



Elmer's story

A profile from
Young Lives in Peru

*"Now I also sow plants. Coffee, cocoa, cassava,
plantain and corn. I can also harvest too."*

Elmer's story

Elmer is now 16 years old. After living in Lima with his sister, he came home shortly before his parents bought some land in a place many miles away. So Elmer had to move again. During the week he and his younger brother and sister live in a village some three hours' walk from the farm where his parents work. At weekends the children go to the farm to be with their parents. Elmer has clearly found these moves very difficult. He says he misses his old friends.

Elmer has lived in the village he is in now since 2009. He lives in one part of a rented house with his younger sister, aged 15, and his younger brother who is 8. Elmer and his sister share the responsibility for the household chores. Other tenants live in the rest of the building. He says it has not been easy moving and complains about the excessive heat.

The three children go to school. But because Elmer goes to school in the morning, and his little brother in the afternoon, his brother spends a lot of time alone.

"In the morning, who stays to take care of your little brother?"

He's alone.

Who else lives here? Are there other people?

No, only the three of us live here.

He stays here by himself? Nothing happens to him?

No.

Are there neighbours who watch over him?

Yes, they keep an eye on him.

Are there other children there?

Yes.

What time does he go to school?

He has to be there just before 1 o'clock.

So you don't see him when you get back.

Yes, hardly at all. When he goes, I am coming back.

So who makes his lunch?

Sometimes the woman at the back gives him lunch; if not we leave some breakfast for his lunch."

Every weekend, the children walk to the family farm and Elmer works there. He says he has been helping his parents since he was 10 and he has learned a lot about farming.

Last time the Young Lives team visited, Elmer was living in Lima with his older sister, going to school in the morning and looking after her two young children while she worked in the afternoons. He liked Lima but was missing home and family.

“What things did you do on the farm [when you were younger]?”

Husking and cleaning coffee.

And now you can do more things? What else do you do?

Now I also sow plants. Coffee, cocoa, cassava, plantain, corn. I can harvest too.

Any fruit?

Oranges, mandarins, tangerines.”

Elmer says his father occasionally gives him pocket money which he uses to buy treats, but generally he is not paid. He says his sister helps their mother with household chores, and his younger brother “just plays” because he is very young. Elmer says he has had two accidents working with a machete: he cut his leg and his finger, but fortunately neither incident was very serious.

He says has made many new friends in the new place, including a girlfriend, but they split up two months ago.

“Do you miss her?”

No. Well just a little.”

However, he says he really misses his old friends. Last year he visited his former village for a week during the summer holidays. As he no longer has a home there, he stayed at a friend's house. They had a good time.

Elmer has a close relationship with his mother, and says that he goes to her when he has a problem or needs advice. The worst thing recently was that his mother went to Lima for six months to support his older sister, who had health problems. But one good thing was that he got to know his father better during that time.

“Has something happened to you that you didn't like?”

Yes, last year my mother was in Lima. She went for half a year. It was to visit my sister. I spent half a year without her.

Half a year ... and you stayed here all alone?

Yes, with my father.

And you didn't like that very much?

No

You missed your mother?

Yes.

Besides that, what other changes have there been in your family?

Nothing, apart from moving house.

Have there been difficult moments in your family in these last two years?

Yes, getting used to being here. I haven't liked it.

Why not?

Where I used to live, it wasn't as hot as it is here.

And school, do you like it better here or there?

I liked it better there.

Would you like to go back?

Yes, I want to go back.”

While he enjoys working on the farm, he says does not want to do this for the rest of his life. He wants to be a mechanic. He says that he still does not know which college he will attend. He feels a bit nervous about the change and has mixed feelings about the end of school. On the one hand, he is eager to finish school so he can start work, but on the other hand, he regrets that he will not see his friends as often. He believes that higher education will be more difficult than secondary school and he says would like to be taught more maths at school, even though it is his least favourite subject, as this would help him with his future studies. He says his parents support him in his ambitions.

The effects of migration on young people in Peru

Peru has high levels of both internal and international migration. People move from rural to urban areas in search of work – Lima, the capital city, where Elmer lived with his sister for a time, has around a third of the country’s population. And 10 per cent of Peruvians live abroad and send back a total of 3,000 million dollars to their families, which is almost three times the amount received by the country in development aid.

A third of Young Lives children from the older group, and over half their mothers, are migrants in their current communities; in other words, they were born elsewhere. Over 9 per cent of families moved district between 2002 and 2006.

Elmer’s family moved in search of agricultural work just before he was born. They moved again when he was in 3rd to 6th grades of school to work on a ranch, which meant he had to attend a poorer-quality school. And then shortly before starting secondary school, he moved to Lima. It is quite common for parents to send their children to stay with a relative. Elmer and his older brother, who no longer lives with the family, each moved at different times to stay with their sister in Lima, not only to help her out but also because their parents believed that they would get a better education in the city.

So the current move is the third time he has had to start all over again. And this time he is not living with his parents during the week, but is effectively in charge of his two younger siblings.

For Young Lives, migration presents a particular problem, as we are following families over 15 years. In Peru in particular, many families move, and some move long distances. We follow the children using contact people in the communities, which means that we have only lost track of 4.4 per cent overall. This is low compared with other long-term studies, but is higher in Peru than in the other Young Lives countries.

Source: Gina Crivello (2009) *‘Becoming Somebody’: Youth Transitions Through Education and Migration. Evidence from Young Lives, Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 43.



Country context: Peru

Peru is now considered a 'high human development' country, rich in natural resources. It currently ranks 80 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index. It has a population of 29.4 million people. For the last decade, the economy has been growing at over 5 per cent each year. Even during 2009, when most of the world economy stagnated or deteriorated, growth continued in Peru, although at a lower rate.

But the country's strong economic performance has not been matched in terms of poverty reduction. There are widening gaps between different sectors of the population (especially between Spanish-speaking and indigenous populations and between people living in urban and rural areas). Social expenditure is low, although there are a number of government programmes targeted at the poor.

- The overall poverty rate decreased by 17 per cent between 2004 and 2010, but a third of the population still lives in poverty.
- While 19 per cent of people in towns are poor, this rises to 51 per cent of people in rural areas.
- Migration from rural to urban areas is common. About 30 per cent of the population lives in the capital city, Lima, and 55 per cent lives on the narrow coastline (including Lima).
- Levels of poverty, infant mortality, maternal mortality and malnourishment among indigenous groups are twice as high as national averages.

Children

- Of the 3.8 million Peruvians living in extreme poverty, 2.1 million are children.
- Children in the poorest areas – city slums, the Andean Highlands and the Amazon rainforest – are ten times more likely to die before the age of 5 than the children from the richest 20 per cent of families.
- Almost all children now go to primary school. Enrolment in secondary school is low compared to primary, but it is growing.
- But repetition of grades and temporary drop-out from school are common, leading to a high percentage of children who are 'over-age', or older than the norm for the grade they are in.
- The number of children who work is high. Boys are more likely to be employed in paid activities and girls more likely to work in the home.

Sources: www.younglives.org.uk; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report*; Santiago Cueto et al. (2012) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

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