

YOUNG LIVES COUNTRY REPORT

Young Lives: Ethiopia Round 2 Survey Summary

September 2008

Young Lives is a long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four developing countries – Ethiopia, Peru, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh) and Vietnam – over 15 years. This is the time frame set by the United Nations to assess progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Through interviews, group work and case studies with children, their parents, teachers, community representatives and others, we are collecting a wealth of information not only about their material and social circumstances, but also perspectives on their lives and aspirations for the future, set against the environmental and social realities of their communities.

We are following two groups of children in each country: 2000 children who were born in 2001-2 and 1000 children who were born in 1994-5. These groups provide insights into every phase of childhood. The younger children are being tracked from infancy to their mid-teens and the older children to adulthood, when some will become parents themselves. When this is matched with information gathered about their parents, we will be able to reveal much about the intergenerational transfer of poverty, how families on the margins move in and out of poverty, and the policies that can make a real difference to their lives.

The Round 2 Survey Report presents initial findings from the second round of data collection which was carried out in Ethiopia in late 2006 to early 2007. It does not aim to give a comprehensive overview of all the findings from Young Lives, rather it gives a broad outline of some of the key indicators of childhood poverty and changes that have taken place in the children's lives between the first round of data collection in 2002 and this second round. Data are mainly presented for the entire age group cohort, in most cases separated into wealth groups or by rural/urban location. The full richness of the data is not reflected in this preliminary report, but we hope

that it contains enough information to prompt other researchers, policymakers and stakeholders to start to engage with the data.

Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world and ranks among the lowest for most human development indicators. The economy has experienced a trend of sustained economic growth following the reform programmes implemented since 1991 when the military government was ousted. However, it is still largely dominated by agriculture, which is highly sensitive to rainfall. Ethiopia has low rates of urbanisation. Most people make their living as subsistence farmers. Millions of Ethiopians are dependent on food aid every year, and in 2008, at time of writing this report, the recent rapid global food price increases represent a further challenge. Despite the government's best efforts and the improvements since 1991, most of Ethiopia's children continue to live with 'not enough' in terms of household assets, food and other consumption goods, and basic services and opportunities.

From our survey data, there are signs that the economic growth and improved access to services have been broadly inclusive. We see that children's well-being – in all dimensions – is strongly linked to, and determined by, their socio-economic status and parents' backgrounds. Over the past 5 years, there have been obvious improvements in basic services, and school enrolment is up, although quality of education is now a key priority for the government. Nutrition remains a challenge, with high levels of under-nutrition, although in other ways we have seen obvious recovery following the 2002 drought.

Levels of absolute and relative poverty

Although we see poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon, the material aspects are captured in our report by two measures of deprivation. We define absolute poverty as living on less than a minimum of

2200 kilocalories per day plus a lack of essential non-food items. Relative poverty is defined as the proportion of households with per capita consumption below 50% of median consumption (using the national poverty line of 1075 birr at 1996 constant prices).

When Young Lives was set up, the sites were chosen because they are poor (having a food deficit). In this second round of data collection we find that they are still below the national average for consumption, despite three years of relatively good harvests between 2003 and 2005. Absolute poverty is higher in rural areas (where 85% of both older and younger cohort children live below the national poverty line) than in urban areas (where 44% of the younger cohort and 51% of the older cohort have less than the national average). However, while absolute poverty is higher in rural areas, relative poverty is higher in urban areas, suggesting greater inequality in the towns.

The prosperity of Young Lives households (measured by wealth and asset indices and by consumption) has increased for both cohorts between Round 1 in 2002 and Round 2 in 2006/7. This rise in wealth and assets is found in both rural and urban areas and across many of the regions of Ethiopia, and indicates recovery since the 2002 drought. The percentage of children from the younger cohort living in households in the lowest wealth and asset index categories decreased significantly in both rural and urban areas from 22% of the total sample in Round 1 to 17% in Round 2. The improvement in wealth categories holds in all Young Lives survey regions (Addis Ababa, Amhara, Oromia and SNNPR), except Tigray.

Access to services and infrastructure

Access to electricity and sanitation facilities has improved substantially between the two rounds, with 57% of households now reporting access to sanitation (up from 38%). Moreover, most growth in sanitation has been reported by the relatively poorer households: we found that 46% of the poorest household now report access (up from 17%), indicating that the government's health extension programme seems to be yielding success.

There continue to be stark rural-urban differences, however, with only 43% of rural households reporting access to clean water and toilets compared with 78% of urban households. Similarly, while the improvement in access to electricity holds true across the country and for all regions (up from 35% to 42% of all

households), rural access is quite low, at just 11% in Round 2, compared to nearly 90% in urban areas.

Nutrition

Ethiopia has a long-standing problem with food security which is reflected in the nutritional status of children around the country. We find high levels of both stunting (a measure of chronic malnutrition) and many Young Lives children who are underweight. Within the younger cohort, 31% were classified as stunted, with 8% of the children being severely stunted.

On a more positive note, both stunting and underweight have declined significantly for the younger cohort, (who are now about 6 years old) with stunting decreasing from 35% to 31% and the proportion of underweight children from 33% to 24%, compared to when they were measured 4 years earlier. This is an impressive change in a short time period, and can be attributed to improvements in household wealth and increased access to health services and sanitation, although we should also note that the measures were high in Round 1 (a year of drought in many areas).

In the older cohort (the 12 to 13 year olds) around 28% of the children were underweight in Round 1. The percentage increased to 36% by Round 2, although for this age group changes are harder to interpret in terms of actual health implications, at least in the long run. We also find high levels of severe wasting (11% of the older children), with disparities between rural areas (13.5%) and urban areas (7.5%).

Our analysis shows that girls are less malnourished than boys (a finding that has been replicated in other studies in Ethiopia), while children in urban areas tend to be relatively better-off compared to their rural compatriots in terms of both level and changes in malnutrition. As expected, household wealth seems to have a positive impact on the nutritional status of children. Moreover, levels of parental education positively affect nutritional improvements.

Education

Literacy and school enrolment remain a challenge in Ethiopia. The 2004 Welfare Monitoring Survey reports that only 38% of the total population are literate, with a large disparity between rural (31%) and urban residents (74% literate). That said, Ethiopia has made great advances in terms of primary education

in recent years. For the Young Lives survey, we looked at enrolment rates in pre-school (for the younger cohort) and primary school for the older cohort.

Since kindergartens are rarely available in rural areas, virtually all the households that reported enrolling their children in pre-school are from urban areas. About 52 per cent of the 5-year-old children in urban areas have been enrolled in pre-school (compared with less than 4% in rural areas). An analysis of the factors that influence pre-school enrolment in urban areas shows children with long-term health problems are more likely to be enrolled (perhaps because the parents feel this extra support will be helpful to their child). Education levels of both mothers and fathers are significantly associated with pre-school enrolment, which indicates the role that awareness and higher opportunity costs of childcare play in the decision to send a child to pre-school. We did not find any gender bias in pre-school enrolment. Households with more members in Round 1 were more likely to enrol their child in pre-school in Round 2.

School enrolment for the older cohort has increased tremendously from a mere 66% to more than 94% between the two rounds. The poorest households have made a substantial improvement in sending their children to school, with enrolment increasing from 56% to 91%. Not surprisingly, the children of parents with high levels of education had achieved almost universal enrolment, but the change and rate of enrolment of children with parents who attained lower levels of education has been impressive (to over 93% at all levels of parental education). The growth rate of enrolment looks higher in rural than in urban areas (since the rural areas start from a lower base). Regional distribution of enrolment rate is the highest in Addis Ababa followed by Tigray region.

Given the very high rate of enrolment, we analysed correlates of years of schooling (not enrolment) for this group. Children who receive some help with their studies, or come from wealthier families, or whose mothers are better educated tend to have completed a higher grade. Children in rural areas being from a larger family means that children are more likely to be in a lower grade at school.

Child work

Many children in Ethiopia work both for pay, and informally or without pay, generally within the household. The incidence of children working for pay

rises sharply with age with almost half of all 5- to 14-year olds being involved in some kind of economic activity in 2001. For the purposes of the Young Lives survey, we measured children's involvement in paid work only, giving us information which was broadly comparable with the first survey round. We found that children's involvement in paid work has decreased from 9% in Round 1 to 5% in Round 2. Disaggregating by wealth quartile, the percentage of children involved in paid work has declined and the difference is statistically significant for all wealth quartiles. When we look at parental education levels, fewer children are working for pay at all levels, and the difference is statistically significant except for the children whose parents were educated to between grades 9 and 12. We found no children whose parents have post-secondary education working for pay in the second round. The reduction over time in paid work is higher for girls than for boys and relates to girls' role in domestic tasks.

Subjective well-being

Young Lives is one of the few studies of childhood poverty that assesses children's subjective perceptions of well-being. We asked the older children whether they were fairly treated by adults and found a significant reduction in the percentage of children who felt that they were treated badly or were treated worse than other children of their age. Children's perceptions of how they were treated showed improvement across the wealth distribution. Over time, the perception of improvement was much larger for boys compared with girls. We also analyse the factors that influence subjective well-being for the 12-year-old children using their responses to questions about where they would position themselves on a ladder (a scale of 1 to 9). Children in households with more initial wealth, particularly in rural areas, felt better off in Round 2, as did rural children in male-headed households. Controlling for other factors, location was also important where children in urban areas felt worse off compared with those in rural areas.

Two other indicators of subjective well-being (used only in Round 2) were based on the ladder question and asked the children where they felt they stood at present and would stand in 4 years' time. A comparison of these two indicators shows that the children are optimistic about the future, and expect their position to have improved. The conclusions hold when we make the comparison separately for rural

and urban areas, for each region, for wealth quartile, and for parental education. However, girls are more positive about both their current well-being and more optimistic about the future than boys.

Looking to the future

In general, despite the fact that the Young Lives sample are poorer than the average Ethiopian household and children, their welfare measured in terms of nutritional achievement, enrolment in school, and involvement in paid child labour has improved over time. The improvement of wealth status of households is indicative of the pro-poor policies followed by the government as well as the improved levels of provision of education and health services in the country.

While most of the changes in child welfare outcomes are observed across the whole socio-economic range within our sample, wealth and parental background remain strong determinants in terms of levels of nutrition and enrolment. Relatively high growth in the period up to 2006 and improved services may have contributed to more inclusion, but this progress may be fragile if economic conditions change, even temporarily, such as in the recent context of high inflation. Vigilance and action is required to translate these improvements observed both in Young Lives and the national data into persistent progress in the form of better living conditions. As a longitudinal study, Young Lives will remain in a unique position to follow whether and how these improvements translate in better outcomes as the children reach adolescence and young adult lives.

The authors

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About Young Lives

Young Lives is a collaborative partnership of research institutes and government organisations in the 4 study countries, together with UK universities and the international NGO, Save the Children UK. It is coordinated by a team based at the Department of International Development, University of Oxford.

The Young Lives partners in Ethiopia are:

Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI)
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