



# Luz's story

A profile from  
Young Lives in Peru

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# Luz's story

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Luz says she is pleased to see the Young Lives interviewer again. She says she thinks she has grown up a lot since last time.

The best thing that has happened to Luz recently is her parents' marriage. Couples in Peru often don't get married until later, when they feel they can afford it, and Luz's parents had a big celebration. The wedding ceremony lasted two days. Luz and her sister served lunch and gave presents to the guests. She remembers that they stayed up until midnight and then some of the family went home and continued to celebrate. Meanwhile, Luz, her sister and her aunt slept in the workshop in order to make sure the presents were safe. It smelled of beer, laughs Luz.

"They got married and that was the nicest thing that's happened to me. The first day we had the civil and religious ceremonies. The second day was to celebrate, as they say here, the '*chalachi*' of the gifts.

Is that an Aymara word?

*Yes, I think so. People bring gifts and beer."*

Luz's grandparents belong to the Aymara indigenous people but Luz herself does not speak Aymara.

Luz laughs a lot. She talks about another party that she enjoyed, the school prom: "Everyone was there. I was dancing with my classmates. We stayed until late. 'Let's go!' my father said. 'No, a little while longer,' I replied. I didn't want to leave."

But she is more serious when she talks about her biggest disappointment: failing the college entrance exams.

*"I was so nervous, I was so afraid. I went to the classroom, and then sat there in fear ... I saw that the exam had things in it that even in school I hadn't been able to do. I said to myself then that I wouldn't get in. And I didn't."*

However, her father then enrolled her on a three-month crash course and she got in second time around. She is now in her first semester, studying accountancy. She says she is enjoying it. She decided to study accountancy on the advice of one of her favourite aunts. My aunt told me, "You can work in banks, in municipalities, do administration. You can go to different places ... you can even go to Lima to work."

Luz was 14 when we last spoke to her. She still lives with her family in a quiet neighbourhood where her parents run a small tailoring business. Since she was 9, Luz has helped them by washing clothes and sewing in her spare time, as well as going to school

Luz says that one day she would like to travel and see other places in Peru. She knows that she will miss her family but thinks that she will enjoy working elsewhere.

The aunt who advised her now lives quite far away and Luz says she misses her a lot. She misses the discussions and advice: "We got along well. We'd talk. She'd tell me things, like things that had happened to her when she was my age."

Her other aunt and her cousin, who lived with the family for seven years, have also moved out of the house. Her aunt's current partner is very jealous and does not allow her to work or go out much. Luz says that she does not like him because he makes her aunt sad, although he does not hit her like her previous partner did.

She says she talked more to her aunts than her mother. She also talked to her best friend but hasn't seen her since they left school. Luz says she gets on well with her parents, but that her father is strict and does not like his daughters leaving the house. This is partly because he believes there is more theft in the area since the new prison was built nearby. Luz says she is afraid of staying at home alone.

She then tells the story of a dog that the family bought as a watchdog but which her father killed three months later.

*"My father wanted a dog to guard the house when there was no one here. 'A dog to make noise,' he said. 'Let's go and buy a dog. Let's buy it on a Sunday at the fair.' He was desperate to buy a dog ... But when we went, we only saw puppies. Then we saw this small St Bernard. It looked like a little bear. We took it with us.... But then it grew. It made a mess, it got dirty. When it ate, it would get everything dirty, and my father didn't like it, so he killed it. He poisoned it."*

She was angry and upset with her father about this, but mostly she is proud of him. He used to be a carpenter, she says, and started the tailoring business from scratch and gradually improved it. These improvements are visible. The first time the Young Lives team visited, the house and workshop were all on one floor. There was a second floor, but it had no roof. The next time, the second floor was complete, and this time a third floor had been built, though it was not yet ready for use.

Luz is excited about having her own room for the first time in her life, and space to study. She believes she will stay with her family for a number of years yet. There are things she would still like to change – they still do not have hot water, and so they have to go to a place with showers a few blocks away to bathe. And in the neighbourhood, she says she would like the streets to be paved so that when cars drive by there is not so much dust, and when it rains it does not all turn to mud. She would also like buses to stop closer to her house. And she would like her neighbours not to make so much noise, because she always hears them screaming and fighting at night. Because of this, she does not consider her community a nice place to live in, but she does like living there.

## Poverty reduction and young people's views of what it means to be poor in Peru

However we measured it, we found that poverty had fallen among Young Lives families between 2006 and 2009. Absolute poverty<sup>1</sup> had gone down by 16 per cent, with the largest reduction happening in urban areas. Urban areas are already better off in terms of services than rural areas, and it is in cities where economic growth has been highest, probably because there are more opportunities for income generation.

If we look at what families thought had improved, we find that they listed housing quality, consumer goods and services. Housing quality – like the additions made by Luz's father – improved by 9 per cent between 2006 and 2009, while possession of consumer durables increased by 25 per cent, and access to services by 21 per cent. We also saw overall improvements in access to safe water (24 per cent), improved sanitation (8 per cent), and electricity (15 per cent).

We asked older children how they defined poverty. They were clear that it was a lack of basic necessities such as food, clothing and housing.

*"[Poverty is] when [people] do not have anything to eat, they don't have farmland, or they do not have a house to live in,"* says Marta, age 12, from a rural area.

*"A poor person does not have any resources, and does not have anything to eat. ... The children do not have clothes to wear,"* says Carmen, age 14, from urban area.

We also know that being poor is not just a question of money. For example, in urban areas, children mentioned isolation as part of being poor. In rural areas, children mention the lack of land or houses. In the upper Amazon, people who lived in rented houses were considered poor, because those who rent are usually daily labourers.

Children also understand that households can move into and out of poverty. In particular, they worry about families becoming too large. Another concern is losing a parent or parents, or being sent away from home because of family conflict. Most children are clear that their families too are a resource: having no family is synonymous with being poor.

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**Source:** Santiago Cueto et al. (2011) *Tracking Disparities: Who Gets Left Behind? Initial Findings from Peru*, Young Lives Round 3 Survey Report.

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1 See Louam's profile (page 16), which explains in more detail the different ways we measure poverty.

*"We [my aunt and I] got along well. We'd talk. She'd tell me things that had happened to her when she was my age."*



## 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](http://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