



Deepak's story

A profile from
Young Lives in India

*"I like my school now. ... I mix with others well.
The food is nice and the school is good. ...
There are lots of pictures, and I know Telugu
better than the other subjects."*

Deepak's story

Deepak is now about 8 or 9 years old. He is much happier. His father has remarried and he has a new stepmother and baby brother and is boarding at a boys' hostel so he can go to school.

In the last interview, Deepak had tried going to the hostel but had not liked it, complaining of insects in the food. But although he was nervous at first, now he enjoys the hostel and seems very happy with the school. He is in Grade 4, where there are 54 students, all boys. He says he has five good friends.

"I like my school now.

Why? What have you found there?

I mix with others well. The food is nice and the school is good."

Conditions in the hostel are basic, but Deepak doesn't seem to mind. The boys sleep in the classroom at night and sit on the floor in the same room to do their lessons. They say they prefer the floor to sitting on a bench. He has four teachers, and learns science and social affairs, Telugu, Maths and English. He says he likes Telugu best because the teacher "teaches us well" and because "[t]here are lots of pictures, and I know Telugu better than the other subjects". In his previous school he only learned two subjects, he says.

Deepak wakes up at 4am. He makes his bed, brushes his hair and takes a bath, usually in the stream near the school. Then he puts on his uniform. He has breakfast when the bell rings at 6am and goes to class by 7am. At 12.30, he has lunch. He says that he is studying well, better than before. In the break, he goes to the playground to play cricket and *kabbaadi*.¹ He has a little money from his parents so he can buy things in the school shop.

At home in the holidays, things are very different too. His older brother, Anand, has gone to live with his aunt. His new mother, who is his father's fourth wife, looks after the other children, including their new baby. The first three wives, who were also relatives, all died, two in childbirth.

Last time we interviewed Deepak, he was about 6 years old, though no-one was sure of his exact age. He belongs to one of India's indigenous tribal groups, and lives in a remote rural community with his father, two younger sisters and older half-brother. His mother died in childbirth. His father was a day labourer and often away. He and his stepbrother were trying to look after the family with the help of his grandmother. His health was not good and his grandmother was worried about him. He was going to the local school but often skipped classes.

¹ A team game, a combination of wrestling and rugby.

Deepak's father was sterilised after this last baby so there will be no more children.

Deepak's stepmother says all the children call her *Amma* (Mother), and that things are fine: "My husband is OK, I am OK with the children and the children are OK with me."

The only problem is that Deepak's grandmother, who Deepak used to be very close to, is not happy with the new marriage. Deepak's father explains: "My old mother-in-law is angry with her [the new wife] because I got remarried! She will not talk with me or come here often."

He feels concerned that this is affecting the children's relationship with their grandmother. "I feel bad [about this]. But we cannot change it."

Deepak's father says he is earning a little more money now than he was before, around 100 rupees (about two dollars) for a day's agricultural work. He mainly works growing groundnuts before the monsoon because they do not require much water, and then after the monsoon he works in the paddy fields.

He talks a little about his own childhood. He grew up in another village and came to this village ten years ago. His father died when he was young. So he left school and worked looking after cattle in return for food. He thinks life now is better than it was then. For example, now there are medical services. Before, if there was an emergency: "We used to tie [the sick child] in a bedcover and carry them to the clinic. Now if we call 108 they will come and take you."

Even ten years ago, he says, there were no cement roads, or wells or taps. There was not even a bridge across the river, and if people wanted to go to the market, they had to cross via a makeshift and dangerous bridge made of wires and ropes. There was no government ration shop, where poor people could get food more cheaply. There were no school hostels like the one Deepak goes to. There were no government schemes (see below), which Deepak's father thinks has been beneficial for poor people like him and his family.

Because they are poor, school is free. His younger children are now also in the local school. Deepak's father says it was Deepak's decision to join the hostel and that he is happy there. "The facilities are OK, the master is there, and the hostel warden is there – they will look after him and tell us if he is sick." He feels Deepak is getting a better education than he would have in the local school. Deepak is asked what he would like to do when he grows up but just says he wants a job so he can earn money to buy clothes.

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

India has a range of social protection schemes to help poor families. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is the biggest social security programme for the informal sector. It provides 100 days of unskilled manual work a year for each household, a legal commitment on the part of the Government to provide employment for those who seek work. As such, the scheme is one of the most important ways of alleviating poverty in India.

The programme covers all 22 districts in Andhra Pradesh. By 2009, 78 per cent of people in 15 of the 20 Young Lives study sites were involved. The Young Lives research team found that:

- poorer and lower-caste households were more likely to register, as were those affected by drought
- having more than five influential relatives increased the probability of registration by 10 per cent
- registration reduced the probability of a boy working by 13 per cent and programme take up reduced it for girls by 8 per cent.

In general the programme seems to offer a viable security net for households and a range of employment opportunities. It also seems to have an important effect on children.

Source: Vinayak Uppal (2009) *Is the NREGS a Safety Net for Children? Studying Access to the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme for Young Lives Families and its Impact on Child Outcomes in Andhra Pradesh*, Young Lives Student Paper.

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The impact of India's Midday Meal Scheme on nutrition and learning among Young Lives children

The Midday Meal Scheme is the largest school meal programme in the world, covering an estimated 139 million primary school children. It has now been extended to high school. It aims to enhance enrolment, retention and attendance and improve levels of nutrition.

This is very important, as 45 per cent of children under the age of 5 in India are stunted (which means they are shorter than they should be for their age). This is a higher percentage than in the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. A high percentage of Young Lives children also experience thinness and underweight – all of which are signs of long-term malnutrition.²

Although started in 1995, the scheme was not introduced in all states in India until 2002, when it became mandatory to provide cooked meals for children in primary school. In 2004 a Supreme Court order also made it mandatory to provide midday meals during summer vacations in 'drought-affected areas'. Drought has affected large sections of India's rural population – among Young Lives children, almost 35 per cent of rural households suffered from drought between 2002 and 2006, when there was a severe lack of rainfall. In Andhra Pradesh, the scheme reaches 7.26 million children in primary schools. Of the Young Lives children enrolled in government schools, over 9 in 10 benefit.

Assessing the impact of the scheme and how it could be improved is of crucial importance, though it is not easy because children in government schools who receive the meals are typically from poorer, more disadvantaged households than children in private schools, who do not get the meal. But our research has found significant impacts on both nutrition and learning:

Impact on children's nutrition

- Children aged 4 to 5 are taller and heavier than might otherwise be expected, suggesting that the midday meal helps reduce serious malnutrition.
- The school meals have most impact on nutrition in areas affected by drought. For younger children, there are large and significant gains in height-for-age and weight-for-age, which more than compensate for the negative effects of the drought.

Impact on children's learning

- For children aged 11 to 12 there is evidence of significant positive impacts on their learning, although it is not clear if these are generated by less hunger or by improved school attendance.

Sources: S. Galab et al. (2011) *The Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; Caitlin Porter et al. (2010) *The Impact of the Midday Meal Scheme on Nutrition and Learning*, Young Lives Policy Brief 8.

² Thinness is low body mass index (BMI-for-age) and underweight is low weight-for-age.



Country context: India

India has a population of more than 1.2 billion people. It is a country of huge inequalities, with the second-largest number of billionaires in the world but also 25 per cent of the world's poor. It ranks 134 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index.

Over the last five years, India has seen impressive economic growth. Even during the global recession in 2009, the economy grew at a rate of 7 per cent of GDP. But inflation is a big problem, especially for poor people.

- 76 per cent of the population lives on less than two dollars per day.
- Malnutrition is more common in India than in sub-Saharan Africa.
- More children under 5 die from preventable and treatable diseases than in any other country.

Many of India's inequalities are tied to gender and caste: women and girls still face multiple discrimination and India ranks 129th out of 187 in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. The caste system, which dates back many thousands of years, is still extremely important in everyday life, with what the Government calls Scheduled Castes (otherwise known as *Dalits* or formerly 'untouchables') and Scheduled Tribes (otherwise known as *adivasis*, India's indigenous peoples) the most disadvantaged communities. This is despite the fact that discrimination on the basis of caste is now illegal, and various measures have been introduced to empower disadvantaged groups and give them better access to opportunities.

Andhra Pradesh, in south India, is its fifth-largest state and has a population of 84.6 million. It is still largely agricultural, although its capital, Hyderabad, is one of the leading centres of the technology revolution. The state was the role model for several new government initiatives during the 1990s to eliminate poverty and has made considerable progress on child development indicators since the mid-1990s.

- Rural poverty went down from 48 per cent in 1973/4 to 11 per cent in 2004/5.
- Unlike in the other Young Lives countries, poverty is higher in urban than in rural areas.
- Adult literacy went up from 61 per cent in 2001 to 67 per cent in 2011.
- But 76 per cent of men were literate compared with 60 per cent of women. And only 66 per cent of girls aged 6 to 17 attend school, compared with 77 per cent of boys.

Sources: www.younglives.org.uk; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report*; S. Galab et al. (2011) *Impact of Growth on Childhood Poverty in Andhra Pradesh: Initial Findings from India*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children*.

Young Lives is a unique international study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam. By following the lives of 12,000 children and young people over 15 years, we aim to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and provide evidence to support effective policies for children.

The profile presented here is one of 24 taken from the interviews we did with the children individually and in groups. Each one is accompanied by a theme of some kind that emerged from the material and which illustrates the issues that children are having to contend with, but also gives a sense of the wider context of their lives. These range from education and schooling, to inequality, health and illness, violence in school and at home, early marriage, the effects of migration, families' experiences of crises, government schemes to help poor people, and children's views and experiences of what it is to be rich or poor.

The children and their families who are participating in the Young Lives study willingly share with us a great deal of detailed personal information about their daily lives, and we have a responsibility to protect their confidentiality and ensure their identities remain protected. For this reason, the children's names have been changed here. The accompanying photos are of children in similar situations to the children within our study sample.

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Young Lives 
An International Study of Childhood Poverty