In Peru, almost a quarter of the young women have had a child by the time they were 19. In India, 36% of young women age 19 are married compared to 2% of young men.

On the other hand, girls are also more likely than boys to stay in school after the age of 15. Young men are finding it difficult to get jobs that will allow them to support a family. As Afework, age 19, from Ethiopia, said: *“You have to have your own income. When you finish your education, you get a job; when you decide to have a girlfriend you think about having children. You need to have your own life, your own house and a car before you start such a relationship.”*

Hung from Vietnam, who is also 19, says he will need to try to find “a stable job.” And then: *“I will try to build a family with a wife and have children, and have a separate house without relying on my parents.”*



Not all of you have managed to fulfil your dreams so far. But many of you are strong and you often have good friends and families. You continue to give us ideas about what needs to change. And you are optimistic about the future.

Teje is 13 and from Ethiopia. She says: *"I believe that in the future I will no longer be poor. I will use family planning and have fewer children [than my parents]. My parents have five children, which may be a reason why we are poor. I want to continue my education to university."*

Salman, aged 19, from India, says: *"After five years, with a good income in my pocket and being independent, I will marry. My family will be happy and my wife will be happy. I will have sons and daughters, they will grow, they will go to school, then we will get them married. This is what life will be like."*



Lien, age 19 from Vietnam, is studying at university. Her mother says: *"She is a good girl, and she is hard working. I just want her to graduate, find a job, and marry. The most important thing is to get a job..."*

Lupe, age 12, from Peru, says that she would like to finish high school and then go to college to study veterinary medicine. She loves animals. She believes she will be able to do this, because her grandmother, who used to take care of her when she was younger, now lives abroad and might be able to help her. She thinks that: *"When you have work, you also have more independence in your life."*

# What difference has Young Lives made?

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We have presented the evidence we have found from our interviews with you to many other researchers and government officials. Listening to your stories and experiences has meant that policymakers around the world now have a better understanding about what it has been like to grow up in the first 15 years of the twenty-first century.

The United Nations and governments around the world have now agreed some ambitious goals for the next 15 years. As we look ahead, the material you have given us will continue to influence the way that politicians think, and help to shape policies that will improve the lives of children and young people everywhere.

Here are a few examples of the many impacts that Young Lives has had in the different countries.

## **Ethiopia**

Young Lives provided evidence on the importance of good quality early education to support the government in its plans to expand pre-school provision to 80% by 2020.

## **India**

India Young Lives researchers have been involved in many government reviews, including the new curriculum for teacher training to ensure children are learning more effectively and having regular feedback on their schoolwork.

## **Peru**

Young Lives evidence assisted with deliberations about a new law to ban corporal punishment which was passed in late 2015. It also provided evidence that it is possible for some children to catch up on their growth even if they were malnourished when they were small and Young Lives research findings fed into the design of the government's Cuna Mas programme for children under 3.



### **Vietnam**

The Young Lives team works closely with the Ministry of Education and Training and the Committee on Education and Culture of Children and Youth in the National Assembly to ensure that education stays fair and equal for all children and that the skills taught in schools are relevant for the rapidly changing global economy.

### **United Kingdom**

We worked with Oxfam to publish teaching materials based on profiles of some of the Young Lives children so that schoolchildren could better understand what life is like in different parts of the world.

*"I liked learning not just about our country but about different countries too and I liked the real data."* Year 5 pupil from Uffington Primary School near Oxford.



### **United Nations**

Young Lives evidence was used by UNICEF to feed into international decisions about how to tackle inequality as part of the new Global Goals.

*"I think that what your team is doing, caring about children, following them from when they are small until they are grown up, to understand about the experience of children in Vietnam, it is good."* Dao's father (Vietnam).

*"My participation helped me understand the research is to improve policies about children's lives."* Teje, age 13 (Ethiopia).

## What have policymakers said about Young Lives?

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*“JUNTOS has taken on board reflections and recommendations from some of the Young Lives findings in the revision of its annual strategic plan.”*

Aurea Cadillo, former Head of Planning and Budget at JUNTOS (a social protection programme in Peru)



*“The value of Young Lives is that it is about real children whom we have been meeting for many years.”*

Professor R. Govinda, former Vice Chancellor of the National University of Educational Planning and Administration, in India



*“The Young Lives publication on inequalities and children was one of the top five submissions to UNICEF’s global consultations on the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals.”*

Richard Morgan, Director, Child Poverty Global Initiative, Save the Children

## What have you said about being part of Young Lives?

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Sarada, age 19, India, on why she liked being part of Young Lives: *"I am able to share my feelings with you by talking to you. You asked me about my family, friends, my happiness and sadness and my sufferings. I felt good expressing myself about all these. You always talked to me very closely like a friend. At first, I hesitated to tell you everything in detail. I thought: 'Maybe they will misunderstand me if I talk openly.' Then I thought that you have come from far away to talk to me....I liked taking part in this. I am happy about you coming to me to talk and me participating in Young Lives research. I will remember you all my life."*

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Thank you, Enamesegnalén /  
እናመሰግናለን, Yuspagara, Muchas gracias,  
Goyta yibhe / ንይታ ይብኹ, Gaalaxxomo,  
Dhanyavadagalu / ధన్యవదంలా,  
Aronega, Dhanyabada, Galatooma,  
Dyuspagrasunki, Galaxeemo, Aat  
Yewdaw, Cam on, Dhanyavadamulu,  
Yekniyelna / የቅኔየልና, Shukriya, Galatais.

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Across the 4 countries, you speak all these languages:

Amharic	Nùng
Aymara	Oriya
Ba Na	Oromiffa
Castellano	Quechua
Chăm Hroi	Sidama
Dao	Silti
Giáy	Tiếng Việt
Gurage	Tày
Hadiyya	Telugu
Kannada	Tigrigna
Mông	Urdu
Nomatsiguenga	Wolayta

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