



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

Young Lives 
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

‘Child Development and Economic Development: Lessons and Future Challenges’

Jo Boyden

**Roundtable: ‘Inequality, Children’s
Development and Post-2015 Debates’
London, 18th July 2012**

THE ASSUMPTIONS

- Children are highly susceptible to environmental forces, the embodiment of both vulnerability and future potential
- Child development and the economic development (growth) of nations are fundamentally linked:
 - ❖ Economic development provides a positive environment for child development
 - ❖ Investing in children builds human capital, thereby promoting broad economic development
- Human capital theory increasingly recognises the links in child development between cognitive and psychosocial outcomes, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem and aspirations

EXAMPLES OF THE GLOBAL APPLICATION OF THESE IDEAS

Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University: ‘We view healthy child development as the foundation of economic prosperity, strong communities, and a just society, and our mission is to advance that vision by using science to enhance child well-being through innovations in policy and practice’

The World Bank’s 10-year education strategy draws on scientific evidence about risks to children’s developmental potential -

calls for prioritizing pre-natal health and early-childhood development programmes to secure brain development in early life, as well as for lifelong learning



EVIDENCE FROM YOUNG LIVES

- The economies of all four Young Lives countries grew rapidly in the first decade of the 21st Century
- This growth was accompanied by broad infrastructural improvements and an increase in access to services. E.g. primary school enrolment = near universal in 3 of our countries
- **But:** economic growth and poverty reduction have been accompanied by growing socio-economic disparities
- The same households and children tend to be repeatedly disadvantaged - with clear adverse consequences for their development



ENTRENCHING DISPARITIES

- **Across child outcomes:**
 - ❖ In Andhra Pradesh, access to drinking water has increased rapidly, but access to sanitation still remains low
 - ❖ While primary school enrolment has become almost universal in India, Vietnam and Peru, the quality of education in public schools remains very poor - especially for poor children
- **Across social groups:**
 - ❖ Higher GDP per capita in Peru, Vietnam and India have not removed multiple deprivations for rural children, ethno-linguistic minority children and those whose mothers have no or low education
 - ❖ Children in the poorest households are 40% less likely than others to have a healthy weight-for-age in India and a healthy height-for-age in Ethiopia and Peru
- **Disparities often widen during childhood:**
 - ❖ A difference of 5 percentage points in school enrolment between poor children and the rest in Vietnam more than tripled between the ages of 12 and 15

DISPARITIES WITHIN HOUSEHOLDS



- In India, parents have lower education aspirations for daughters than for sons at age 12, and by age 15 girls have lower educational aspirations for themselves
- Economic growth changes how gender bias is expressed. Previously, girls had lower primary school enrolment rates. Now, there is gender equity in enrolment, but boys are more likely to go to private schools and to have more money spent on their education
- Yet, girls are not always worse off than boys - e.g. Vietnam
- And gender is less important in determining disparities between children than are location and other factors

CHALLENGES - ECONOMIC GROWTH

- Economic growth and political commitments to support child survival and development have resulted in progress for children's well-being in many developing countries, **BUT**
 - With current global financial shortfalls (and ODA cutbacks in middle-income countries), maintaining recent spending on human development is unlikely
 - The problem with investing in children as a means of realising economic growth is that they do not constitute a homogeneous group in terms of human capital - what about social justice?
 - Resilient systems are needed to protect investments in children's welfare and safeguard the young from the effects of economic downturns



CHALLENGES - INEQUALITY

- Patterns of progress remain distorted by uneven provision and entrenched inequalities
- Inequality may be as detrimental for psychosocial outcomes in children as is poverty, indicating a cumulative loss in child development and well-being:
 - ❖ Psychosocial wellbeing does not depend solely on the reduction of poverty or access to good-quality services
 - ❖ It arises from growth that is inclusive of children and young people from all social and economic backgrounds



CONCLUSION

- Efforts to ensure that recent investments in children are sustained and benefit all young people are vital
- Greater understanding is needed of the mechanisms through which exclusion is perpetuated for particular groups
- Broad socio-economic development should be complemented by investments in disadvantaged groups, including through extension of successful social protection policies
- Better integration of sectors is required to guarantee that all aspects of children's wellbeing are provided for