

## School effectiveness and equity for poor children

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The Millennium Development Goals set the aim of universalising primary schooling. While not completely met, the majority of children in developing countries now have access to five years of primary education, and the focus has shifted from access to effectiveness, equity and learning. Children's aspirations are too often undermined by the poor quality of many schools, and low quality reinforces existing disadvantages. The Sustainable Development Goals set out a new aim, to 'ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning' (SDG4), and also emphasise the need to achieve parity for girls in education. Young Lives has been designed to help create 'detailed evidence on factors influencing school effectiveness for policymakers aiming to address the global learning crisis and Sustainable Development Goal agendas around learning quality' (Theory of Change 2015). Evidence for enrolment and retention in primary school is impressive, but much less evidence is available on the levels of learning achieved and on the closely related issues of school quality and effectiveness. Young Lives is helping to address the data gap in this area through its school effectiveness surveys, which offer robust evidence on the school, teacher and pupil factors that contribute to pupil learning and progress, and engage with the educational issues that matter at a local level.

Young Lives is ahead of the game in this area in many respects, as it has always collected information on learning as part of its regular household and child survey rounds, focusing on the key SDG priorities of quality, equity and learning. Longitudinal evidence is essential to address the question of how children learn. Educational data from Round 4 showed significant evidence of inequality of outcomes.

“ Young Lives' unique approach to linking of household- and school-based data provides a vital evidence base to inform progress towards the SDGs. The survey presents important policy-related findings based on an assessment not only on which children are learning, but also on school and teacher attributes that can make a difference to narrowing learning gaps. ”

Pauline Rose, Professor of International Education, University of Cambridge

In late 2016 Young Lives research associate Abhijeet Singh wrote about the findings on varying educational attainment in a [World Bank blog](#) (later republished on the World Economic Forum (Davos) website). He used Young Lives data to identify that there are significant differences in learning during the early primary school years, comparing Vietnam and Peru, attributing the greater learning gain in Vietnam to school productivity.

The strength of Young Lives' work on school effectiveness and learning is reflected in the significant influence it has had on DFID's RISE programme (Research on Improving Systems of Education). Young Lives has collaborated closely on how learning outcomes are measured in RISE, and there has been significant cross-fertilisation, with our methods integrated into the programme. Young Lives also influenced the choice of study countries (Vietnam, India and Ethiopia are all included). Vietnam in particular was chosen as a result of Young Lives research showing how and why their schools perform so well. Young Lives has arguably formed the foundation for RISE, which would otherwise not have existed in its current form.

“ The Young Lives team started working with the education team at the World Bank in late 2014. The analysis of Young Lives

population and school surveys contributed significantly to the understanding of improvement in education attainment on the one hand, and challenges in reducing drop-outs and improving learning outcomes on the other. This analysis was used in the World Bank report: [Investing in Ethiopia's Future – Education Sector Financing Review 2015](#). ”

Thanh Thi Mai, Senior Education Specialist, World Bank Ethiopia

From 2009-13 Young Lives also implemented in-depth school surveys in all four study countries. We are the only group in the world using this methodology to analyse learning and school effectiveness across a diverse range of developing countries. The second round in 2016-17 (Vietnam, India and Ethiopia – Peru's survey will start later) is focusing on secondary schools.

The new surveys have been designed to capture detailed data on the quality of learning outcomes at secondary level, and cover over 30,000 children. The broad design is similar in all countries, which enables cross-country comparisons of key measures, including the first directly comparable assessments of levels of literacy and numeracy across the study countries. The surveys will also provide some of the first evidence from low- and middle-income countries on twenty-first century skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, and enable an investigation of the relationship between curriculum subjects and twenty-first century skills.

“ No other research team that I know of is doing anything like this on a global scale. Kudos! ”

Luis Crouch, VP & Chief Technical Officer, RTI International

Over the past year, Young Lives has engaged extensively with key stakeholders (NGOs and local and national government bodies) to identify the important policy questions facing school systems in each country. These interests have then been integrated so that the survey instruments reflect the different educational priorities, policies and institutional structures in each study country. This 'organic' model of engagement – negotiating the research design with the people who are going to use the

data – ensures research relevance. It also means that the resulting data will be more valued by stakeholders as they have invested in it from the outset. The consultation process itself has strengthened local relationships and improved Young Lives' reputation in education research.

In Vietnam, Young Lives has consulted with the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, and the Vietnam Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES), the government organisation that designs the school curriculum. From this it emerged that a key area of education policy interest is the transition to upper secondary school at age 15, and so the survey will seek to answer questions on the factors affecting transition, particularly ethnic background. Vietnam's Development and Policies Research Centre (DEPOCEN) has already expressed an interest in using Young Lives data from the school survey, which will lead to wider impact of the data. Young Lives provides the only longitudinal evidence on skills development across the life course in Vietnam, and the importance of this was reflected in 2015; combined with other data sources such as employers' surveys and data on early childhood, Young Lives data were used in the World Bank's *Vietnam Development Report*, which focused on 'skilling-up Vietnam'.

In India, Young Lives has had meetings with state Secretaries of Education in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and with the Ministry of Human Resource Development in Delhi, which oversees education in India as a whole, as well as with the World Bank, the British Council and DFID. The key areas of policy interest emerging from these meetings are to develop a better understanding of learning outcomes in different types of schools, and in Telangana in particular to explore the impact of provision of English-medium education in government schools, something which the state has recently begun to offer. Young Lives has also worked in partnership with Educational Initiatives, an Indian organisation working on educational research and school-based interventions, and has drawn on their expertise in the design of English and maths tests for all three country studies. Educational Initiatives work closely on educational assessments with the Indian government at both state and national level, and also work with the World Bank in India and with RISE. Partnering with them will allow Young Lives to draw on their networks to more effectively disseminate findings from the school surveys.

In Ethiopia, consultation has taken place with the World Bank (who also advised on the first school survey), UNICEF, DFID and Ministry of Education representatives in the Ethiopian Government. For the Government, one of the main issues of interest is that of language, and how the language of instruction affects learning outcomes. Language use is viewed as important for nation-building and social cohesion. Amharic, while not an official national language, is the de facto language of communication, and it is recognised that weak Amharic language skills may limit some young people's opportunities to find employment or further training outside their home communities. As a result of these discussions, Young Lives has added an Amharic assessment into the survey. There is very

little information about learning levels in Ethiopia, so Young Lives contributions in this area will be valuable to the Government.

Peru's school survey will start later, but there has also been impact on education here. In 2013, Young Lives Peru were approached by Jaime Saavedra, a former Young Lives researcher who at the time was the new Education Minister in Peru, about ideas for raising the achievement of children who were underperforming at school. Country Director Santiago Cueto mentioned inequality as a big challenge for education in Peru, suggesting that children who were poor, indigenous or rural had lower performance and no network of support. Cueto discussed with him an idea for a programme of 'school reinforcement'. The following year the government introduced a 'pedagogical support' programme that included school reinforcement as one of its components, inspired by the discussions with Young Lives. This programme has been rolled out since 2014 and is now very well-established.

At an international level, there is considerable discussion about how to measure educational outcomes and hence progress towards SDG4. Young Lives is contributing to key discussions on learning metrics in international forums such as the World Bank, SABER, CIES, UKFIET and RISE. In the UK this year, Young Lives has also contributed evidence to the International Development Committee's inquiry into DFID's work on education: 'Leaving no one behind?'. These interactions are building the conditions for impact of Young Lives' educational evidence in the future, and they enable Young Lives to have international influence beyond its four study countries.

“ I am writing to express my appreciation for the work of the Young Lives programme and the value that it provides to researchers, policymakers and practitioners. I am currently working on two projects with the World Bank, the World Development Report 2018 (Education) and a retrospective on World Development Report 2007 (Youth). The recent products of Young Lives have provided me with some superb and very timely resources for these projects;

- A latent class approach to understanding patterns of peer victimization in four low resource settings. In the paper for the WDR18 on 'fragility, conflict and violence', we are taking a wider approach to 'violence', including issues of GBV and bullying, with the latter an under emphasized and serious problem.
- Patterns and Drivers of Internal Migration among Youth in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. Part of the emphasis in the youth (WDR07) work is that we need a much more nuanced 'spatial' approach to youth and their mobility, and this paper is a very timely resource for this emerging area of policy discussion.
- Finally the recent study on children's experiences of violence in Vietnam, Ethiopia and Peru is invaluable to both the WDR18 and the 2007 retrospective work. ”

Stephen Commins, Lecturer in Urban Planning and Associate Director, Global Public Affairs, UCLA