



Louam's story

A profile from
Young Lives in Ethiopia

"I am happy with my job. On festivals and holidays, I buy drink and meat for my family."

Louam's story

Now Louam is 9, and her wish to start school has been granted. Her family's circumstances are better, and they have a new kitchen and a toilet. Other things in the village have improved too. But school has not lived up to her expectations ...

Louam now lives with her parents and three of her siblings. One of her sisters has just got married and another has joined the police. Louam's house has a corrugated iron roof and mud walls which are covered in newspaper on the inside. There are two bedrooms and a living room and a new separate kitchen and toilet. The living room is divided from the bedrooms by curtains. There are chairs made from leather and wood, and a table where Louam studies. She says that the family's living situation has improved since the Young Lives team last visited.

“What is new in your home?”

We have built a kitchen and a toilet, so we no longer have to go outside. We have tap water but no power supply.”

Louam also points out some positive changes in the village. There is a new road, a new bridge, a school, a health centre and a church. Some people have mobile phones, although her family does not.

Apart from this, the last year has been hard for the family. Louam's mother says there was not enough rain and so the harvest was not good.

“What did you do about this?”

We sold our animals and had to buy grain. We sold nine sheep and also our eucalyptus trees.”

Louam's mother says that the wedding of her daughter added to the family's expenditure. In addition, this year it will be their family's turn to invite others for the annual feast of St Michael.

“There are 13 families who take turns to invite each other to eat and drink.

Is it expensive?

Yes. Although it hurts, it is our culture and we have to do it.

Does it affect Louam's life?

Yes, because we can't afford her clothes and school materials until later.”

Last time we interviewed Louam, she was 6 years old. She is the youngest of seven children. Her parents farmed and bred cattle and were relatively well off, but there was a time when they had to live on bread and tea because bad weather had destroyed their crops. Louam was desperate to go to school like her older brothers and sisters.

Louam says her family are not poor and not rich, but medium. She thinks that poverty means wearing ragged clothes and going hungry. Louam knows what this is like. A year ago her mother, who is now 49, was seriously ill and had to go to the city to be treated in hospital. Louam's sister looked after Louam but they didn't have enough to eat. Her mother explains.

"Last year, I was sick and was in the city for almost the whole year. I have been OK since last September.

How did your sickness affect Louam?

There was no one to give her food, so she was hungry. Now I am better, she is OK. I bought her clothes and shoes and also wash her body every three days."

When asked what good things have happened to her recently, Louam has a simple reply:

"I found 50 cents while walking on the road.

What else?

I found my book after I lost it somewhere."

Last time the Young Lives team visited Louam, she was so desperate to go to school that she tried to register early and was very disappointed to be turned away. So now we ask her how she likes school. She is rather non-committal:

"What do like most at school?

Playing.

Have you ever missed school?

Only once.

Does your school have a library, playground, tap water and toilet?

Yes it does. It has separate toilets for boys and girls.

When are you planning to finish school?

When I reach Grade 5."

It turns out that Louam doesn't like school because she is teased because her skin is darker than the other children's.

"Why do you want to leave in Grade 5?

Because the kids insult me.

Do you become angry when others insult you?

Yes, I do."

She says she wants to go to another school and stay there until 10th grade. Her mother says she also wants Louam to continue at school.

"Do you think that your child will have a better life than yours when she grows up?

Yes I do, because her life will be better than mine as she is learning.

What else is more important for your child other than education?

Obedience, courage and saving money."

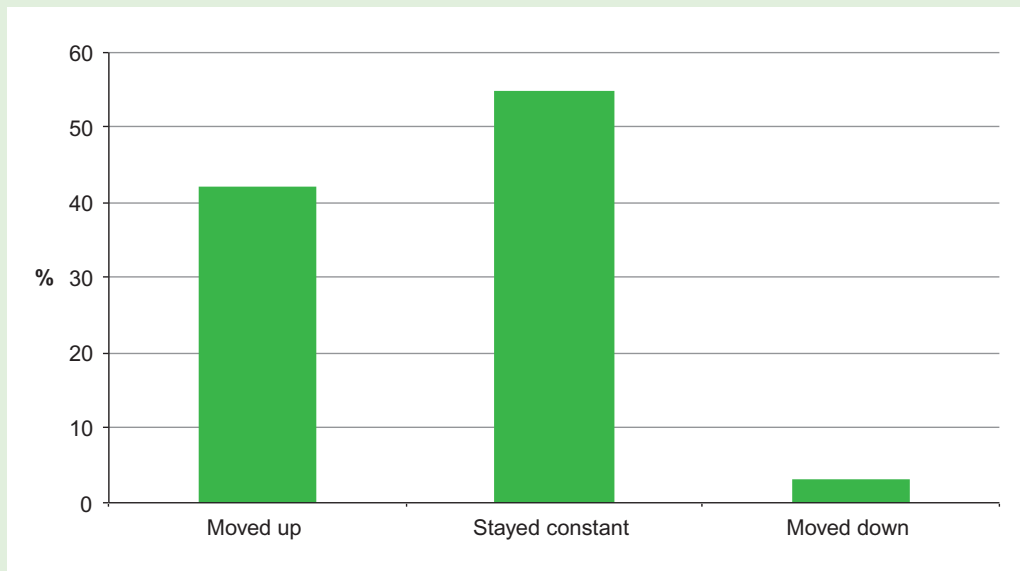
Reductions in poverty in Ethiopia

Most of the children in our study come from families who are living below the national poverty line. But Louam's is not the only family in our study in Ethiopia whose circumstances seem to be gradually improving.

Young Lives measures poverty in three main ways, by wealth index, by absolute poverty¹ and by relative consumption poverty. On all three measures, poverty among Young Lives families seems to be declining.

- Numbers living below the national poverty line went down from 72 per cent in 2006 to 68 per cent in 2009.
- Numbers living in relative poverty² went down by 16 per cent over the same period.
- In terms of poverty measured by wealth³ rather than consumption, 42 per cent of families moved out of poverty, 55 per cent stayed the same and 3 per cent became poorer.

Young Lives families in Ethiopia: movement into and out of poverty, 2002–2009 (wealth level)



“We have built a kitchen and a toilet, so we no longer have to go outside. We have tap water but no power supply.”

Reductions in poverty in Ethiopia *continued*

Although families living in rural areas tend to be poorer than those living in urban areas, rural poverty in Ethiopia is declining faster than urban poverty. The main reason for the improvements seems to be that families have increased the number of ways in which they earn income. In urban areas, involvement in business activities and new jobs, as well as remittances from family members living outside the household, have played a major part in this.

However, 9 out of 10 children in the younger group said that their families had been affected by rising food prices between 2006 and 2009. Families who have become poorer during this time say it is due to drought, and, like Louam's family, the illness of household members.

Sources: Paul Dornan (2010) *Understanding the Impacts of Crisis on Children in Developing Countries*, Round 3 Preliminary Findings; Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

- 1 The percentage of households living with a consumption level below the national poverty line
- 2 The percentage of households with less than 50 per cent of typical (median) income. (Median is when you rank everyone by income, then pick the middle one. It is used to avoid the tails of the income distribution biasing the calculation.)
- 3 Measured through consumer durables, service access and housing conditions. An index of items is created (between 0 and 1), and a threshold (0.4) set for being poor or not poor.

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Louam's mother



Country context: Ethiopia

Ethiopia, a country in the Horn of Africa, has a population of 80.7 million. It is Africa's oldest independent country but remains one of the world's poorest, although progress has been made in recent years. Child mortality has fallen, access to healthcare has improved and advances have been made in primary education, in part due to the commitment to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The Government has also introduced a number of Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes.

For the last seven years, Ethiopia has had double-digit economic growth rate – around 11 per cent on average each year. More than 60 per cent of government spending now goes to what the Government calls pro-poor sectors, namely education, health, roads, water and agriculture.

But in 2011, the United Nations still ranked Ethiopia 174 out of 187 countries in terms of human development. Almost 40 per cent of the population survives on less than 1.25 dollars a day. The country also suffers regularly from drought, which affects up to 13 million people. Many families are unable to buy or grow enough food to feed themselves, and so need food aid each year to survive. The effects on children are devastating.

- One in every 13 children dies before reaching their first birthday, while one in every eight does not survive until they are 5 years old.
- Nearly one in two children under 5 are stunted (short for their age), 11 per cent are wasted (thin for their height), and 38 per cent are underweight.

Despite significant investment to increase enrolment in primary schools, they are often poorly staffed and equipped. There are large differences in children's attendance between urban and rural locations, between boys and girls, and between and within regions. Overall literacy is low, at 31 per cent for rural and 74 per cent for urban residents.

Sources: Tassew Woldehanna et al. (2011) *Understanding Changes in the Lives of Poor Children: Initial Findings from Ethiopia*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report; UNDP (2011) *Human Development Report 2011*; UNICEF (2012) *State of the World's Children 2012*.

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 
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