GROWING UP WITH THE PROMISE OF THE MDGs

Children's hopes for the future of development

Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

Save the Children

Front cover: Sreyleak, eight, from Cambodia, loves to do homework and read stories. Save the Children supports her family with a small loan, which they have used for breeding fish and chickens, and to grow crops. (Photo: Karin Beate Nosterud/Save the Children)

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Save the Children works in more than 120 countries.
We save children's lives. We fight for their rights.
We help them fulfil their potential.

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children in four countries over 15 years. It is led by a team in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford in association with research and policy partners in the four study countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam.

Through researching different aspects of children's lives, we seek to improve policies and programmes for children.

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More information about this study, and all other Young Lives publications, is available at: www.younglives.org.uk

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Improving children's life chances is central to what the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were seeking to achieve. There is some consensus that the MDGs have achieved progress, but with the target date of 2015 fast approaching there are questions about how equitably gains in education, health and living conditions have been distributed. A focus on children is essential, not only because their age and stage of development make them more susceptible to the impacts of poverty, but because interventions during childhood can bring important long-term benefits to society and are key to sustainable economic growth.

This paper is based on an analysis of survey and qualitative data from 12,000 children in four countries (Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam) and examines children's experiences of growing up during the period of the MDGs. While material living standards are rising, inequality persists, and the poorest households are not benefiting equally from economic and social change. The expansion of schooling and other services has generated high aspirations among children and their families, but multiple and recurrent shocks and food insecurity, as well as inequality in accessing quality services, may prevent these goals from being achieved and undermine progress. Children's experiences reinforce the importance of retaining a focus on human development and addressing inequality of opportunities in international development post-2015.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Absolute poverty is falling, but inequality is persisting as the poorest households are not benefiting equally from poverty reduction.** While economic growth has resulted in material improvements for Young Lives households and some narrowing of gaps between urban and rural areas, disparities between other socio-economic groups remain wide.

2. **Economic growth is not delivering improved outcomes for all children equally.** In Ethiopia, while wealth levels are broadly increasing for all sectors of society, changes in children's outcomes such as reductions in stunting have been greater for the least poor, suggesting a concentration of disadvantage.

3. **Over the period of the MDGs, access to primary schooling and basic services has increased and has often been pro-poor** – reaching groups traditionally least served by basic services and formal schooling. In Ethiopia the enrolment rate of Young Lives children aged eight increased from 66% to 77% between 2002 and 2009. Nearly all of this rise resulted from enrolment increases in rural areas, yet rural enrolment still lagged behind enrolment in urban areas by 20 percentage points.

4. **Major concerns are raised about the use of averages to measure progress, because improvements in children's outcomes were slower among the poorest groups.** An 11 percentage point improvement in school enrolment in Ethiopia over the period was matched by a one percentage point improvement in children's literacy, with the gains occurring

in urban areas and less poor households. In Peru, while stunting declined over the period of all groups, the reduction for the top 40% of households was three times greater than that for the bottom 40%.

5. **Children and their caregivers have high aspirations for the future.** There are differences in how parents view girls' and boys' futures, but aspirations for both tend to be high. In Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam in 2009 more than half of the parents aspired for their eight-year-old children to complete university. These aspirations are higher than what is likely to be achieved given current participation rates in higher education, and 'expectations' may differ from 'aspirations', but there is little evidence of a lack of aspiration.

6. **Progress is fragile, as the poorest households remain on the edge, vulnerable to shocks and adverse events.** A quarter of households in Andhra Pradesh reported concerns about running out of food in 2009; one in ten said that they did not eat enough. The poorest households spend a higher proportion of their budgets on food, and this leaves them vulnerable to inflation.

7. **Access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is rising fast but risks reinforcing inequality.** In 2002 in Ethiopia, about one in 300 Young Lives eight-year-olds were in households reporting access to a mobile phone; by 2009 this was one in three. Poorer groups saw a small increase in access to phones, but they were still much less likely to have these than other groups, with implications for access to information and social networks, and for the equity of policies delivered through mobile phones. In Vietnam, by 2009, ethnic majority households were twice as likely to have a mobile phone as ethnic minority groups.

These findings suggest that while the MDGs have been an important catalyst for change, human development must remain the focus of a post-MDG framework. They also present a series of challenges in terms of how to address inequality, the quality of education and services, and the multidimensionality of poverty, and how these issues may be reflected in development goals. Addressing inequality of opportunities is essential to improving children's outcomes and so building sustainable economic growth and development.

PHOTO: PRASHANTH VISHWANATHAN/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Chotti, six, at a centre for street children in New Delhi, India

1 INTRODUCTION

As momentum builds towards 2015, the target date for the MDGs, two questions dominate discussion: to what extent has progress been made on achieving the goals, and what should come next? Agreed following the adoption of the UN's Millennium Declaration in 2000, the eight goals provide concrete indicators to measure development progress globally.[1]

The goals aim to:

- eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- achieve universal primary education
- promote gender equality and empower women
- reduce child mortality
- improve maternal health
- combat HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases
- ensure environmental sustainability
- develop a global partnership for development.

Although the MDGs focus on human development across age groups, improving the life chances of children is central to their realisation. As the Millennium Declaration states, not only are children more vulnerable to the impacts of poverty on account of their age, but it is children "to whom the future belongs". In order to review progress, it is useful to start with the experiences of children and explore what has changed for them between 2002 and 2011.

This paper is based on an analysis of data gathered from and with children who have been growing up during the timeframe of the MDGs. It draws on the Young Lives study of international childhood poverty, which for 15 years is following the lives of a younger group of 2,000 children born in 2000–01 in Ethiopia, India (the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam, and an older group of 1,000 children born in 1994–95.

The findings tell a positive story of improving material circumstances and the expansion of primary schooling and basic services. Children and their caregivers are enthusiastic about opportunities which are being introduced, many of these linked to the expansion of schooling.[2] However, the poorest households are not benefiting from poverty reduction and the expansion of basic services, and this has severe implications for children's development and wellbeing. It creates inequality of opportunities, with children's socio-economic background, household location, ethnicity or caste, and gender shaping their life chances. These inequalities are reinforced further as the poorest households, who have benefited least from development, also face a disproportionate burden of economic, environmental and health-threatening events or shocks, and have the fewest resources to cope with them.

This echoes evidence from other studies indicating that inequality starts early. For example, a World Bank study in Latin America demonstrated that between a quarter (Colombia) and half (Guatemala) of adult income inequality is related to early life circumstances – relating therefore not to rewards for effort but to circumstances beyond individual control.[3] There is a lack of consensus on the effect that income inequality has on growth, but high income inequality is associated with worse health and social indicators (including infant mortality, social mobility, murder rates and imprisonment) as well as violence and political instability.[4] Moreover, high income inequality over time is likely to produce high asset (including land) inequality, and this has been linked with lower long-term growth.[5] As for poverty reduction, this will occur at a greater rate if the proceeds of growth are more equally shared. Reports from both the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have concluded that tackling inequality of opportunities is essential for equity and social justice, and for economic growth; wasted human potential is a missed development opportunity.[6]

The experiences of children and their families have implications for debates in international development post-2015 and illustrate a positive role for:

- promoting pro-poor growth
- tackling inequality and marginalisation
- developing integrated services to address multidimensional poverty
- building on service access to encompass quality concerns
- strengthening social protection.

While the MDGs have been an important catalyst for change, it is clear that there is still unfinished business with regard to tackling poverty and inequality, above all for children, upon whom future development and economic growth depend.[7]

PHOTO: COLIN CROWLEY/SAVE THE CHILDREN

Desalegn, nine, outside his home in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. Desalegn's father, Ayal, is delighted to be involved in the Productive Safety Net Programme. "I used to be very poor, unable to provide enough food for my wife and children and we often suffered from hunger," he says. Now he has a number of animals, including a cow that gives them milk for their children and two oxen to plough their land. "This year we have produced enough crops to sustain us for a whole year," he says.

2 ABOUT YOUNG LIVES

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty that follows the changing lives of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam over 15 years. The children were chosen to reflect a wide range of cultural, economic, geographical, political and social contexts, and they live in states that are following trends typical of low- and middle-income countries. Young Lives is following two groups of children in each country:

1. An older group of around 1,000 children in each country (somewhat fewer in Peru) who were born in 1994–95. Household- and child-level data was collected on this group when they were eight, 12 and 15 years old. In-depth qualitative information was collected with 25 older children per country in 2007, 2008 and 2010–11.

2. A younger group of around 2,000 children who were born in 2000–01. Survey data was collected with this group when they were two, five and eight years old. Qualitative information was collected with 25 younger-cohort children in 2007, 2008 and 2010–11.

The key advantage of Young Lives is that it is a panel study which can show change in the lives of the same children, disaggregated into sub-groups.[8] This paper uses survey data analysis to provide an overview of the changes experienced by children in some broad focal areas of the MDGs: poverty reduction and extreme hunger, school enrolment and literacy, environmental sustainability, and access to services and communications. As a pro-poor study, Young Lives is not nationally representative and was not set up as a monitoring tool. However, it is representative of the types of group present in society, and the cohort design means it is possible to compare the two groups of similar children at the same age (eight years) at a different time point (2002 and 2009), disaggregated by socio-economic indicators to show who has benefited from development processes. Where appropriate, the study refers to the significance of differences between groups and over time (using the t-test and t-test with independent samples; when quoted as significant these results are at the 95% confidence interval or higher).

Young Lives is also a mixed-method study. Through a household-based survey of all the children and their primary caregivers, combined with qualitative research with a sub-sample of 50 children, their parents, teachers and community representatives, Young Lives is collecting a wealth of information about each child with regard to their material and social circumstances, and their views and aspirations, set in the context of the environmental and social realities of their communities.

The qualitative research is typically being carried out in four sites in each country (five in Ethiopia), selected to enable exploration of variations in location (rural/urban), ethnicity, and social and economic circumstances, and of how these characteristics interact with and affect access to services and government support. Within the sites, the children were randomly selected from within the larger sample – an equal number of boys and girls, and an equal number of younger-cohort and older-cohort children. Young Lives uses a semi-structured approach to interviewing, along with participatory tools such as drawings and diaries. The case studies used in this report are typical of broader trends within the data.

All the children mentioned in this report are referred to by pseudonyms. For further information on methodology, see the technical notes section of the Young Lives website.[9]

3 MDGs: PROGRESS, BUT FOR WHOM?

MDG 1 focuses on the eradication of extreme hunger and poverty and uses an absolute poverty threshold (income of less than $1.25 per day). Globally, absolute poverty levels have been declining rapidly, driven by economic advances in India and China.[10]

Peru is categorised as a higher middle-income country, India and Vietnam are lower middle-income countries, and Ethiopia is a low-income country. Using the MDG definition of the percentage of the population living on less than a dollar a day, national data shows poverty fell in Vietnam, Ethiopia and India.[11] Peru shows a more complex trend, with the rates appearing to rise between 1990 and 2000, and then to fall subsequently, but not to the 1990 level. Ethiopia and India had similar poverty rates in 2005, even though India's Gross National Income (GNI) per capita in that year was about 3.5 times higher. By 2008 Vietnam was succeeding in reducing its poverty levels to those of Peru, despite having only a third of the latter's GNI per capita.[12]

At the same time, inequality is persisting. This highlights the limitations of absolute poverty reduction in providing a comprehensive answer to human development problems. A living standard of more than $1.25 per day does not guarantee that children are able to go to school or eat sufficient food. Concerns over inequality highlight the extent to which social ills are graduated (the poorest households may do worse, but households that are slightly less poor still tend to do much less well than the richest households), and also that inequality per se may have additional negative effects on society.[13]

Analysis of Young Lives data shows, in line with wider economic change, that Young Lives households were experiencing material improvements across this period. Even when the sample was disaggregated into different social groups, the pattern of generally rising living standards was evident. Figures 1 and 2 use household wealth level data from Andhra Pradesh and Vietnam to explore changes in wealth between 2002 and 2009.[14] In each country, the sample has been ranked by household wealth level, then split into equally sized quintiles, and then the typical experience within each of these five groups has been examined. The figures also draw on data disaggregated by rurality and ethnicity.

In Andhra Pradesh (Figure 1) the gain in rural areas was greater than in urban areas, and similarly the bottom four quintiles saw a larger increase than the least poor quintile. The pattern in Vietnam (for both urban and rural areas) is similar to that in Andhra Pradesh. However, there was no narrowing in the gap in Vietnam between ethnic minority and majority groups. Moreover, in both countries the gaps between ethnic and caste groups and in terms of household wealth level and location remained large in 2009 despite a decade of growth. The measure used here is an absolute one, and the greatest 'growth' possibility is for those with the initially lowest levels of the wealth index (and therefore the development of services over this period is likely to show as pro-poor growth). Despite the positive gains, and some evidence of narrowing, the persistence of wide (and significant) gaps on this measure therefore demonstrates continuing large differences between social groups in material circumstances and access to services.

There is increasing recognition in development circles of the need to consider the multidimensional nature of poverty, and to use indicators of living conditions and outcomes alongside money-metric indicators.[15] Although much attention within the MDGs is given to the poverty indicator, MDG 1 also includes indicators relating to hunger and child undernutrition. Here we make use of data on stunting (being shorter than expected for age) to explore changes over this period.[16] This outcome indicator of children's development is particularly important, given the well-documented links between early malnutrition and impairment of children's later development.[17] Stunting is caused by undernutrition, which itself results either from insufficient quality or quantity of food or from

FIGURE 1: WEALTH INDEX LEVELS BY WEALTH LEVELS AND RURALITY, ANDHRA PRADESH

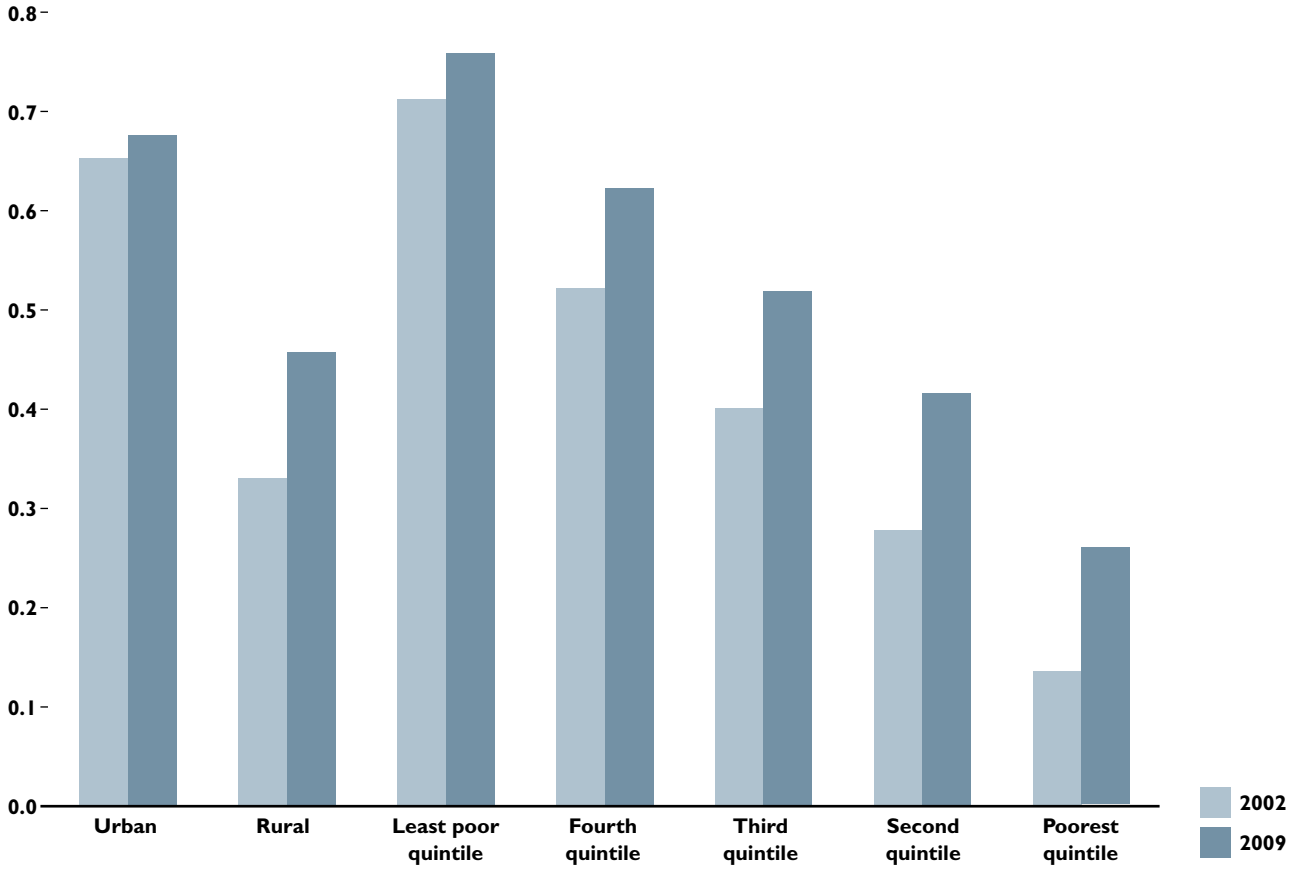
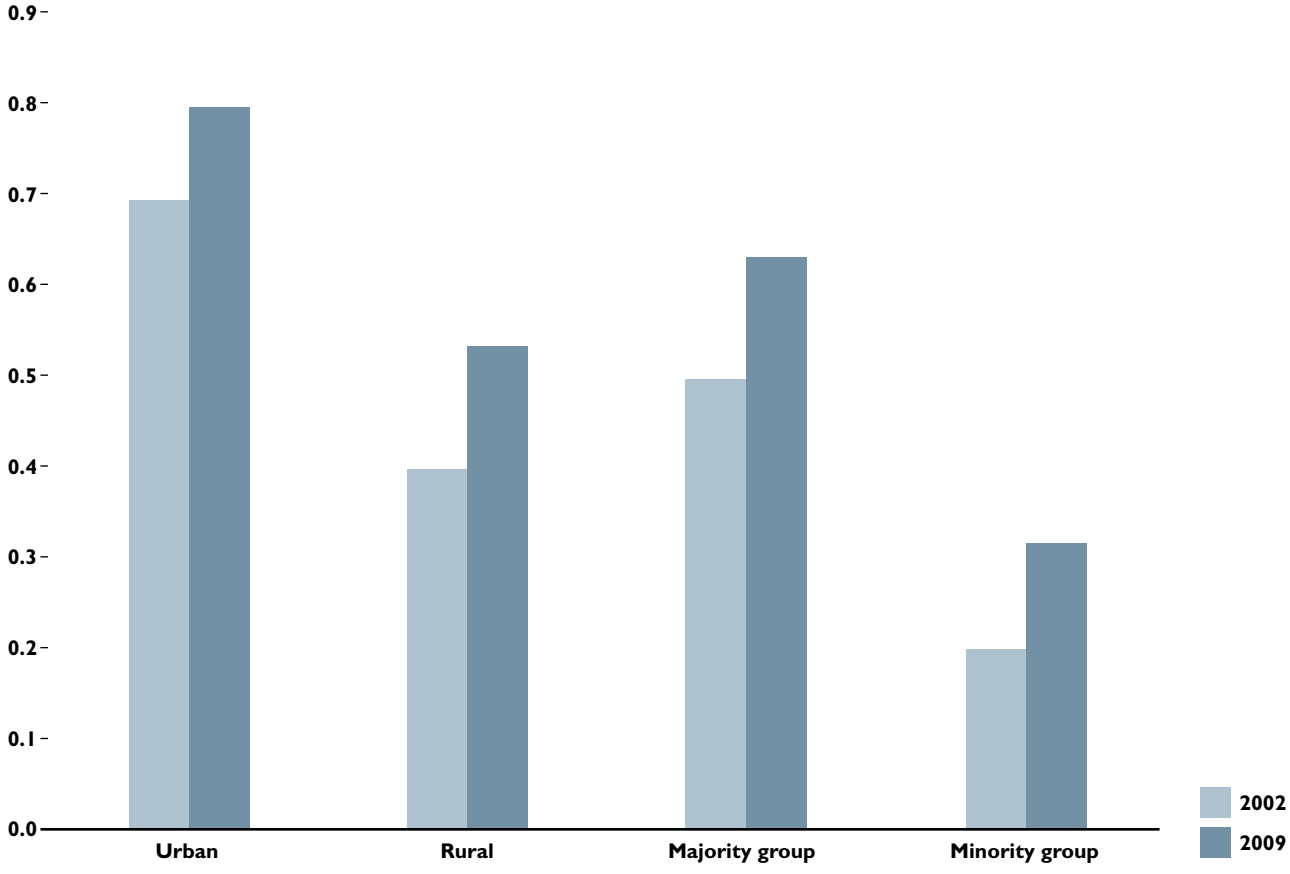


FIGURE 2: WEALTH INDEX LEVELS BY ETHNICITY AND RURALITY, VIETNAM



disease which impairs children's ability to absorb nutrition. Figures 3 and 4 present analysis of data from Peru and India to track overall change in levels of stunting, and where the gains have been experienced. The numbers vary from country to country, but the pattern is common.

Figures 3 and 4 both demonstrate average reductions in child stunting (by about seven percentage points in the Peru sample; and about four points in the Andhra Pradesh sample). It is clear, first, that there are differences in the chances of being stunted between groups and, second, that the gain was not experienced equally across the sample. In Peru, by 2009, one in 15 of the least poor 40% of households were stunted, compared with one in three of the poorest 40% of households. There were substantial gains for children in both urban and rural areas, but when considered by wealth levels the largest gains occurred in groups with already lower stunting levels (the richer three quintiles). These changes were statistically significant for the least poor three quintiles, but not significant for the poorest two quintiles, as the top 40% of households saw a nearly four times greater reduction in stunting rates than the poorest 40% of households (11 percentage points compared with three percentage points).

The pattern in the data from India is similar, with the greatest gains experienced by the 'Other' (higher-caste and non-caste) group and the Backward Classes.[18] The Other group and Backward Classes have better material circumstances than the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Again it is notable that the falls observed in Figure 4 are in these less poor groups (and those changes were statistically significant), whereas for the scheduled caste and tribe group there was no large change (if anything, it appears the rate of stunting increased for Scheduled Tribe children, but the numbers are small and this was not statistically significant). Since stunting itself has been linked with poorer outcomes for children, this concentration of disadvantage in stunting also has implications for other indicators of children's development.[19]

Literacy shows a broadly similar picture to stunting, albeit with some evidence of a worsening situation for the poorest children in Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh. Table 1 shows changes in wealth levels and concurrent changes in stunting and literacy by comparing children aged eight in 2002 and those aged eight in 2009. While in Ethiopia, Peru and Vietnam stunting fell and literacy rose (with the exception of the literacy level in Andhra Pradesh), disaggregating the average by quintile reveals a pattern where stunting rates tended to fall more for the least poor children than for the poorest children. This is a concentration of disadvantage. In Andhra Pradesh there is no evidence of an improvement for the poorest fifth (if anything,

TABLE 1: CHANGES IN HOUSEHOLD WEALTH, CHILD STUNTING AND LITERACY LEVELS, 2002–09

		Absolute difference (between 2002 and 2009)		
		Average household wealth index (material circumstances)	**Being stunted**	**Ability to read without difficulty**
Ethiopia	Least poor quintile	0.12	-9.2	11.7
	Poorest quintile	0.10	-7.0	-6.2
	Average	0.11	-11.5	1.6
Andhra Pradesh	Least poor quintile	0.05	-10.7	0.5
	Poorest quintile	0.13	2.1	-6.0
	Average	0.10	-3.9	0.0
Peru	Least poor quintile	0.11	-8.4	12.4
	Poorest quintile	0.06	-3.4	5.7
	Average	0.08	-7.2	8.4
Vietnam	Least poor quintile	0.10	-6.6	5.3
	Poorest quintile	0.15	-3.1	14.3
	Average	0.13	-8.8	9.9

FIGURE 3: STUNTING LEVELS BY WEALTH LEVELS AND RURALITY, PERU (%)

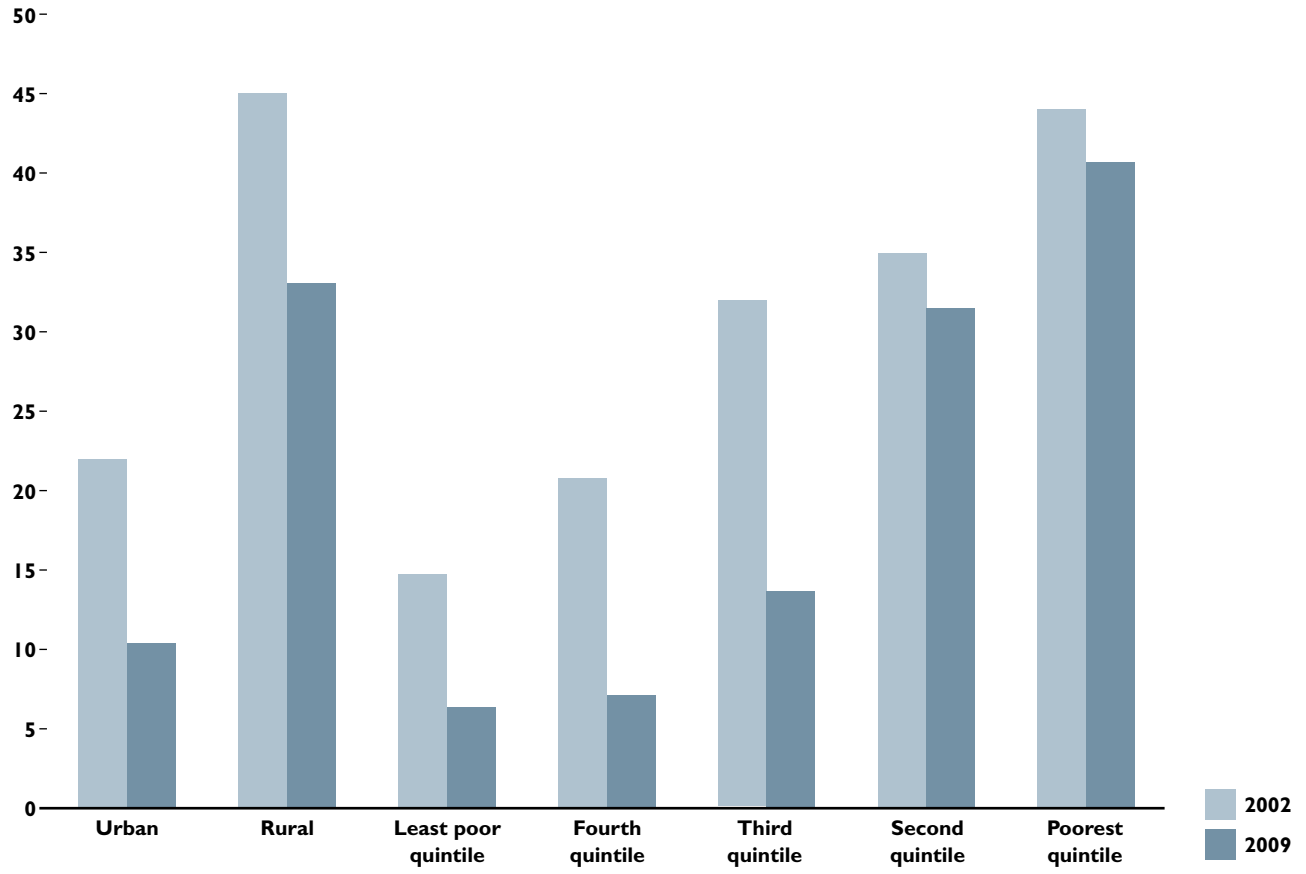
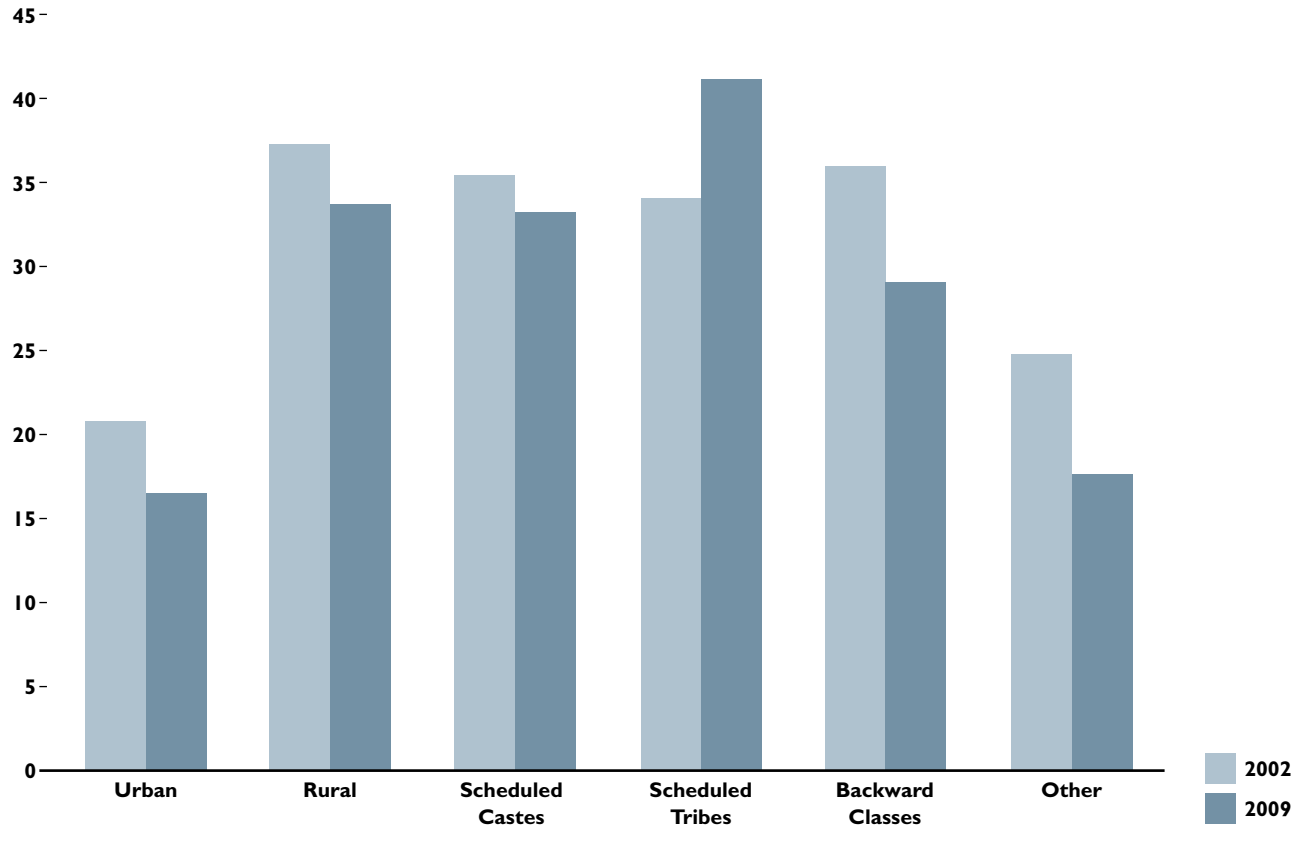


FIGURE 4: STUNTING LEVELS BY RURALITY AND ETHNICITY AND CASTE GROUP, ANDHRA PRADESH (%)



stunting rose, but the change is small). This pattern remains despite the already higher stunting rates for poorer groups.

Vietnam is an exception: the absolute gain for the poorest was three times that of the least poor group, which is positive, especially since the gaps were wide (in 2002, 89.1% of the least poor children could read and write without difficulty, compared with about half (47.7%) of the poorest children).

Inequality between different groups becomes larger as the children become older.[20] Figure 5 illustrates growing disparities between urban and rural children in school enrolment within the older age group of children, at the age of 15, in Andhra Pradesh. Similar trends are observed in the other countries.

Research from high-income countries has illustrated the profound impact that living in poverty has on children's wellbeing and how it affects engagement with peers and schooling.[21] Despite their countries' different stages of economic development, children in the Young Lives study also experience stigma and shame associated with poverty, which impacts on their wellbeing. Young Lives uses a ladder exercise to collect children's perceptions of their wellbeing. Children are asked to position themselves on a ladder where the ninth step represents the best possible life and the first step the worst possible life. Figure 6 groups together children who position themselves on steps one to three as children who consider that they have a bad life, and those who place themselves on steps seven to nine as children who consider that they have a good life. It illustrates that children from poor households and from ethnic minority groups have a much lower sense of their own wellbeing than children from less poor and ethnic majority groups.

Drawing on qualitative data analysis, we find that across the countries poor children and those from marginalised groups report feeling stigmatised on account of their background. Y Thinh is 16 years old and from the Cham H'roi ethnic minority group in Vietnam. At the end of seventh grade he got into many fights with other children who bullied him because of his ethnicity. Y Thinh says that another boy "mocked me for being 'an ethnic'" and then "punched me with his fist". He could not put up with the continued bullying and adds, "I couldn't digest the lessons. So I felt tired of learning." He has now left school and is working on the family farm. When he is 20 he wants to be "a driver of a big truck to carry sugar cane". Similarly, Rajesh and Yaswanth, both from Scheduled Tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh, describe being treated disrespectfully and bullied

FIGURE 5: SCHOOL ENROLMENT, ANDHRA PRADESH, OLDER COHORT, 2002–09 (%)

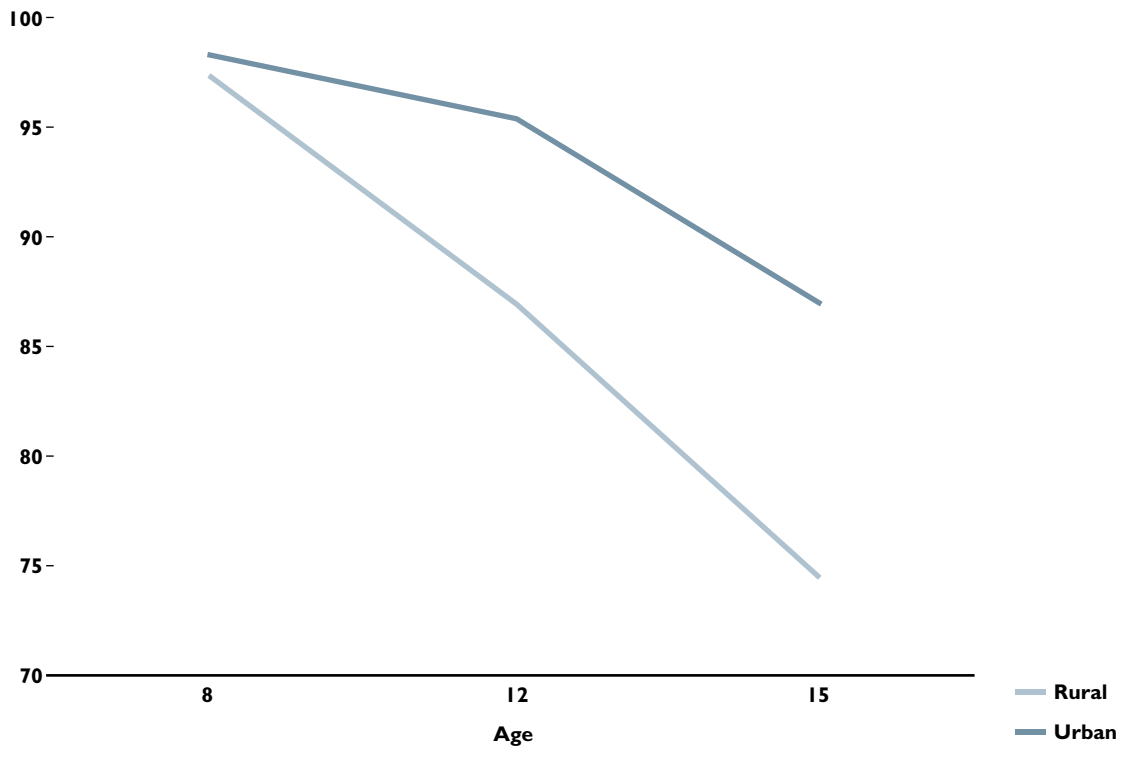
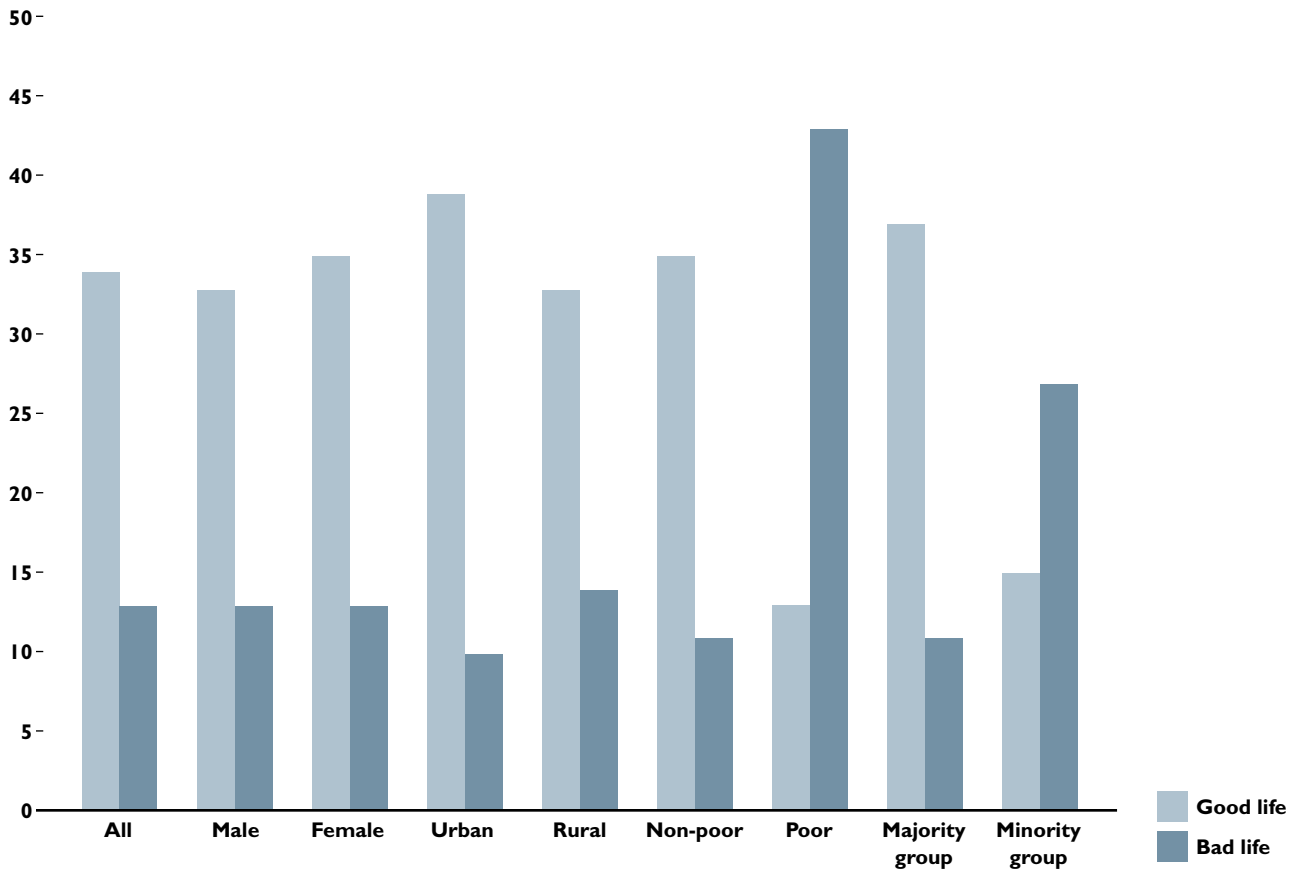


FIGURE 6: SUBJECTIVE WELLBEING, BOTH COHORTS, VIETNAM (%)



Note: In Figure 6, consumption data has been used instead of wealth, and 'non-poor' refers to households which are above the national poverty line.[22]

because they belong to caste groups with low social status. Rajesh says:

> *They are from higher classes and we are from lower classes… We give respect to them, but they didn't give it to us… We are six to seven people and we stayed in queue for hostel for food, but our higher-class students come in the middle of the queue. If we ask why do you do that, they scold me.*

This sense of being stigmatised can affect children's experiences of schooling and beyond, as illustrated by the next two examples, Bereket and Fabian.

Bereket lives in a slum area in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and is currently in grade eight, although he misses school from five to seven days a month when he works washing cars. He says that among his peer group, boys do similar jobs but "the girls are more concerned about their education". Bereket is an orphan who lives with his grandmother. She feels angry when he is absent from school, but he does not listen to her. Bereket says, "Learning enables you to have a vast knowledge and it helps you to think good things, and that makes me happy. But I hate sitting in a classroom where there are many students. It is hard for me to sit in a classroom for long hours." He adds, "When the students come wearing better clothes, I don't like to feel inferior to them, so it is a must for me to work hard to change my situation." Bereket thinks that poverty is at the root of his problems: "It is my problems that pushed me to join this job. I didn't have any choice, and in our locality there was a good opportunity for generating money." Working has changed his attitude: "I used to think and hope that education would change my life, but now I only hope that having a business will change me. I used to rely on education, but now I prefer to work."

Fabian lives in Lima, Peru. His mother says that when he was young, his father had an accident and injured his back in the factory where he was working. He was unable to work for five years, and she feels that Fabian was badly affected, since he didn't have the same clothes and toys as other children. Although she went out to work, her salary wasn't enough to

cover the utility bills and school expenses. The family received support from a government-organised community kitchen programme which targets the most vulnerable families:

> *I used to participate in the community kitchen in this time of crisis… Collecting the meal cost less, and the salary that I was earning was not enough, because I had to pay for the water, electricity, their clothes, supplies: that's where it went… My children used to go and collect it.*

Fabian's mother describes the impact that this had on her daughter, who wanted to move away from the shanty town: "She doesn't like it; her friends never come to visit." She continues:

> *[Fabian and his sister] used to bring the soup, and the neighbours used to say, "They're bringing the soup and it's spilling everywhere, neighbour."… We participated in the soup kitchen for five years, and then my daughter said, "I'm going to cook now. I don't want to know any more about this soup kitchen, because it makes me ashamed."… Why did it embarrass her? Because my neighbour used to say, "Now be careful and don't spill the soup."*

However, inequality between groups of people does not only affect the wellbeing of children who are from the poorest families. Susan, aged 16, is very worried by what she perceives as rising violence and crime insecurity in Lima and how this will affect her studies, as she will have to commute to university and will be in the street: "I'm getting close to the point where I won't go out, I won't go and study outside, as it makes me afraid… because they are saying that it is getting more insecure."

In summary, evidence presented in this section illustrates that economic growth, while important, on its own does not deliver improved outcomes for all children. There is a common pattern of persisting and even increasing inequality harming children's physical and cognitive development and subjective wellbeing. Moreover, there is a concentration of disadvantage, as the same groups of children (usually from the poorest households, rural areas and ethnic minority or caste groups with low social status) suffer from multiple and overlapping deprivations. This highlights the problematic nature of averages and suggests the need for greater disaggregation of statistics to be embedded in future monitoring targets.

POLICY RESPONSES: THE MIDDAY MEAL SCHEME, ANDHRA PRADESH

The Midday Meal Scheme (MDMS) in Andhra Pradesh provides children in government schools from first to eighth grades with a cooked midday meal, which is intended to consist of 400 calories and 12g of protein. The scheme aims to improve levels of nutrition and increase enrolment, retention and attendance rates. Deepak is eight and from a Scheduled Tribal community, and benefits from the scheme. He says he likes going to school because "the food is nice and the school is good". Yaswanth says that the MDMS helps children get nutritious food, as previously his mother did not have money to give him for food, and since she has to leave for work at 4am she did not have time to prepare food for him, which affected his ability to concentrate in class. Other children report liking MDMS because they are no longer ashamed of their lunch boxes from home.

The scheme also seems to have beneficial effects in protecting children from the impact of drought. Findings from Young Lives show that children in households affected by drought had a lower height-for-age and weight-for-age than their counterparts who were not affected by the drought. However, when children experienced the MDMS this compensated for the impact of drought.[23]

4 CHANGING OPPORTUNITIES: CHILDREN'S HOPES FOR THE FUTURE

The following two sections explore in more depth children's experiences of growing up during the time frame of the MDGs. The case studies of the children and young people featured here reflect the narrative of rapid social change and increasing opportunities (Section 4) and a counter-narrative of persisting inequality of opportunities which prevent all children from benefiting from development (Section 5). We explore how children's life chances are being shaped, and how this affects their hopes and fears for the future.

EDUCATION: FAST INCREASES IN ENROLMENT BUT QUESTIONS ABOUT QUALITY

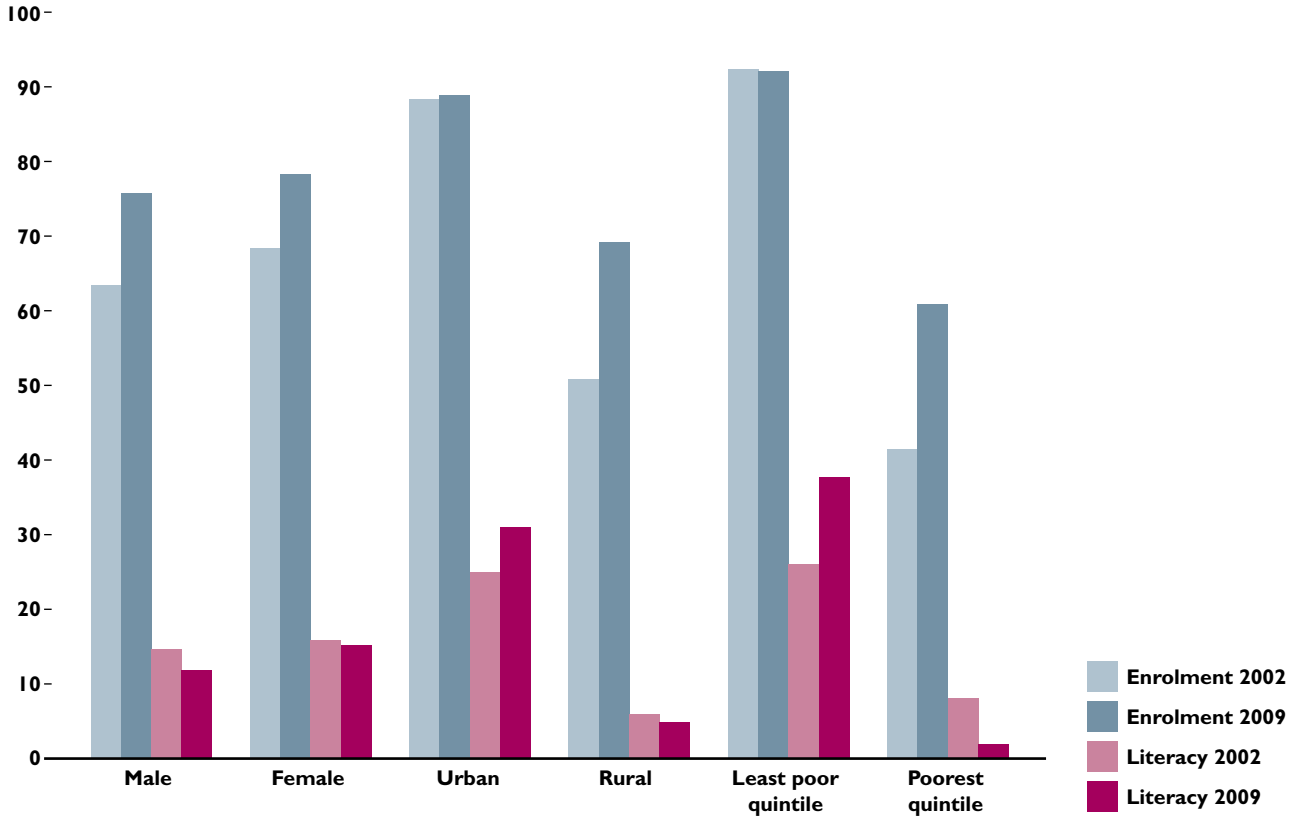
The MDG indicators contain 'process' indicators of primary enrolment, the completion of a period of schooling and eliminating gender-based differences in enrolment, and they focus on the literacy levels of young adults (as an outcome of education). In this section we highlight the rapid (and pro-poor) changes in school enrolment, and find that differences remain in the longer-term educational careers of different groups of children. Even though there have been relatively pro-poor changes in enrolment, differences in literacy remain marked, indicating the importance of considering both household background and the quality of education received by different groups.

Figure 7 demonstrates an overall increasing rate of enrolment in Ethiopia. This increase in enrolment was pro-poor, with the greatest increase occurring in rural areas and for the poorest quintile, narrowing gaps between groups. For context it is also worth noting that the expected enrolment age in Ethiopia is comparatively late (at seven years, although not all children go to school at that point), and so the children would typically have experienced only a short period of school when surveyed. Peru (Figure 8) already had a high enrolment rate in 2002, and this remained high in 2009 (although it was slightly lower for poorer groups).

The story in relation to gender differences implied by Figures 7 and 8 is quite positive in view of the lack of difference between boys and girls (with girls, if anything, doing slightly better). While in national data Peru has reached gender parity in primary schooling, Ethiopia has not: data for 2009 suggests that boys have a 5% higher primary school enrolment rate than girls, but national data is net (age adjusted) and for the whole of primary schooling, whereas Young Lives data is for one age point.[24]

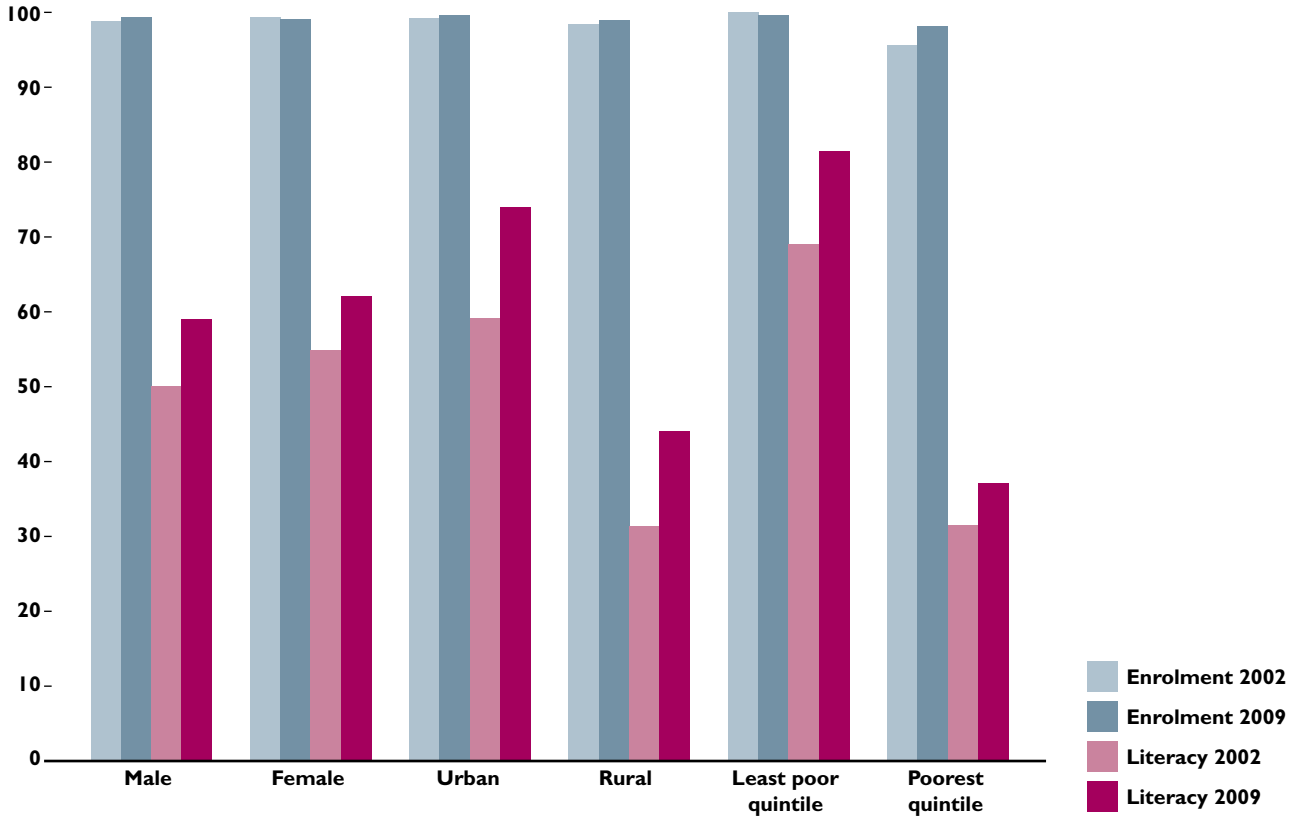
Alongside the pro-poor story of enrolment, however, changes in literacy went in the opposite direction. In the data from both Ethiopia and Peru, large numbers of children are in school but cannot read and write without difficulty, and those least likely to be literate are from poorer households. Encouragingly, there was a gain over the period shown in both figures. In Ethiopia this overall gain was small (two percentage points), and the significant gains occurred in groups with initially higher literacy levels (urban and the least poor); literacy rates actually decreased among the poorest children, and this was also significant. The data from Peru shows an overall increase of eight percentage points in literacy: while this increase was 12 percentage points for the richest group, it was six percentage points for the poorest group. While the increases were significant for both urban and rural areas and for children from the least poor quintile, the increase in literacy among children from the poorest quintile was not significant. As with stunting, while gradual improvements can be seen when we compare the cohorts, improvements in children's outcomes seem quite slow, especially for disadvantaged groups.

FIGURE 7: ENROLMENT AND LITERACY LEVELS DISAGGREGATED BY SOCIAL GROUP, ETHIOPIA (%)



Note: Literacy is defined here as the ability to read and write a simple sentence without difficulty.

FIGURE 8: ENROLMENT AND LITERACY LEVELS DISAGGREGATED BY SOCIAL GROUP, PERU (%)



Differences in school resourcing, such as those between urban and rural areas and in the language of instruction, can contribute to varying learning outcomes for children. In Peru, there are wide gaps in test scores between ethnic groups, with minority groups scoring less well than Spanish speakers.[25] Evidence from qualitative analysis supports these findings. Eva is nine years old and from a Quechua (minority language) speaking family in Peru. She feels that her school is too old and lacks facilities such as a library and computer room. She also criticises some of the teachers, as they "don't teach you: they are too old". She thinks that the schools in the city are better. Similarly, in rural Vietnam, Duy's mother feels the facilities at her son's school are of poor quality: "For example, there are only so many computers. They have to take turns; they have to wait for a long time to use the computers. Schools in Hanoi have enough equipment; schools in the rural areas don't. In my opinion, they don't teach very well in rural areas."

Other factors also may be exacerbating differences between children's experiences of school and learning outcomes (see Section 6). Andhra Pradesh has a fast-growing low-fee private education sector. In 2002, when the older group of children was aged eight, 12% of boys and 10% of girls in rural areas were attending private schools. By 2009, in the same areas, when the younger group of children was eight, 40% of boys and 25% of girls were receiving a private education.[26] The following case of Shanmuka Priya illustrates how a growing unregulated private sector may lead to inequality between boys and girls, and between households that are able to pay and those that are not. This has implications for children's life chances, because private schools usually teach in English (although with considerable variations in quality), which may enable some children to obtain better-paid jobs in the future.

Shanmuka Priya is eight years old and lives in rural Andhra Pradesh. When she was six her parents sent her to an English-medium private school in a town about 15 kilometres away, as they were worried about the quality of the local government school. She only attended for four days, as the fees were prohibitive at 5,000 rupees ($95) a year, and her father says they "missed her too much". Shanmuka Priya is now back studying at the local government school, while her brother Prashant now goes to a private school. Her mother says, "Shanmuka Priya is a girl: we won't give her higher education. And in the case of Prashant, we will make him study as much as we can. We want our only son to get a good education. We have up to tenth grade in the village school for Shanmuka Priya. We will see what happens after that." This is because sons traditionally look after parents, while girls leave the natal home when they marry. As Shanmuka Priya's father explains:

> *Some people say that girls are just like boys and they should be educated well. And others say, "What are they going to do with higher education, since they will be going to somebody else's house?" They also say, "Since we can't benefit, why spend money on a girl's education?" But I want Shanmuka Priya to get a good education. We think that if she studies well, her life will be good. We know what it is like to work hard. Why should our children suffer like us? We want them to have a better life. We all like to see our children happy and comfortable. I hope our dreams come true.*

During early childhood, socio-economic and household characteristics are much stronger determinants of children's development than gender.[27] For example, Figure 8 illustrates little difference in literacy between boys and girls at age eight in Peru. However, gender differences become more marked during middle and later childhood. They take different forms within and between countries – for example, pro-boy gender bias is more evident in India, and to a lesser extent in Ethiopia, whereas some gender gaps favour girls in Vietnam. For instance, although boys are more likely to be in school in Andhra Pradesh at age 15, in the other three countries girls at age 15 are more likely to be in school. At the same age, boys are performing better than girls in cognitive achievement test scores in Andhra Pradesh and Ethiopia. In contrast, girls in Vietnam have a higher average performance in cognitive achievement tests.[28]

Gender-based inequalities affect boys and girls at different ages and in different ways according to intra-household dynamics, socio-cultural context, institutional structures and economic pressures. They are often shaped by parents' (and increasingly children's) expectations of how choices or investments will pay off in later life, as illustrated by the case of Shanmuka Priya. The following sections examine children's and parents' aspirations for the future, including how employment or marriage prospects shape different expectations for boys and girls, which in turn shape decisions over schooling or work in the present.

"WITH STUDIES I CAN BE SOMETHING": RISING ASPIRATIONS LINKED WITH SCHOOLING AND WITH INVESTMENTS IN EDUCATION

Attendance at school and acquisition of qualifications have been hailed as a means of breaking the poverty cycle by developing children's skills and enhancing their chances of securing better-paid employment in the future. Across the countries, children and caregivers from all socio-economic backgrounds stress the importance of schooling for children's life chances and social and material opportunities.

Figure 9 shows the percentage of children aged between 14 and 15 who, when asked, "Ideally, what level of education would you like to complete?" replied, "University". It illustrates the high level of children's aspirations across the countries. In comparison, Figure 10 shows the aspirations of caregivers of the younger group of children at age eight. The trends are largely similar to those in Figure 9 and show even fewer gender differences for sons and daughters (Andhra Pradesh is an exception).

Both children and caregivers in Andhra Pradesh seem to have lower aspirations than their counterparts in the other three countries; this may reflect cultural specificity in the way the question was asked, and we are not intending country comparison.

Across the four countries there is a nuanced picture of gender dynamics.[29] In Andhra Pradesh and Ethiopia girls have lower aspirations than boys, with the reverse being the case in Peru and Vietnam. Andhra Pradesh is the only context where caregivers have markedly lower aspirations for their daughters than for their sons. In addition, in Andhra Pradesh, parents have lower education aspirations for daughters than for sons at age 12, and by age 15 girls have lower educational aspirations for themselves.[30] This demonstrates that while the increase in girls' enrolment is positive, it is only part of the challenge. It remains to be seen whether girls are able to translate school attendance into better-paid jobs or improved bargaining power within the household.

Many children aspire to become 'professionals' – for example, doctors, teachers, business people, engineers, police – or to find other forms of office work. In

FIGURE 9: 14- TO 15-YEAR-OLDS WHO WOULD IDEALLY LIKE TO COMPLETE UNIVERSITY (%)

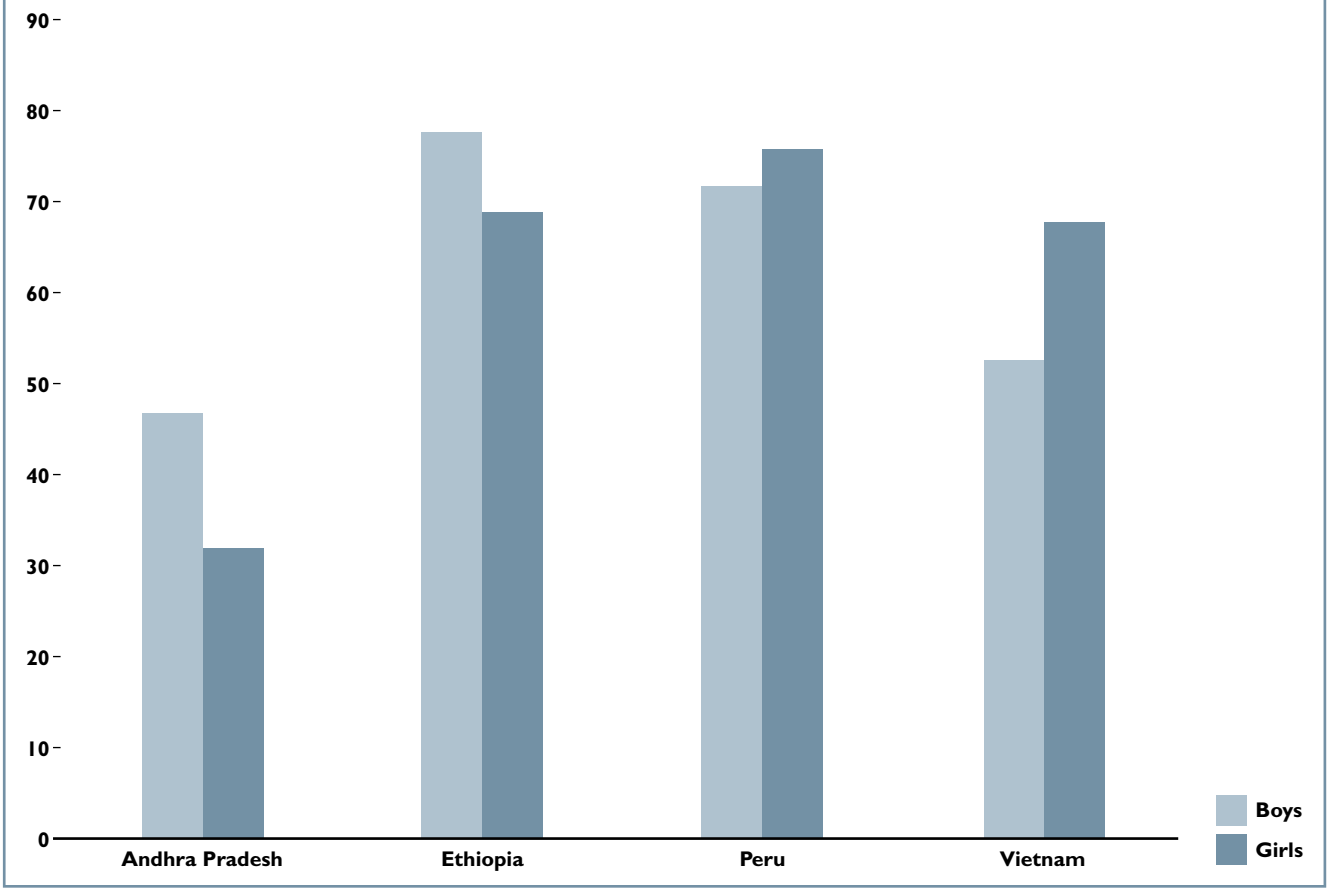
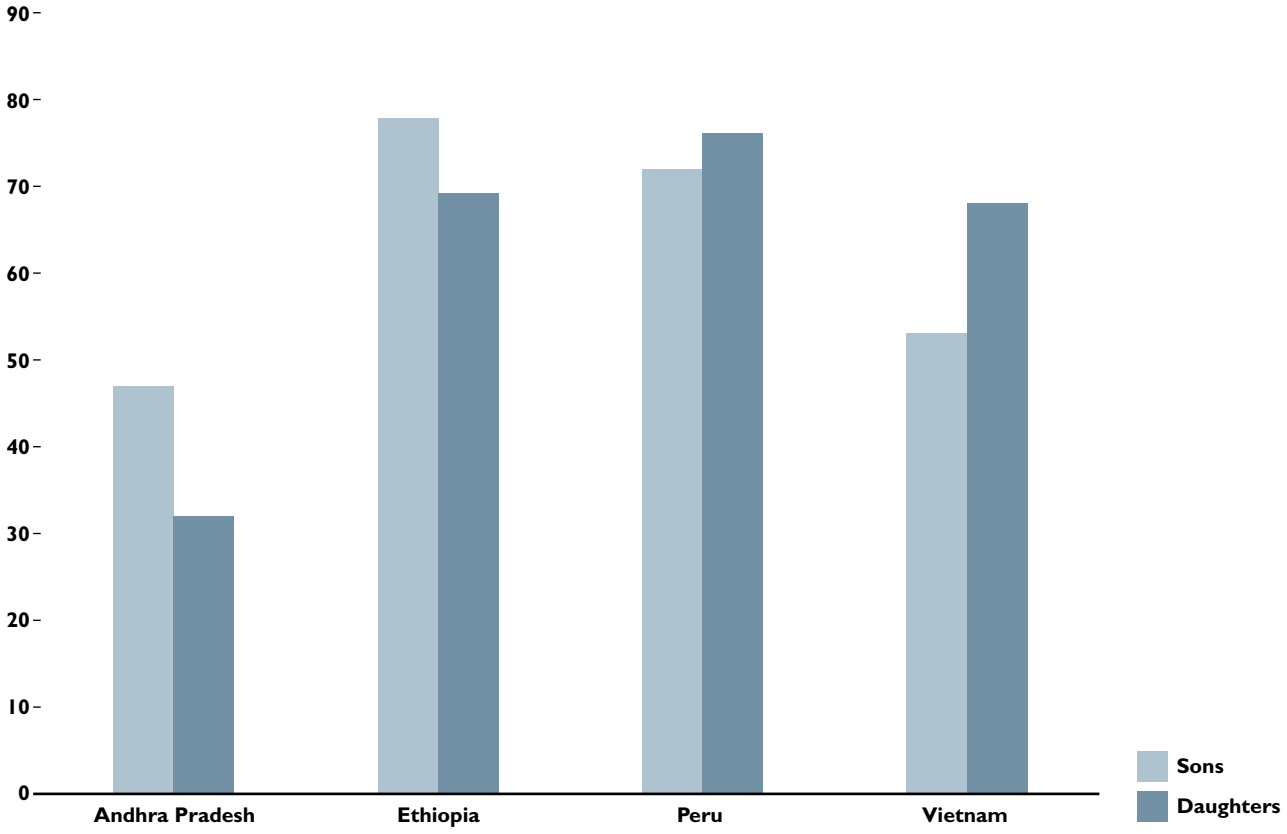


FIGURE 10: CAREGIVERS OF EIGHT-YEAR-OLDS WHO WOULD IDEALLY LIKE THEIR CHILDREN TO COMPLETE UNIVERSITY (%)



addition, many children and families view education as a route out of poverty and towards improved social standing, whether for the children or for the family as a whole.

Susan, aged 16, from Lima, Peru, describes the importance of school for young people's future prospects:

> *[School is important], as it is something that teaches you various things, no? And now… for any job they require you to have finished secondary school, and I think that to be a driver, or whatever, you need to have finished your secondary schooling…*
>
> *[If I left school] I wouldn't be able to keep myself in the future. With studies I can be something, no? And I know that I could be something… and anyway, it would be like defrauding my mother.*

Susan's sense of obligation to her mother reflects the many sacrifices caregivers make to ensure that their children can go to school. Santhi is from an *adivasi* or tribal background in rural Andhra Pradesh. She feels pressure to succeed at school, in order to reward her family, who have supported her: "I am frightened whether I will reach the expectations for the support they gave me. I feel tensed also, and if we are tensed we will forget what we study." Santhi says that her family "collected details of some colleges and told me that this college is like this and the reputation of that college is high. They worked hard and got me admitted into this college, and my friends also they think a lot of me, so the only way to repay their support is to study well and score good marks and achieve a good position in society about which my parents feel proud and be happy without any worries."

Phouc is 16 years old and lives in Da Nang city in South Central Vietnam. He would like to study for a master's degree, and says, "If I have a master's and a stable job, maybe I will study for the PhD." He adds: "I could be a professor, but I think a PhD is enough." He believes that having good wages and a job he is passionate about is important, and says he wants to "be of use to society". Although he has ambitions to study abroad, he says, "I still want to return to Da Nang in the end," adding, "Da Nang is my homeland. I have to develop my homeland first."

Phouc's mother describes the sacrifices she and her husband have made for Phouc and his older sister, including borrowing 12 million dong (£370) from the student support programme for their schooling. Top-up tuition is common in Vietnam, even for the poorest families, because of the half-day school system and low teacher salaries.[31] She explains: "If we can't pay back the debt we'll sell this house and buy a small one." She continues: "Since he likes studying, I have to try hard for him. Because I have two children, when I close my eyes they'll be able to be better off than society. They'll be cultured people when they go out into the world, and no one can look down on them. I think so, so I try hard for them; I always think about them. For example, if I had two coins and I saw someone poor, I'd help them, because I'd think if I help them now, someone will help my children later. Everything I do and think is for my children."

"WE ARE NOT GOING TO SUFFER ANY MORE LIKE THIS IN THE MUD": EXPECTATION OF SCHOOLING AS A DRIVER OF SOCIAL MOBILITY

For children living in the towns, aspirations include migrating abroad to study (as in the case of Phouc) or moving to the capital city. Luz, aged 18, from a town in Peru, is studying accounting at university. After she failed the entrance exam at her first attempt, her father paid for her to attend a private academy for three months and she passed second time round. Luz was encouraged by her aunt to study accounting:

> *My aunt spoke to me. She told me, "You can work in banks, you can work in the municipality, do administration, not only here… You could even go and work in Lima, to the Congress"… Well, that's very ambitious!… But I liked the idea.*

She still helps her parents in their textile workshop. She feels these skills are useful if she ever needs to *defenderse* (to 'get by'). She feels that it is always good to know something other than your main profession. Now that she is older, Luz feels that she has to take charge of her future:

> *Now I have to think about what will become of me, what I will do in the future, how I will sustain myself… Before, I didn't have any idea, but now that I have started university, it's different – you have to worry more; now you can't be joking around.*

Luz aspires to go to Arequipa or Lima – 'big cities' – to work. "I want to be a great professional… a professional, working and helping my parents economically." She also wants to secure a good public image and gain respect from peers and family: "They will always speak well of me, 'She manages herself well.' Others will recommend me… I will be happy, as everyone will recommend me… My parents will feel proud that things are going well with my work… Thanks to them I have this opportunity, a profession… Where would I be without them?"

In contrast, children in rural areas often link aspirations about formal schooling with opportunities for social mobility. Living in rural areas and working in the fields is associated with extreme hardship and suffering. Marta, aged 15, is from the rural city of Andahuaylas and is currently in fourth grade of secondary school. She aspires to be a nurse, and would like to continue studying either in Andahuaylas or in Lima. She doesn't like working in the fields: it involves digging potatoes, which she finds difficult, and she doesn't like the heat. Her mother is supportive of her aspirations: "'We are not going to suffer any more like this in the mud… It's better that I study,' that's what she tells me." In this sense, this mother sees her daughter's upward social mobility and escape from rural life as part of the natural order of things: parents make sacrifices so that their children can have a better life. Her mother is determined that Marta should study "all that she can", but worries about money and recognises this will be compromised should anything happen to herself or her husband.

Yet not all children have aspirations related to education or see their role as working to support their families now. For children who have left school, obtaining a good job in order to support their family is important. Salman is 15 years old and lives in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, with his mother and four siblings. His father died when he was six. Salman left school at 12 and has been working to support the family. His mother explained, "From whom can we take support except our children?" Currently Salman is working as a driver for a building company. His grandmother works in the company's office and got him the job. He has been doing this for three months. He enjoys his work and says, "By the grace of Allah everyone is fine. I started working, and my younger brother and sister are studying." Salman says he has four uncles who live abroad in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait and somewhere in Africa. He has applied for

a passport and says that one of his uncles will find him work. He would like to be a driver abroad, where he can earn more money and support his family: "Me and my brother will save money and build a house. I will educate my younger brother. I want to send my mother on the Haj [Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca]."

"I DON'T WANT HER TO STAY AT HOME; I WANT HER TO STUDY MORE": CAREGIVERS' VIEWS ABOUT THE CHANGING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

These high aspirations are related to changing expectations regarding children's future roles and responsibilities. Across the countries (although to a much smaller extent in Andhra Pradesh) there is a growing sense among girls and their caregivers that it is more socially acceptable to get married later and to delay childbirth, for economic and health reasons. There is a strong sense (reported by both girls and boys) of needing to provide and care for family, especially parents in old age.

Fatuma lives in Addis Ababa and is 15 years old. She says, "I will finish 12th grade and join the university. After that I will have a job," and explains, "If one can learn and study hard, they will always have a good job at the end that can change their family's life." Fatuma was brought up by her grandmother, whom she calls mother. Fatuma's grandmother stresses the importance of education: "If she succeeds in her education, she will have a job. She might have her own house, and anyone who is educated can support himself. The problem is if you are not educated." Fatuma says, "Around here, since they get married very early, they hate each other after they have children." She adds, "I want to get married after I have a job, when I am 30 years old." She thinks that this "is a good age after learning and being independent". She does not want to have children until she is 35, as she thinks that then she will be "stable economically with my own house and a good job to raise my children". She wants "to have two children, a boy and a girl". Her grandmother says it is up to Fatuma whom she marries, and says, "I want her to marry when she has a job and in her 25th year or so." She thinks that having children around that age is good, because then "you will have a job, you will organise your living. You can bring up the child comfortably, you will not have something to regret." Fatuma's grandmother also compares her own youth with her granddaughter's: "Their time is good because there is freedom. In our time, there was a negative influence on us… In our time, many things were hidden. For example, you did not tell someone about menstruation, but now, they ask you what it is."

This illustrates the potential of schooling to generate social change, not only through increasing children's formal skills and so potentially future employment opportunities, but in terms of gender dynamics and decision-making within the household. It also enables young people to access other information, such as about reproductive health. At the same time, fast-moving processes of social change are creating new dilemmas for families whose livelihoods and social reputations may be at stake if they are out of step with the wider community. This is particularly the case for girls, as caregivers often fear that others may doubt the reputation of their daughters if they spend time away from home, and that this may reduce their marriage prospects. Earlier we heard from Santhi, who is determined to succeed at school. Her mother explains the importance of selecting a place with a good reputation, as there is a social risk in sending girls outside the village. She says some people in the village are concerned about letting girls study instead of arranging marriages: "They are scared that girls might do something wrong." So Santhi's family decided to send her to a college attended by other girls from the village, including the niece of the sarpanch (the elected head of the village), and so considered socially acceptable.

Boys too have family responsibilities and face social expectations to provide for parents in their old age, and, in Andhra Pradesh, to ensure that their sisters have sufficient dowries. Yaswanth is 15 years old and in the tenth grade of school. He lives in rural Andhra Pradesh and his family is from the Scheduled Tribes. His father died when he was in first grade and his mother "struggled, worked hard and took care of me and my sister". As the only son, Yaswanth feels an increasing responsibility to care for his mother: "I just want to lead a simple life and take care of my mother and myself." His sister has recently married and his mother incurred debts in order to pay for her dowry. The debts are a source of anxiety for Yaswanth, as he explains, "If we don't repay them they will mortgage

my house." Yaswanth has also suffered from 'tumors', and the treatment has put the family further into debt.

Yaswanth wants to continue studying and go to university, but he says, "I am getting afraid whether or not I may complete or not my tenth class." He struggles at school: "I feel I want to study, but I can't study… Lessons are hard to understand and learn." He does not like asking for help when he does not understand. He says, "When my masters scold me or beat me I feel sad."

The economic situation of the family and his struggles at school mean that Yaswanth is considering leaving after completing tenth grade and looking for "anything which will earn enough for me and my mother to lead a happy life". He says that when he marries, if his wife comes from a poor family he will not ask them to pay a dowry, because of his family's experience.

The experiences of children and their caregivers discussed throughout this section illustrate how the rapid expansion of schooling is opening up opportunities to learn new skills. The anticipation is that children will be able to study for longer than their parents did, and to obtain more highly skilled and better-paid jobs. This is challenging traditional gendered roles and responsibilities, with changing attitudes to and views about marriage and fertility (at least in Peru and Ethiopia). Caregivers are making considerable sacrifices in order to keep children in school, and children's hopes for the future are bound up strongly with being able to improve their families' standards of living, and in many cases to develop the communities and even countries in which they live. At the same time there are hints of uncertainty: awareness that manual skills are important, the desire to ensure that girls remain 'marriageable', and concerns about the quality of schooling received. This suggests that not all children are in a position to benefit equally from the progress made.

5 INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES: CHILDREN'S FEARS FOR THE FUTURE

Aspirations are rising, and there is a sense of new possibilities brought by schooling and increased social mobility. These changes, however, do not fully capture children's pathways through schooling or explain why these may vary between different children. Children and their caregivers identify a range of barriers to schooling which may prevent them realising their goals. This section explores shocks and adverse events within the household and poor-quality living environments that affect children's attendance at school and future aspirations. It demonstrates the impact of these experiences on children's wellbeing and future life chances.

"FROM WHOM CAN WE TAKE SUPPORT EXCEPT OUR CHILDREN?" HOW FAMILIES RESPOND TO SHOCKS

The persistence of poverty and multiple, recurrent adverse events, such as illness, debt and environmental shocks, means that families have to balance the need for survival in the present with the anticipated rewards of keeping children in school. The level and type of shocks experienced vary according to the economic status of households. Economic shocks include increases in input prices, decreases in output prices, death of livestock and loss of income. Environmental shocks include drought, flooding, soil erosion, frost, hailstorms and pests. Health shocks include the illness of a child's father, mother or other family members. Figure 11 demonstrates that while economic shocks affect households across the wealth spectrum, environmental shocks are also more concentrated among poorer households. This raises worrying questions about the ways in which shocks may entrench poverty and existing inequality.

Across all the countries, poor and marginalised families suffer multiple and recurrent shocks and have fewer resources to cope with their impact: children's life chances may be limited as a result. Ho Phoung is from the Cham H'Roi ethnic minority group and lives in a rural community in south-central Vietnam. She is currently studying in third grade but does not attend school regularly, as she has to care for her younger brother so that her mother can go to work. Her teacher says it is unlikely that she will pass third grade, as a result of her irregular attendance. Ho Phoung explains that she would like to continue studying, but says, "Dad told me to quit school in fifth grade," as she will need "to stay at home and watch over my brother, so that Mum and Dad can go to work". The family has suffered a series of shocks which has plunged them into debt. They have been making a loss every harvest for the past three years. Ho Phoung's mother says she "borrowed with high interest to eat… 1 million, 2 million to buy rice". She adds, "There's still a few millions left that I haven't paid back yet," and estimates that this is around 10 million dong. In addition, the family owes the government 8 million dong which they received as a loan to build a house. Ho Phoung says that she knows her family cannot afford school materials and so she does not ask them. Instead, she goes sugar cane chopping, picking beans or weeding to earn money for these things. She wants to be a teacher or seamstress but thinks she will get married at 25 and will cultivate sugar cane with her husband.

This uncertainty has been reinforced further by the impact of price rises across the countries and the strain which this is placing on families. In 2009, households were also asked if they had experienced food price increases in the previous three years. Of the children in the younger cohort, one in three in

FIGURE 11: PERCENTAGE OF YOUNG LIVES HOUSEHOLDS IN ETHIOPIA AFFECTED BY SHOCKS, 2006–09, BY WEALTH QUINTILE

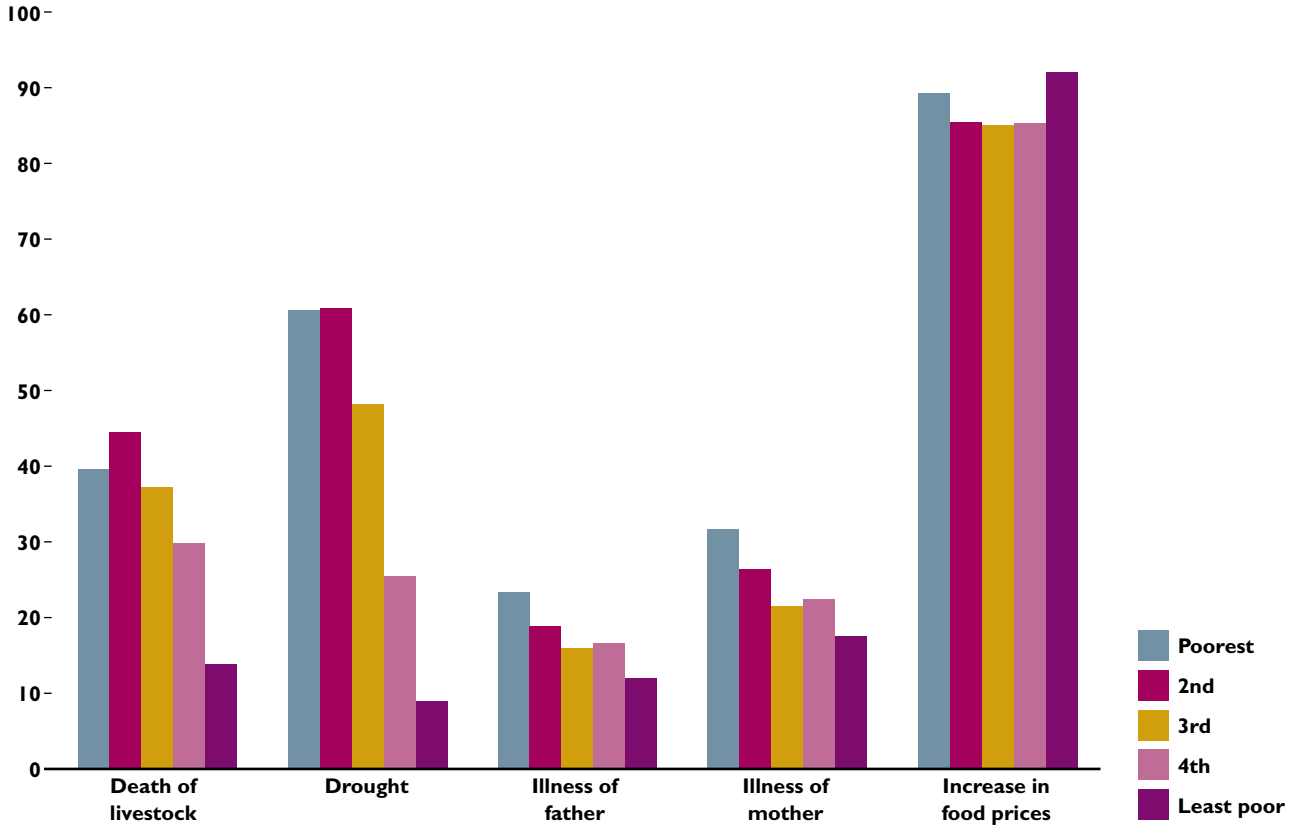
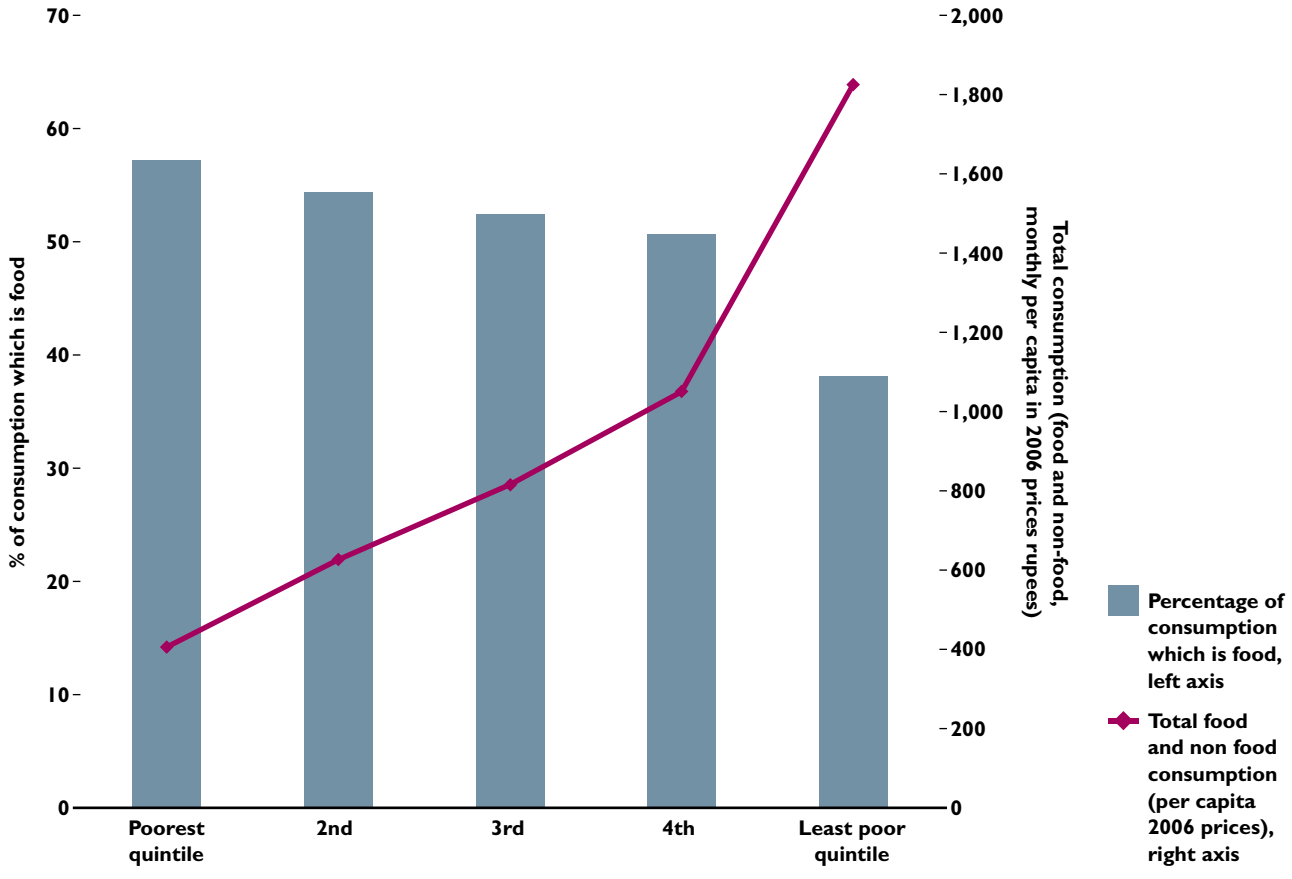


FIGURE 12: HOUSEHOLD FOOD AND NON-FOOD CONSUMPTION, ANDHRA PRADESH, 2009



Vietnam, nearly four in five in Andhra Pradesh, and nearly nine in ten in Ethiopia were in households that reported food prices had increased since 2006. Food price increases were reported by households across the board, but the poorest households are more vulnerable, as illustrated by Figure 12. Households in Andhra Pradesh were grouped into quintiles (ranked by spending level). The graph presents average spending (on all items) as a line plotted on the right-hand axis, and bars representing the percentage of household spending on food plotted against the left axis. Food is a priority area for families, absorbing much of the family budget, and it is hard for them to cut back on this expenditure without harmful results. This means that although poorer people's spending is lower overall than that of richer groups (including on food), it actually represents a higher percentage of their consumption, leaving them particularly vulnerable to rising food prices.

The Young Lives survey includes questions about perceptions of food security. In 2009, one in four households (25%) in Andhra Pradesh were worried that they would run out of food before they had the money to buy more, and almost one in ten households (9%) reported that they sometimes or frequently did not eat enough. This is forcing families to make difficult decisions, and while children are not necessarily dropping out of school, families are making other sacrifices.[32] Samrawit is nine years old and lives in Addis Ababa. Her mother is a single parent and describes the difficult decisions she has been forced to make:

> *Since I work collecting rubbish, I don't have money to go to hospital if I get sick, or to buy bread for my children. My living standard is below everybody's… When I talk too much and remember the situation, I get disturbed and want to run away. My way of life is worse.*

POLICY RESPONSES: THE MAHATMA GANDHI NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE SCHEME, ANDHRA PRADESH

Recent years have seen the expansion of social protection schemes as part of an attempt to reduce poverty and provide a safety net in the event of shocks.[33] One important recent policy development in India is the introduction of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). This is a social protection scheme that provides 100 days of employment a year at a minimum wage rate to every rural household willing to undertake unskilled manual work. One positive aspect of the scheme is its potential as an insurance against environmental shocks. For example, analysis from 2006 showed households affected by drought were 10.7% more likely to register for the MGNREGS. Similarly, households whose primary occupation is agriculture were 12.7% more likely to register. Registration and take-up of work are positively correlated with positive impacts on children's nutritional outcomes.[34]

Govindh, aged 17, describes the struggles his family have faced over the past few years:

> *Seeds did not grow in the first year, and the second year rains have not come… so we didn't harvest… We did not have money to buy vegetables and other things to celebrate festivals… so it was not well at home.*

In addition, his mother was ill and the family had to pay 10,000 rupees for treatment. Govindh says, "We borrowed money from my grandmother's village… We borrowed a little, two, three times," and they also borrowed from his uncle. However, the introduction of the MGNREGS has enabled the family to cope better: "Through the employment guarantee scheme we cleared the loans." Govindh works on MGNREGS in the college holidays and at the weekend in order to support his family.

Implementation of large social protection schemes is not without numerous governance and administrative challenges. For example, some households report delays in receiving wages, or relatives of local officials receiving preferential treatment. It is important that these problems are addressed in order to ensure the sustainability and enhance the effectiveness of the scheme.[35]

Samrawit and her sister live with their aunt. Her mother explains:

> *I should handle the costs for my children's feeding and sleeping, rather than bothering other people and feeling ashamed… My sister brings them up together and allows them to sleep there… I always feel disturbed for not living together with my children and not having that mother and child intimacy – primarily due to not having a house…. It's when you live together that children internalise the challenges and the love. If they're not living with you, they don't feel that and they don't notice your problems.*

Samrawit hopes to become a pilot and to build a house for her family "where there is no rubbish, no bad smell". She wants to be able to "buy what I want for my family" and to "develop my country by working hard". She also says that she will help her neighbours: "When they don't have food, I will give them money."

"WE WILL NOT GET JOBS, EVEN IF WE STUDY": SOME FAMILIES QUESTION THE CAPACITY OF FORMAL EDUCATION TO TRANSFORM LIVES

The uncertainty caused by multiple adverse events and precarious livelihoods is compounded by doubts held by children and caregivers about whether skilled employment will be available after education. Children consequently feel the need to learn manual skills alongside studying. We saw earlier how Luz is helping her parents in their textile factory in case she is not able to find a job. This is echoed by children across the other countries, as illustrated by the following quotations from focus group participants in Andhra Pradesh and Vietnam:

> *As it is, one is not sure of getting employment after completion of education. We are not sure of getting a job. So we cannot depend on one source for employment alone. We have to take up studies and work simultaneously during holidays. If we do these two things at a time, maybe we will be able to do some work to survive in case we don't get a job. We can do one of these jobs and earn a living. We can also have some confidence in us that we can take up one of these jobs and survive. If we depend totally on education alone we will not be able to do any work in case we don't get a job.*
>
> (Andhra Pradesh)

> *If misfortune occurs, such as the company dissolving, you will lose your job and might not find another job. Manual jobs are always needed.*
>
> (Vietnam)

Children and caregivers worry about the availability of skilled jobs, especially for women. Genet is 16 years old and lives in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. She is an orphan and lives with her aunt, uncle and cousins. After completing her education, she says, "I am still thinking that I will be a doctor in the future." Genet's aunt is supportive of her education: "Now, it is very good for the students; there are many fields of education. In our time, if you were intelligent you could go to the university, otherwise there was no chance. But now, you can go to skill training. There is an option. At this time, you can be what you want to be. It is good." However, Genet adds, "These days, I see people graduate and not get a job for a long time. So maybe I will not find a job." She reflects on her aunt's situation: "She completed grade 12, so maybe I will be like her." Her aunt does not have a formal job but stays at home: "She is a housewife."

Therefore, while the expansion in school enrolment is positive, there is the risk that this potential will not pay off if it is not accompanied by an increased take-up of skilled job opportunities.[36] Focusing on skill acquisition at the individual child level neglects the broader socio-economic context in which children and their families are living. It also gives insufficient attention to the ways in which poverty and inequalities shape engagement with schooling learning processes and transitions to the labour market.

"HERE THERE IS ELECTRICITY, THERE IS WATER, WE'RE NOT LACKING ANYTHING": IMPROVING COVERAGE OF SERVICES, BUT BARRIERS REMAIN

Children and caregivers describe positive changes in their communities, including the provision of services such as water, sanitation and healthcare. In the MDGs, access to safe drinking water and sanitation is related to environmental sustainability, and also to other aspects of the goals, with low water quality or sanitation encouraging the spread of infectious disease which could affect children's participation in school and their nutritional status. Figure 13 compares the situation for eight-year-olds in 2002 and 2009. It

demonstrates variation by social group in access to improved water and sanitation. While there were statistically significant changes in access to sanitation for urban and rural areas and for households in the bottom three quintiles, significant gains in access to improved water occurred in the second and third quintiles, but not for the poorest households.

As Figure 13 illustrates, inequality in access to services remains, as urban/rural differences in access to water and sanitation remain statistically significant. These differences are reflected in the experiences of Carmen's family, who moved from one area to another in Peru. Previously they did not have access to electricity, water and other services. Her mother compares where they are living now with their former community:

> *We really missed having light to watch television, to do the ironing… [We used] a candle, we made lights with tins and a piece of wick… That's how we used to get light, and my daughter was really affected, as the smoke used to go up her nose… We also suffered due to lack of water… We used to get water once a week, and so we used to have to go to the stream… That water is dirty… and the road was bad. So here we've seen that it's more peaceful, here there is electricity, there is water, we're not lacking anything. We're much better here… Yes, and [my daughter] feels much happier: she says with electricity she has everything, she can watch cartoons. She feels better, happier.*

Poor-quality living environments, lack of basic services and poor nutrition mean that illness is a recurrent experience for poor households, yet many poor families face numerous barriers in accessing health services.[37] Figure 14 illustrates that caregivers from the poorest households in Ethiopia were around three times more likely to report being unable to take their children to a health facility when needed than households in the least poor quintile.

Children and families identify a series of barriers to accessing healthcare, including direct and indirect costs, the distance to the clinic, and being deterred by the poor quality of treatment sometimes experienced.

FIGURE 13: IMPROVED WATER AND SANITATION COVERAGE BY SOCIAL GROUP, PERU (%)

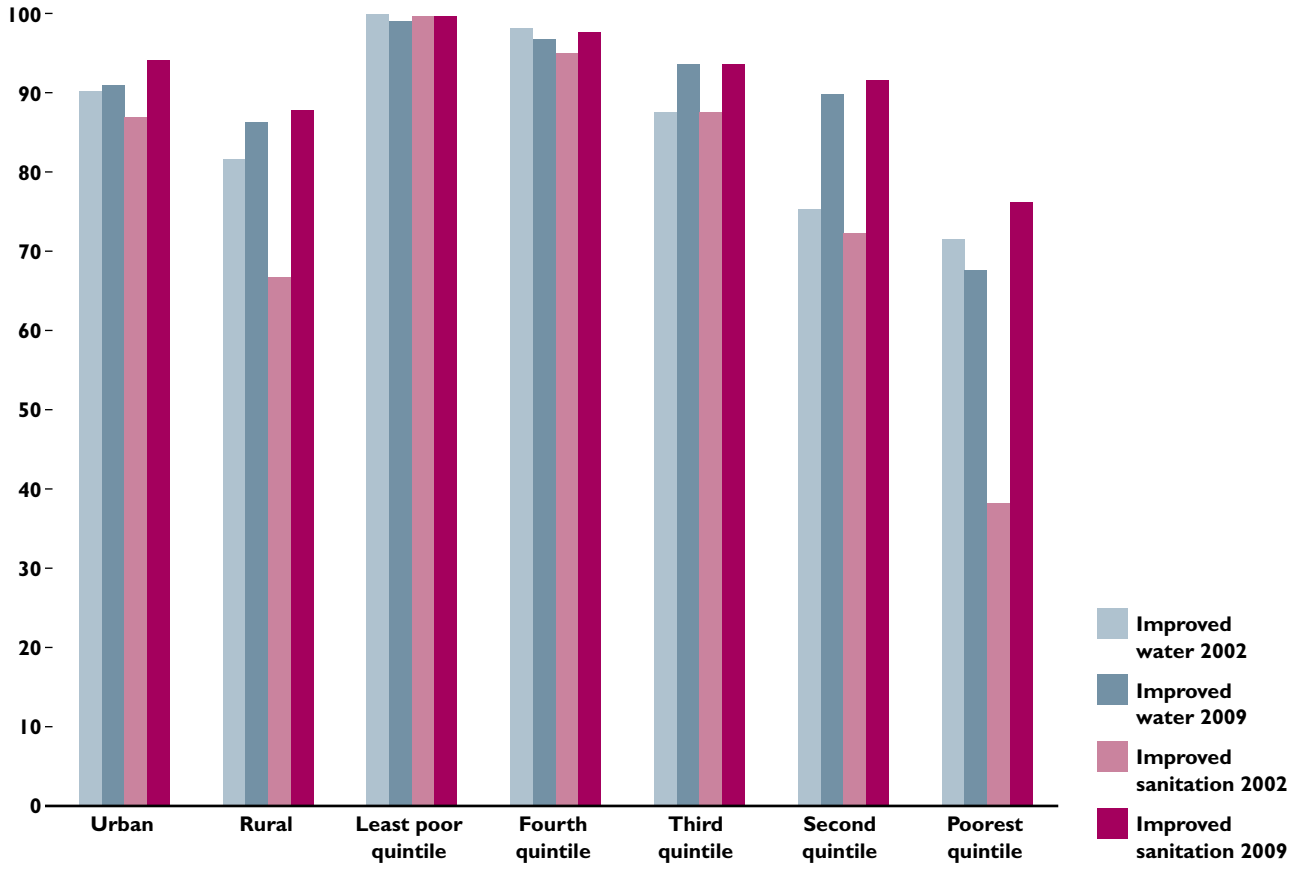
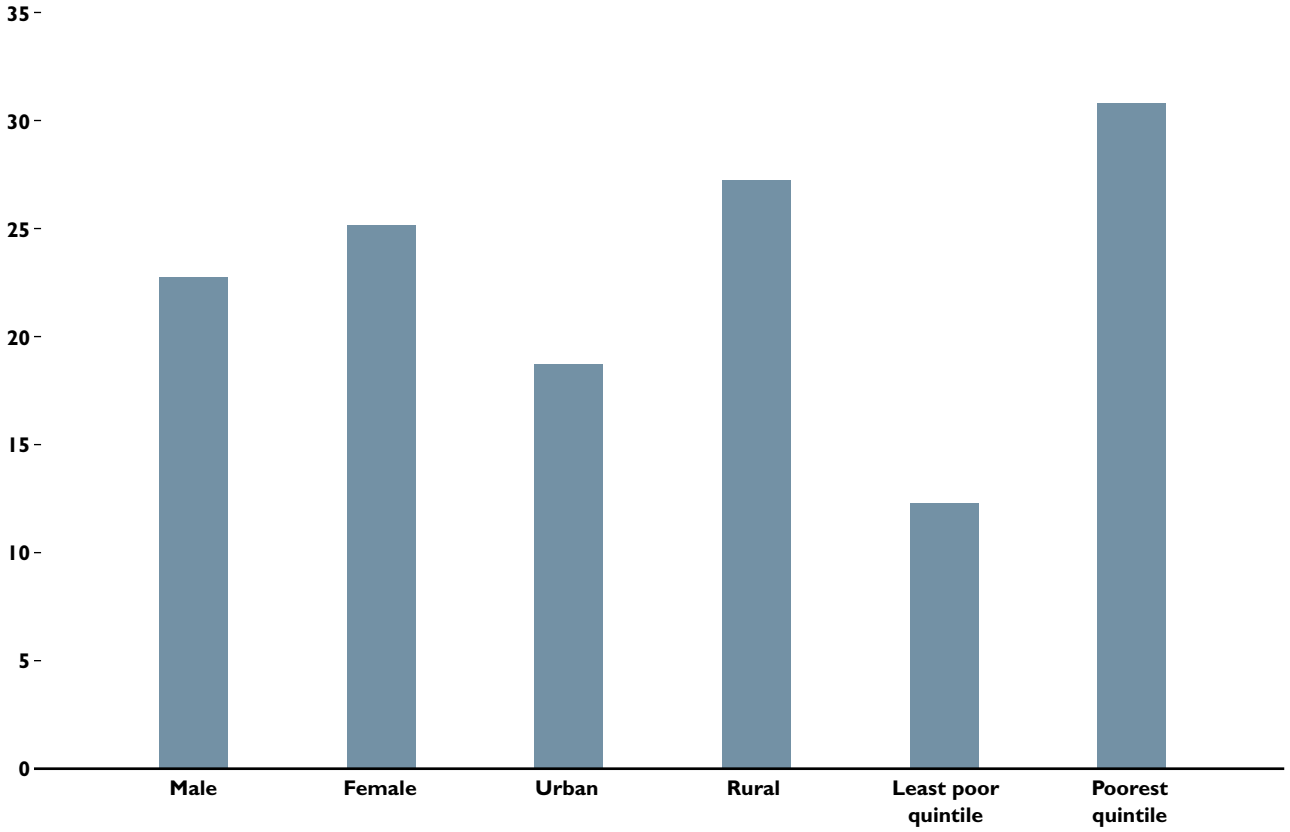


FIGURE 14: CAREGIVERS WHO WANTED TO TAKE THEIR CHILD TO A HEALTH FACILITY BUT WERE UNABLE, ETHIOPIA (%)



Mitiku's family, in rural Ethiopia, have been affected by repeated illness. His father says Mitiku "had a serious stomach ache. We got him treated, and though he is not totally cured, he is getting better these days." Mitiku's mother was recently in bed for more than five months. Her husband explains:

She had a stomach condition. She gets it sometimes, then other times it goes. I took her to health clinics, and they gave her some treatment for her stomach. Now she's a lot better but she's not totally cured. Her case was so serious. And it made things really tough for me.

POLICY RESPONSES: HEALTH INSURANCE, VIETNAM

In 2009 the Vietnamese government introduced a targeted health insurance scheme for children. From July 2009, children under six years old, ethnic minorities and poor people in rural areas were entitled to free health insurance, while students from low-income households would pay less.
Y Thanh is ten years old and from a Cham H'Roi family in rural Vietnam. His older brother was sick and his mother explains that "he stayed in hospital for two weeks: two weeks without insurance. The room fee and food expenses were 3 million dong in total." Since then the whole family has obtained free health insurance. This is a relief for Y Thanh's mother: "We don't need to pay to go to the hospital; we just need to pay the room fee and our food expenses. Medicines are free for us… It helps us a little, saves money for us. If we have a cough, or a light cold, we can go to the medical centre to get some medicines. We can get free medicines after showing the insurance." Both Y Thanh and his brother have been able to receive medical care from the local health centre as a result.

Although her health is improving, the cause has not been found, to her husband's regret: "I was not able to get her better treatment, because of financial problems." He describes the impact on the family: "It has affected all of us. As a result of the sickness, she was not able to take care of the family as she does usually. For example, the family was not getting food on time."

If a caregiver or another sibling falls ill or dies, children often have to take over their responsibilities, either temporarily or permanently, as illustrated by the case of Rahmatulla, 15, who lives in Hyderabad. Rahmatulla's elder brother had been the family's primary earner until his death just over a year ago. Rahmatulla says, "Because of that, when I finished ninth class there were financial difficulties here [at home] and I had to work even in the holidays, so I started working in the shop. I had to take care of the house; my sister is also there." Rahmatulla works in a clothes shop to pay for his education, and his mother has taken on more embroidery work. The financial situation is made worse by the fact that Rahmatulla's father has an illness which affects his mobility, and Rahmatulla has to buy medication for him every day, at a cost of 50 rupees a time.

This illustrates an 'inverse care law' whereby, despite needing these services more, poorer families tend to have less access to them, and the services they do access are poorly resourced. This can exacerbate a range of health-related problems, prevent children's regular attendance at school and impact on children's subjective wellbeing.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES: OLD CHALLENGES

There has also been rapid change in the spread of new technologies. The growth in mobile phone connections demonstrates this point very powerfully (data for landlines shows a somewhat similar trend, though with less rapid change between 2002 and 2009). Figures 15 and 16 use data from Ethiopia and Vietnam to explore these trends. In both countries mobile phone access was very restricted in 2002.

FIGURE 15: ACCESS TO MOBILE PHONES, ETHIOPIA (%)

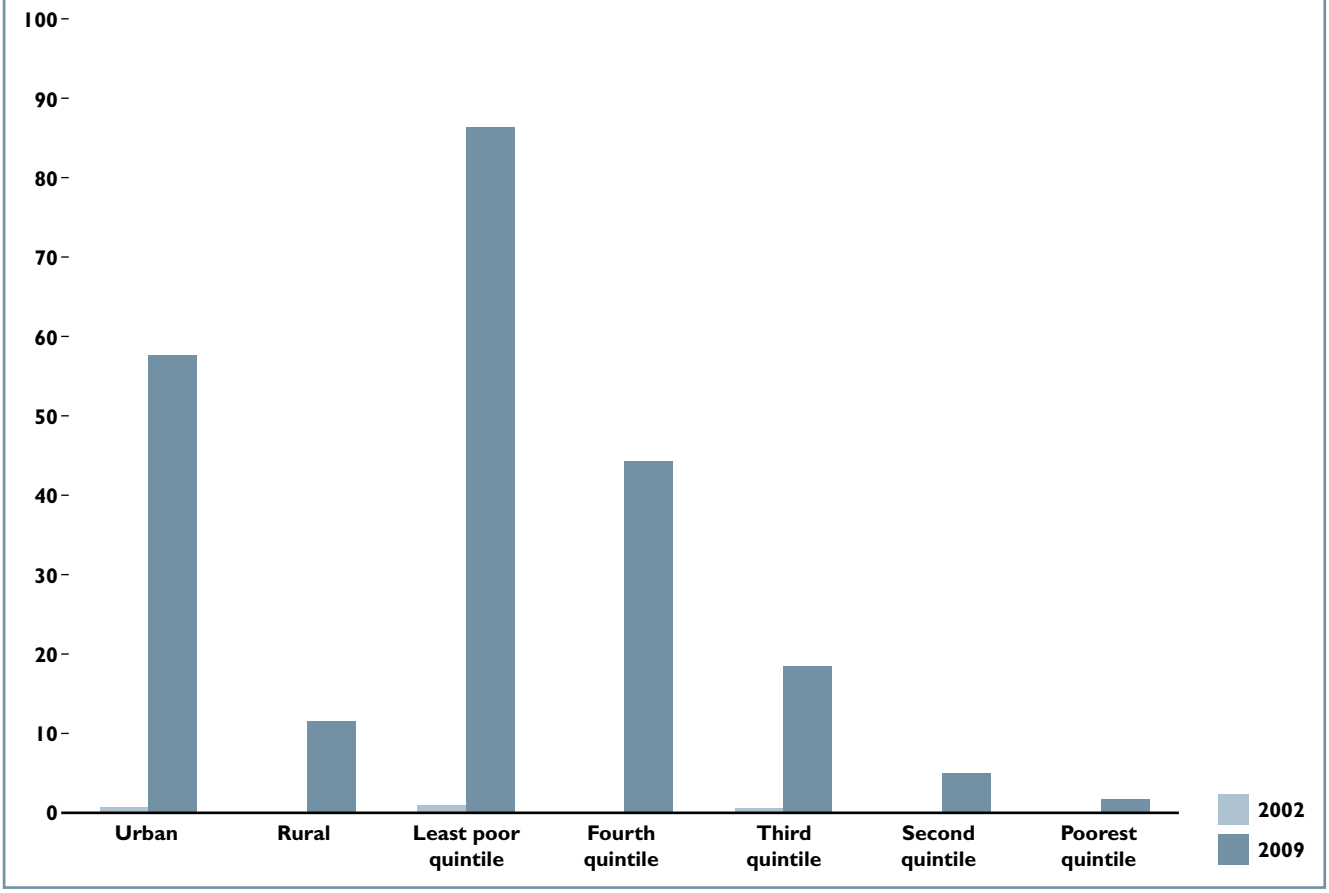
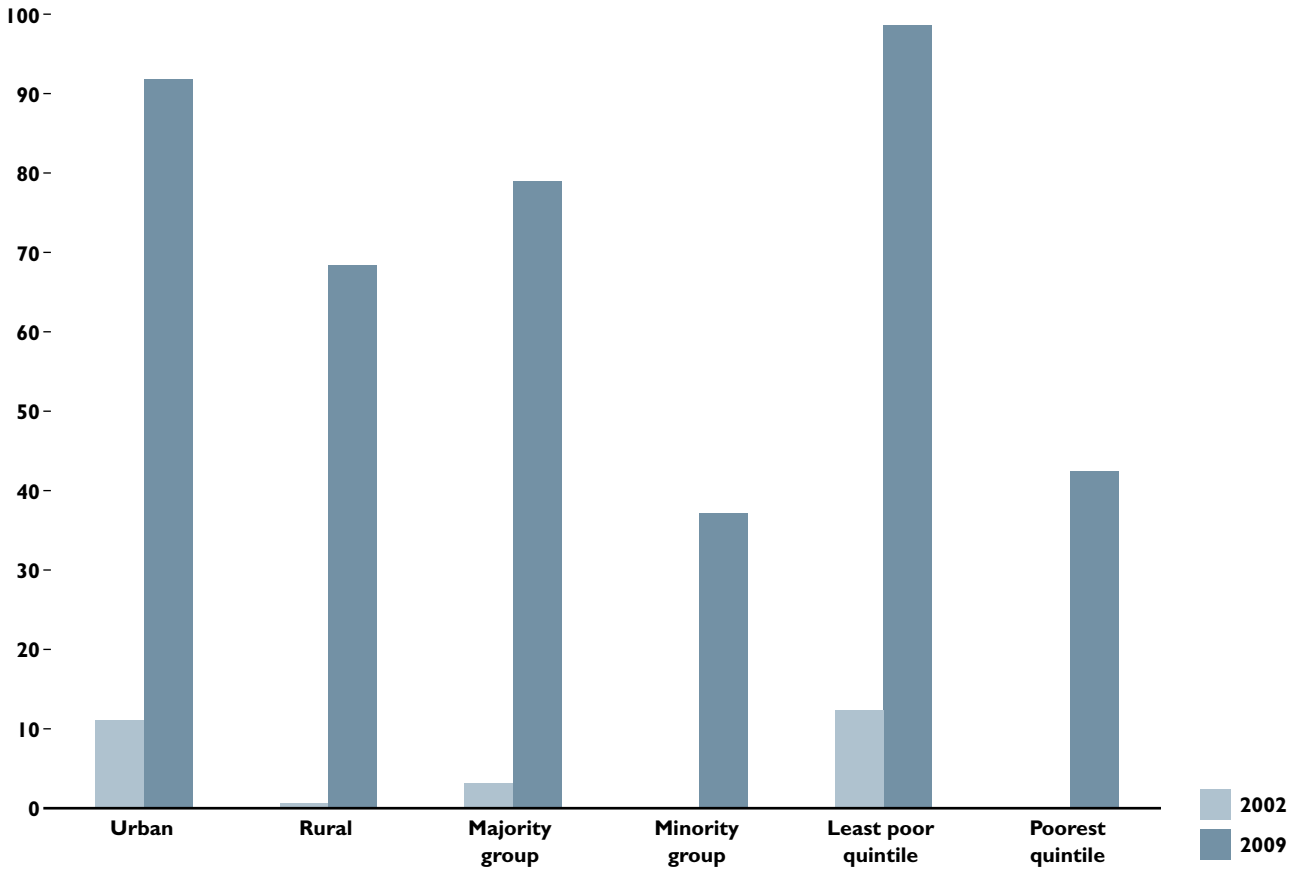


FIGURE 16: ACCESS TO MOBILE PHONES, VIETNAM (%)



The maximum coverage was about one in ten of the least poor households in Vietnam; among this group, by 2009, reported coverage was nearly 100%. Across the sample in Ethiopia, coverage grew during this period from 0.3% of households to 29.7%. Coverage in Ethiopia is lower than in Vietnam, but the increases are very rapid, especially in urban areas and among the least poor quintile. Poorest households were the only wealth quintile for which the change in access to mobile phones was not statistically significant. The spread of this new technology remains profoundly linked to old inequalities between socio-economic and ethnic groups: in Vietnam by 2009 the extent of mobile phone coverage was about half as great for minority households as it was for the majority (Kinh) group.

ICT has been used in a wide range of programmes, including those focused on learning and literacy, access to micro-credit, cash transfers and markets, health awareness and violence prevention. Greater connectivity has the potential to improve children's outcomes through increased access to knowledge and material resources.[38] At the same time it raises concerns about equity if poor and already marginalised communities are unable to access policies and services provided through ICT and, thus, experience an exacerbation of pre-existing inequality. For example, we saw earlier that children living in urban areas are typically perceived as having greater access to computers in school than those in rural areas, given the relative resourcing of urban and rural schools.

POLICY RESPONSES: THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILD-SENSITIVITY, ETHIOPIA AND PERU

Policies need to be child-sensitive, and to be monitored accordingly, in order to: promote impacts of improved resources for the poorest households; help manage risks; and enable the potential impacts on children of particular mechanisms to be understood, to allow ongoing improvements. Young Lives reinforces this evidence with an analysis of receipt of work through the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) (a large public works-based scheme in Ethiopia). This highlights that the public work element of PSNP (which increases the amount of work available in return for cash or food) increased some children's work – probably as a result of work within the home or on family farms being displaced from adults to children when adults were working in the PSNP.[39] In Peru, *Juntos* is a conditional cash transfer programme aimed at poor families. The conditions include sending children to school and taking them for vaccinations and regular health check-ups. The money is usually given to mothers, in order to improve their bargaining power within the household by reducing their economic dependence. But if they do not fulfil all the conditions, the payment can be suspended. Every three months, local coordinators visit the families and cross-check the information they get with records of school attendance and healthcare visits.

Around 60% of Young Lives families enrolled in *Juntos* say that the programme is 'good' or 'very good'. On the other hand, some mothers say the monitoring is oppressive: "*Juntos* is everywhere. We need to be careful and do what they say, otherwise we lose the money." They are also worried about whether the programme will last long enough to help them in the future. And some children make disparaging comments about others who aren't in the programme, for example: "He hasn't had his vaccinations," "She never has pencils and erasers," "He looks untidy and dirty all the time," which leads to divisions between families who are in the programme and those who aren't.

Schemes will have multiple effects (positive and negative), but child-sensitive policies need to recognise the specific effects on children in order to work towards maximising the benefits while minimising any costs.[40]

PHOTO: MATS LIGNELL/SAVE THE CHILDREN

A boy outside a school in Northern Afghanistan where Save the Children is running health education sessions

6 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This paper has explored changing situations and experiences for children growing up during the period of the MDGs. Much of this story is positive. Economic and technological change combines with wider coverage of basic services.

Concurrent social change, especially concerning education, can also be seen, perhaps most powerfully in the words of parents as they describe differences between the circumstances of their own childhoods and those of their children:

> *My children's life is better than mine… We didn't even have the opportunity to go to school at the age of nine and ten… Had I got such an opportunity and got educated at least up to grade six or seven my life would have been different. I didn't even get the opportunity to educate myself, because of the work burden at home.*
>
> (Mother, Ethiopia)

Understanding children's perspectives, and those of their families, plays an essential part in informing debates concerning the future of international development. Children have high hopes for the future, generated in part by increased access to education and other services. However, they also identify a range of barriers to the realisation of their aspirations, including shocks and adverse events within the household and poor-quality living environments with a lack of job opportunities and good-quality services. The improvements in family finances and in 'process' indicators, such as access to basic services and primary school enrolment, are matched by rather slower improvements in children's outcomes, which means that the greatest improvements were often experienced by less marginalised groups. This reinforces existing evidence of a concentration of disadvantage, with poorer children being left behind on a generally rising tide.[41] The challenge is how to create equality of opportunities so that children can fulfil their talents and hopes for the future.

The MDGs have acted as an important catalyst for change, but these findings demonstrate that huge challenges remain in tackling poverty and inequality. As Jan Vandemoortele, one of the architects of the MDGs, states, "Growing inequities within countries are the principal reason why the world will miss the 2015 targets."[42] This is why human development must remain the central focus of a post-MDG framework, but it also presents a series of challenges on how to address multidimensional poverty, quality of education and services, and inequality.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY: FROM THE GLOBAL TO THE NATIONAL

Both poverty and children's development are multidimensional, and so require a focus which includes, but is broader than, that of money-metric indicators. While the existing MDG framework captures many areas of deprivation (lack of food, safe drinking water and sanitation, access to education, health, communication), these are often not given as much prominence as the $1.25 indicator. Moreover, the challenge for policy-makers at the national level is to develop more integrated responses to the multidimensional causes and consequences of poverty, which help ensure that children have access not only to a school but also to an affordable health clinic and the social protection mechanisms able to insure households against environmental or other crises.

Reporting of national averages obscures the concentration of disadvantage observed in this report. However, national reporting may also mask a second challenge: the extent to which service areas are able to support each other by reaching the same groups of children. National reporting therefore does not reveal the extent to which systems of provision exist, with children having access to schools, affordable healthcare and adequate social protection. Since it is likely that more marginalised groups may have systemically worse access to opportunities and services, these issues will interact and concentrate disadvantage.

QUALITY: FROM QUANTITY TO OUTCOMES

Gains in the expansion of basic services and formal education highlight an important foundation, and provide powerful evidence of the positive impact that social and economic change can make. If improvements in 'process' indicators such as enrolment have often been larger than 'outcome' child development indicators, this raises the question of how we can improve the impact of service developments and social change. This concern is both a moral question – how to do the best for children – and a practical question: how to secure the human capital for more skilled and 'healthier' societies. Measuring quality is technically difficult within the constraints of a relatively simple, communicable framework. An alternative way to make a future framework more outcome-focused would be to connect quantity of provision targets with outcome measures, such as better reading or writing or less hunger. This does not, however, draw attention to the nature of the process, particularly concerns of discrimination.

INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITIES: AVOIDING THE TYRANNY OF AVERAGES

MDG 1 provides a target to halve absolute poverty rates. There has been substantial progress on this measure, with low-income countries graduating to middle-income status, for example. However, since MDG 1 is an absolute indicator rather than one which measures inequality, it has encouraged a general growth rather than a pro-poor growth strategy. One of the key advantages of the $1.25 a day indicator is that it is, superficially at least, simple to understand and communicate. Given the need to draw consensus around a set of goals, we must be able to explain simply what these goals are trying to achieve. Inequality indicators (such as the Gini coefficient, which measures inequality among values of a frequency distribution) and efforts to measure multidimensionality can appear complex, technical and without consensus. Without a degree of both simplicity and consensus around possible alternative indicators, the power of the 'simple' $1.25 a day remains persuasive.

There are three principal ways in which inequality could be addressed in a new framework:

- **An explicit inequality goal.** The challenge would be what it should cover. The most likely solution would be a focus on income, with the obvious choice being use of the Gini coefficient (although the ratio of the top 10% of incomes to the bottom 40% may be an attractive alternative).[43] However, this may be politically contentious.
- **Tracker measures on one or more goals** (eg, not only the literacy rate, but the literacy rate of the poorer 20%). This could be strengthened by having specific targets for improvements, as well as tracker measures, or by weighting progress (which would give a country more 'credit' by improving the situation for more disadvantaged groups). The strengths of this approach are that it could reflect inequality across a number of areas and could fit pragmatically within either the existing or an altered framework, and would focus attention. The downside is that this approach could encourage a narrow targeting agenda, which is unlikely to result in strong public support or decent-quality interventions. In addition, although the poorest children may do least well, it is also clear that poor outcomes are usually graduated, with the next 20% doing slightly better than the poorest 20% but still much worse than the least poor. A 'half-way' alternative might be to use tracker measures but with a slightly broader focus, of say 40%.
- **Universal indicators.** MDG 2 implies universal entitlement to primary schooling. Since levels of enrolment are lowest among more disadvantaged groups, this may encourage a focus on the poorest. This strategy could therefore be extended to other goals. However, while universal targets ought to focus attention on those with the greatest social need, this is not always the case, since if there is a long way to go before a target is increased, policy-makers may seek faster progress by focusing on those nearest the line. In some areas (such as under-five mortality) a universal goal may not be logically achievable, even where it is clear that substantial improvement is possible.[44]

While no indicator will be a perfect fit for measuring the complexity of inequality, an indicator could play an important role in concentrating attention on ensuring more equitable progress. Evidence presented in this report suggests that although the circumstances of the poorest fifth are almost always worse than those

of other groups, this problem is not restricted to the poorest fifth – it is a graduated phenomenon, with the poorest doing worst, followed by the second, third quintiles and so on. When we consider gains over time, we find it is often the bottom 40% of the wealth distribution who lag behind in gains. The challenge for equity is therefore a broader matter than ameliorating the situation of the very poorest. In order to attract political support, to ensure greater sustainability, and because services for poor people tend to become poorer services, the agenda on equity needs to be broader than a focus on targeting.

The evidence in this paper reinforces a well-established evidence base showing that opportunities are often very unequally shared.[45] Inequality of opportunity, by definition, prevents individuals from flourishing to their full potential, and is thus a waste of human talent. This is not a new argument, and while recent economic growth has brought major benefits to many people, it has not levelled the playing field. The key challenge of any framework replacing the MDGs is how to better link the driver of economic growth with the outcome of better human development; to do so requires a much greater focus on inequality.

PHOTO: MICHAEL TSEGAYE/SAVE THE CHILDREN

A newborn baby in a hospital in Afar region, Ethiopia

ENDNOTES

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GROWING UP WITH THE PROMISE OF THE MDGs

Children's hopes for the future of development

Improving children's life chances is central to what the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are seeking to achieve.

Based on an analysis of survey and qualitative data from 12,000 children in four countries – Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam – this report examines children's experiences of growing up during the period of the MDGs.

The findings tell a positive story of improving material circumstances and the expansion of primary schooling and basic services. However, the poorest households are not benefiting from poverty reduction and the expansion of basic services, and this has severe implications for children's development and well-being.

The experiences of children documented in this report reinforce the importance of retaining a focus on human development and addressing inequality in international development post-2015.

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