



Young Lives Research Hub on Climate Change and Environmental Shocks

The Challenge

Growing up in poverty is full of challenges, but today's young people are facing unprecedented crises that are deepening inequalities and having a profound impact on life outcomes, and opportunities, particularly in the Global South.

The climate crisis is increasing both the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and is already affecting many areas of young people's lives related to health and nutrition, food security, water and sanitation, mental health, education and access to decent jobs (among others), with those living in the poorest households hardest hit, especially women and girls. Exposure to **environmental degradation** is also strongly correlated with poverty and inequality, with the WHO estimating that 89% of premature deaths from air pollution occur in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). When climate shocks coincide with other crises, such as the recent pandemic, political violence or armed conflict, the consequences on people's lives are compounded, making it harder for vulnerable individuals and communities to cope and recover.

Despite growing attention to the immediate effects of climate change on poor communities, population-based evidence on the long-term and intergenerational impacts is very scarce. Climate-related research also tends to focus on specific sectors—such as the impact on health or education

—rather than providing a **holistic perspective**. These knowledge gaps hinder effective action to prevent the climate crisis from worsening poverty and disadvantage throughout people's lives and across generations.

With less than six years to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement climate targets, now is the time to equip governments and international agencies with robust longitudinal data and evidence to better deliver essential cross-sectoral policy action.

The Opportunity

As the largest and most comprehensive longitudinal study of poverty and inequality ever conducted in the Global South, [Young Lives](#) (YL) is uniquely positioned to address these critical evidence gaps. We have been following the lives of 12,000 children since 2001, from infancy into young adulthood, across four countries—Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam—each representing very different levels of economic development and patterns of climate change, and environmental shocks.

Building on over two decades of longitudinal data, our ambition is to establish a ground-breaking new YL Research Hub on Climate Change and Environmental Shocks. The Hub will generate, for the first-time, important policy-

relevant evidence on the long-term effects of shocks on human development across the life-course, and across two generations of children and young adults. This will include the impacts of extreme weather shocks experienced throughout infancy, childhood and adolescence, such as droughts, flooding, and rising temperatures, as well as increasing air pollution.

Our holistic approach will enable us to investigate various inter-connecting aspects of young people's lives, including their physical and mental health, learning and cognition, and social and emotional functioning, with long-term repercussions for their health and well-being, education, employment and family lives.

The Hub will capitalise on brand new data collected in our most recent survey round (completed in May 2024) and pioneer cutting-edge research, and data matching methodology. This will include the innovative use of biomarkers to measure exposure to air pollution (providing value for money by analysing hair samples already collected), and matching YL longitudinal data with external micro-level climate and environmental datasets, such as NASA's Socioeconomic Data and Applications Center for pollution data, and NASA's Terra Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer (MODIS) for temperature data (building on our recent success [matching YL data with global gridded rainfall data](#)).

This new area of research has the potential to reframe global debates to better address the long-term and intergenerational intersecting impacts of climate change, environmental shocks and pollution in LMICs, with important policy implications for improving young people's lives, and meeting the 2030 SDGs.



What do we know already?

Our evidence has already revealed that early exposure to climate shocks has an unequal impact on children's long-term development, affecting their nutrition, physical growth, learning progress and access to education, as recently featured in the [Financial Times](#) (June 2024).

Remarkably, our evidence shows that the impact of climate shocks extends to the next generation. YL data matched with historical rainfall data shows that droughts, flooding or cyclones experienced by a mother - while she is pregnant - can affect her child's vocabulary by age five, with longer term effects on basic maths and social and emotional skills, even into adolescence.

These findings have been showcased at numerous high-level fora including at COP26 (2022), UKFIET (2023) and Wilton Park (2024); informing FCDO's Position Paper on Education, Climate and the Environment (2023) and influencing research-to-policy debates at the country and global level (including with UNICEF, WHO, ILO, The World Bank, Centre for Global Development, and Save the Children, among others).

Most recently, droughts and rising food prices exacerbated by the climate crisis have led to shocking levels of food insecurity in southern Ethiopia, particularly among the poorest households, which is likely to be having profound impacts on the nutritional health and long-term development of newly born and infant children.

Why Partner with Young Lives?

YL has created a unique dataset over the last two decades, derived from our unique mixed-methods, inter-cohort programme across four diverse LMICs. The new Hub will capitalise on this treasure trove, with the strength of our data continuing to increase following our latest quantitative survey round and new data matching opportunities to enable progressively more sophisticated analysis and research.

YL is internationally renowned for research excellence, with an impressive track record of innovative research and survey methodology, and our findings extensively published in high-ranked and high-impact journals.

We are a diverse international team, led by the University of Oxford, with remarkable institutional and intellectual capital, particularly among our country partners led by experienced Country Directors and Principal Investigators. Being on the ground

in our study countries for over twenty years has enabled YL to establish long-term partnerships of trust and collaboration with a wide range of national governments, international agencies, donors, NGOs and civil society organisations.

Our theory of change is built on a robust track record of exceptional research to policy impact, with active policy engagement enabled by a targeted influencing strategy and innovative communications. High-profile examples of impact in recent years include:

- [Legislative change](#) to prohibit child marriage in Peru;
- Expanding and strengthening [pre-primary education in Ethiopia](#);
- [Shifting the global debate](#) on opportunities for tackling undernutrition;
- Contributing to the framing of the [SDGs to focus on childhood poverty](#);

Investment Opportunity

YL is looking to partner with like-minded individuals, corporations or foundations to help deliver our ambitious new Hub. This includes exploring opportunities for consortium funding, working in partnership to maximise our potential impact across a range of policy areas critical to addressing the impacts of climate change, environmental shocks and pollution in LMICs, and meeting the SDGs.

To date, YL has been core funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO, formally DFID), with additional support over the last two decades from a broad range of funders including Irish Aid, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), the Gates Foundation, the Hewlett Foundation, the OAK Foundation, and the Bernard van Leer Foundation (among others), and more recently from UNICEF, the Packard Foundation, the Old Dart Foundation, and the Wellcome Trust.

We look forward to taking the conversation forward.



Contact:

Dr Marta Favara
Director of Young Lives
Email: marta.favara@qeh.ox.ac.uk

Kath Ford
Senior Policy Advisor, Young Lives
Email: katherine.ford@qeh.ox.ac.uk

www.younglives.org.uk

Young Lives
Oxford Department of International
Development
University of Oxford
Queen Elizabeth House
3 Mansfield Road
Oxford
OX1 3TB

