RESEARCH, POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND PRACTICE:

Reflections on efforts to mainstream children into Ethiopia's second national poverty reduction strategy

Nicola Jones
with Bekele Tefera
and Tassew Woldehanna

Young Lives

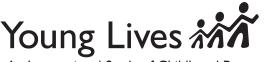An International Study of Childhood Poverty

RESEARCH, POLICY ENGAGEMENT AND PRACTICE:

Reflections on efforts to mainstream children into Ethiopia's second national poverty reduction strategy

Nicola Jones
with Bekele Tefera
and Tassew Woldehanna

Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

Preface

This paper is one of a series of Young Lives Project working papers, an innovative longitudinal study of childhood poverty in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh State), Peru and Vietnam. Between 2002 and 2015, some 2000 children in each country are being tracked and surveyed at 3-4 year intervals from when they are 1 until 14 years of age. In addition, 1000 older children in each country are being followed from when they are aged 8 years.

Young Lives is a joint research and policy initiative co-ordinated by an academic consortium and Save the Children UK, incorporating both inter-disciplinary and North-South collaboration. In Ethiopia the research component of the project is housed under the Ethiopian Development Research Institute, while the policy monitoring, engagement and advocacy components are led by Save the Children UK, Ethiopia.

Young Lives seeks to:

- produce long-term data on children and poverty in the four research countries

- draw on this data to develop a nuanced and comparative understanding of childhood poverty dynamics to inform national policy agendas

- trace associations between key macro policy trends and child outcomes and use these findings as a basis to advocate for policy choices at macro and meso levels that facilitate the reduction of childhood poverty

- actively engage with ongoing work on poverty alleviation and reduction, involving stakeholders who may use or be impacted by the research throughout the research design, data collection and analyses, and dissemination stages

- foster public concern about, and encourage political motivation to act on, childhood poverty issues through its advocacy and media work at both national and international levels.

For further information and to download all our publications, visit www.younglives.org.uk

Abstract

Working Paper 21 examines efforts to bridge multi-disciplinary research, policy engagement and practice in order to help improve children's life quality in diverse developing country contexts. This paper highlights the importance of mapping the policy context and of re-conceptualising policy making as a non-linear dynamic process, involving multiple actors with varying perspectives.

Attempts by Young Lives Ethiopia to mainstream child-sensitive policies into the second Ethiopian Poverty Reduction Strategy process are examined in detail, and are assessed against five criteria identified in the relevant literature.

- Quality evidence: Young Lives sought to acquire quality evidence by drawing upon a large sample from five of the country's most populated regions; employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies; and adopting a multi-disciplinary approach.

- Intent: Research designed explicitly to influence policy will be more likely to do so. Young Lives research was designed to explore the impacts of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy process in order to inform debates on the development of the second.

- Context: An understanding of the context in which policy decisions are made is crucial. Young Lives experience suggests that simultaneous engagement with officials and capacity building with civil society organisations is essential to ensure social change. The speed at which the political context can shift (for example, following elections), and the necessity of designing flexible policy influencing strategies is also highlighted.

- Networking and identifying key players: Cultivating a sense of government and community ownership of a research project is likely to accord credibility to research findings. Young Lives sought to engage key PRSP players and invited them to present their thinking about the incorporation of child-specific policies.

- Framing research messages: Messages need to be succinct, culturally resonant and able to summarise often complex academic arguments without over-simplifying. Young Lives Ethiopia seeks to communicate that children are not only affected by health and education policies, but also by broader development and poverty reduction strategies.

The Authors

Nicola Jones is the Young Lives International Co-ordinator and is based at Save the Children UK in London; she is the main contact person for this paper and can be contacted via email: n.jones@savethechildren.org.uk.

Bekele Tefera is the Young Lives Ethiopia National Co-ordinator based at Save the Children UK-Ethiopia in Addis Ababa; Tassew Woldehanna is the Young Lives Principal Investigator in Ethiopia, based at the Department of Economics, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia.

Acknowledgements

Contents

Introduction

This paper explores efforts to bridge multi-disciplinary research, policy engagement and practice to improve the life quality of children living in poverty in diverse developing country contexts, based on the experiences of Young Lives, an international longitudinal policy research project (2000-15). Although the discussion draws on insights from the four participating countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam), it pays particular attention to the Ethiopian team's efforts to mainstream children into the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) process.

The paper is structured in two parts. The first section discusses the importance of mapping the policy context so as to carry out effective policy influencing for and with children. It supports re-conceptualising policy making as a non-linear dynamic process involving multiple actor networks with varying interests and informed by competing policy narratives (local and global). This is particularly important in under-researched polities at different stages of democratisation, decentralisation, and economic development. In such cases Northern-derived models of advocacy are likely to be context-inappropriate.

The second section draws on an emerging body of literature on bridging policy and research to evaluate efforts made by Young Lives Ethiopia to use research on the impact (on child well-being) of the first round of the Ethiopian PRSP (2002-5) to improve the inclusion of child-sensitive indicators and policies in the second PRSP (2005-9). Research outputs combined quantitative analysis of national and Young Lives data with qualitative research with families and key community informants. The outputs focused on highlighting the effects of broader economic development policies on children; especially in terms of educational access and achievement, nutritional status and demands for their labour (domestic or external). In order to disseminate the findings and discuss best practices identified by child rights advocates in other PRSP processes, a multi-pronged dissemination and policy engagement strategy was devised. Key actors and fora with which Young Lives Ethiopia sought to engage included: the Poverty Action Network Ethiopia (PANE) (the civil society umbrella network co-ordinating anti-poverty efforts); donor action groups (DAGs); awareness-raising workshops with national and regional parliamentarians; seminars with sector ministry representatives, especially technocrats in charge of revising the PRSP; and academic conferences (especially with economists).

Although the second Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (SDPRP - the name given to the Ethiopian PRSP) was expected to have been completed by July 2005, at the time of writing the final version is still being drafted. As a result, it is premature to assess the final impact of Young Lives evidence-based advocacy on this process. This paper nevertheless concludes by reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of our strategy, and attempts to tease out some generalisable lessons for translating research into social policy change. Ingredients for success include: securing buy-in from officials from the outset; developing research/advocacy partnerships between NGOs and research institutes; identifying best practices and viable alternatives; forging alliances between mainstream socio-political reform advocates; and deploying culturally-resonant rather than internationally imposed discursive tactics. Important stumbling blocks by contrast have included a dearth of state and civil society champions as well as economic and human resource constraints.

1. The challenge of non-linear, dynamic policy processes

Quantitative assessment tools

In the world of development policy – where policy making has historically been viewed as a simple linear progression from technical evidence, to policy design, to accurate implementation – the failure of poverty reduction policies has largely been interpreted as a problem of inadequate and/or poor quality evidence-based policy making. Premised on the belief that better research tools would lead to superior policies and outcomes, the 1990s/2000s saw the creation of multiple poverty assessment initiatives, as well as an array of international development and poverty reduction targets (McGee and Brock, 2001:4). In order to monitor and potentially hold national and international policy makers accountable to their official commitments to poverty amelioration, researchers and activists recognised the importance of quantifiable indicators and related data collection. Similarly, in the case of children's issues, in order to measure progress on the World Fit for Children goals and the child-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), specialised quantitative surveys focusing on children and their caregivers were initiated; for example, UNICEF's Multi Indicator Cluster Surveys and DFID's Young Lives.

The penchant for quantifiable poverty assessment approaches is understandable in that they help to address important information gaps concerning the patterning, distribution and identity of those living in poverty. Nevertheless, quantitative surveys are likely to be of limited value in shaping social policy if they are not contextualised within the complexities of the policy process itself. Lucinda Platt (2003: 2) in her survey of the interaction between research on child poverty and related social policies in the UK between 1800 and 1950, aptly notes:

> *The impacts of research may occur neither at the time of the research, nor in ways that are predictable. The influence of research is not necessarily in the direction in which researchers intend and is mediated by the options available to policy makers at a particular time. [There is a] …need for research to be both radical and relate to its time and place… Its influence will vary with the political complexion of the country and ideological and religious factors. It is both to make an impact but also to accord, at least in part, with existing mores.*

Because the expected utility of quantitative surveys is premised on a linear model of policy making, involving the rational execution of technically-informed evidence, we should not be surprised that in isolation such methodologies are unlikely to have a significant impact on real world policy processes and outcomes. As McGee and Block emphasise:

> *The view that government officials should be convinced of the instrumentality of poverty knowledge illustrates an obscuring of the political and social dynamics which other commentators suggest are at play in the policy process* (2001: 8).

3

Non-linear dynamic policy processes

In trying to account for the complexities of policy formulation and implementation, a newly emerging body of policy processes literature underscores the importance of reconceptualising policy making as a non-linear, dynamic process. Theorists such as Keeley and Scoones (2003: 27-8) argue for a 'structuration approach' which combines the insights of three different schools of thought as to what drives policy change:

- political interests derived from actors' structured interests

- actor agency stemming from an on-going process of inter-actor negotiation and bargaining

- discursive practices (reflecting a Foucauldian understanding of the inter-relationship between power, knowledge and policy).

This approach attempts a middle ground between policy as a linear process and policy as chaotic and accidental. It recognises structural constraints and the difficulties inherent in negotiating the complex and messy dynamics of the policy process, but nevertheless leaves room for agency and change:

> *Policy approaches are likely to be influenced by dominant policy discourses and narratives, by powerful combinations of political interests and by effective actor-networks… but this should not lead to the conclusion that policy processes inevitably end in impasses. Each discourse, actor-network or policy network involves institutional practices and interactions that are made up of the activities of individuals. At these multiple interfaces there may be "policy spaces" or "room for manoeuvre" to promote alternative approaches to policy* (ibid.: 29).

Of importance here is the recognition of policy influencing as an iterative process with multiple but comparatively narrow opportunities to affect change. It argues that policy is shaped significantly by interpretation and practice, and by policy actors from multiple sectors (line ministries and departments) and levels of government decision making (i.e., central, regional, local) that are involved in implementation.

Different modes of engagement

If we understand the policy environment as an arena with multiple, shifting but relatively narrow access points, two basic types of interaction are open to those pursuing policy engagement and dissemination strategies. The first can be characterised as 'argumentative interaction': a more critical or combative approach involving strategies to 'build alternative actor networks [and …] dislodge dominant positions and their associated networks' (Keeley and Scoones: 2003: 30). However, while there is clearly a place for challenging existing paradigms that underlie inappropriate policy decisions, proponents of 'participatory' or 'deliberative democracy' (eg, Fraser, 1989; Dryzek, 1994) contend that political change is often more effective and enduring if proponents attempt to foster more participatory forms of governance and decision making. This second 'communicative interaction' approach seeks to build participatory, consultative partnerships involving research networks, community groups and NGOs, and national and local government stakeholders, in which a diversity of values, perspectives and goals is negotiated and reflected (Keeley and Scoones, 2003: 31). The extent to which these policy engagement strategies are available to proponents of change will largely depend on the specific political and social climate of a given country.

2. Young Lives practice – an Ethiopian case study

With a broad emphasis on civil society engagement and learning from the international experiences of the first generation of Poverty Reduction Strategies, the development of Ethiopia's second SDPRP (2006-10) presented an important opportunity for Young Lives to combine its research, advocacy and dissemination strategies. In early 2004 Young Lives Ethiopia secured a grant from the Canadian International Development Research Center to assess the impact of the first SDPRP on child well-being. An ambitious 18-month programme of multi-disciplinary research and policy engagement was mapped out. This included:

- quantitative analysis of Young Lives first 2002 household survey with 3,000 families

- new qualitative data collection and analysis in five of Young Lives 20 sentinel sites, to understand better the underlying dynamics between policy change and household-level and child-level outcomes

- an analysis of national and sub-national policy frameworks and implementation practices, as well as a multi-pronged dissemination and communications strategy involving seminars with key stakeholders, the development of video documentary and photography projects, and capacity building workshops with national and state-level policy practitioners.

The research was to be structured around key MDG-related themes (as the MDGs were used as a key organising framework of the first SDPRP). The themes were: i) the child-, household- and community-level determinants of children's nutritional status (as measured by stunting, wasting and underweight); ii) school enrolment and achievement outcomes; and iii) involvement in labour activities (both paid and unpaid)[1]. In all three cases we were interested in exploring inequalities among children based on gender, poverty status, urban/rural location and regional state residency. In order to contextualise these sector-specific analyses, we also proposed to carry out a child-sensitive critique of the first SDPRP document, and to compare the Ethiopian PRSP document with that of ten other countries' PRSPs, encompassing a range of development levels, political systems and continents[2].

Ingredients for successful research-based advocacy

The art of effective research-based advocacy is still only partially understood (Court and Maxwell, 2005), but a growing body of research on the linkages between research and policy influencing has identified a number of key ingredients:

- the importance of credible quality research

- intent to shape policy

- understanding the socio-political context in which the research will be taken up

---

1   The titles of the research papers were as follows: "Who is benefiting most from education expansion in Ethiopia? Implications for addressing wealth, gender and urban/rural educational disparities in Ethiopia's SDPRP II", "Tackling Child Malnutrition: to what extent do the SDPRP's underlying policy assumptions reflect local realities?", "Child labour, gender inequality and rural/urban disparities: how can Ethiopia's national development strategies best address negative spill-over impacts on child education and well-being?", "Mainstreaming Children into Ethiopia's SDPRP II", and "Children's educational completion rates and achievement: implications for Ethiopia's SDPRP (2006-10)".

2   These countries were chosen based on their economic and geographical diversity. It should be noted that these PRSPs provided statements of policy intent and do not reflect an assessment of policy implementation or impacts.

- identifying and networking with key governmental organisation and NGO actors
- the importance of context-appropriate packaging of messages (e.g., Court *et al.*, 2005; O'Neil, 2005; Ahmed, 2005; Lockwood, 2005).

Although we will return in the conclusion to the extent to which the Young Lives Ethiopia experience confirms or extends current understanding about the research-policy engagement-dissemination nexus, the discussion in this section will evaluate our efforts to mainstream children into the PRSP, based around the five criteria mentioned above.

a) Quality evidence

Analysts interested in exploring how best to bridge policy and research are at pains to emphasise that quality evidence is essential (eg, Court and Maxwell, 2005). But how should we best define this? In the Young Lives case we have sought to ensure quality across three broad dimensions: the research sample, the integration of quantitative and qualitative methods, and analysis from a multi-disciplinary perspective. First, the Young Lives sample is not only relatively large (3,000 households) but spans five of the most populated regions of the country (approximately 90 per cent).[3] Although not a nationally representative sample, it reflects a diversity of agro-ecological zones, livelihood patterns, cultural and religious traditions, human development levels and ethnic compositions. It also provides us with valuable information about the impact of macro-level poverty eradication/development policies in diverse sub-national contexts.

Second, we explicitly set out to combine quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to complement breadth with depth (e.g. White, 2002). The quantitative analysis (using multi-variate regressions) allowed us to aggregate our findings about the determinants of various aspects of childhood poverty (nutritional and educational deprivations, exposure to paid and unpaid work). The qualitative analysis, meanwhile, allowed us to develop a richer definition of childhood poverty. It provided greater insight into causal processes and the complex dynamics behind quantitative findings that initially appeared counter-intuitive. Moreover, given that we used a team of researchers to carry out a sizeable number of mixed community dialogues, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with key informants, caregivers and children, we went some way towards meeting what Moser (2003) has termed the need for 'apt illustration' (as compared to anecdotal evidence) through quantifiable qualitative research:

> To solve one of the fundamental problems facing researchers today requires a shifting of goalposts as to the definition of robustness that it becomes more "inclusive" of quantifiable qualitative research. Only this can ensure that social issues do not remain confined to anecdotal boxes, but provide information of equal comparability in poverty assessments (ibid: 82).

Lastly, the research team combined multiple academic disciplines: economics, political science, public health, sociology and gender studies. Although doubtlessly more time- and labour-intensive than research involving a single discipline, the combined perspectives enabled us to present a convincing case to multiple audiences. Econometric analysis provided us with currency in the language of power: not only are economists highly respected in Ethiopian society but we were largely trying to persuade economist-trained officials in the Ministry of Finance and Economics as well as the donor community. However, contextual sociological analysis and in-depth case studies allowed us to translate the more technical analysis into a more compelling human-centred narrative about the implications of the PRSP

---

3   This includes Addis Ababa, Tigray, Amhara, Oromia and SNNP (Southern Nations, Nationalities And Peoples), but because of complications relating to tracking pastoralist communities in a panel survey these areas of the country were omitted.

on child well-being. This therefore allowed us to reach broader civil society and public audiences. As Court and Maxwell (2005: 719) have argued, a key ingredient of policy engagement necessitates highly developed storytelling skills – 'the storytelling expertise of Sheherazade'.

b) Intent matters

Although research may have an impact on policy practitioners' thinking and practice through the process of 'knowledge creep' – whereby ideas gradually filter through to a broader array of policy stakeholders (Crewe *et al*, 2005) – there is a growing consensus that research explicitly designed to influence policy will have a better chance of success than research that relies upon chance or accident to shape policy change (Saxena, 2005). Young Lives was created in the spirit of DFID's emphasis on 'getting research to users and beneficiaries' (DFID Research Funding Framework, 2005). It is a partnership project between a research consortium (comprising academic and research think tanks) and an international NGO aimed at explicitly producing policy-relevant research in order to improve policies that will enhance the well-being of children born into poverty. Therefore, from the outset, the Young Lives Ethiopia work involved a partnership between Save the Children UK (London and Addis Ababa) and academics from Addis Ababa University housed under the government's Ethiopian Development Research Institute (EDRI). However, in addition to this overarching project aim, we also explicitly designed our research on the impacts of the first SDPRP to feed into debates on the development of the second SDPRP (2006-10). In this regard timing was very important: we had to provide ourselves sufficient lead time to carry out and write up a body of research to meet the government's drafting deadlines, and hold stakeholder workshops on our findings with donors, government officials and civil society groups. Clearly, the completion of working papers after these deadlines would be of little practical value.

c) Context

In order to engage effectively with policy practitioners, it is important to understand how policy decisions are made, which groups or coalitions are politically powerful and which issues are politically sensitive and why (eg, Court *et al*, 2005; Young, 2005). We need to consider for example:

- whether the policy process is consultative and seeks to represent the viewpoints of a broad range of stakeholders, or is determined by a small group of government officials largely behind closed doors

- the relative balance of power between political institutions (legislature, bureaucracy – and particular ministries – and judiciary) and what the best entry points are for policy influence and dialogue[4]

- the contours of the interface between civil society and policy decision makers: is the relationship constructive, complementary or antagonistic? What are the dominant ideologies held by respective groups?

Prior mapping of the Ethiopian policy process and advocacy environment had indicated that the balance of power between political institutions was firmly tilted towards the bureaucracy; that civil society umbrella groupings and the media were still fledgling and suffered from significant capacity constraints (both internal and in their legal capacity to openly challenge government priorities and policies); and that NGO engagement with the PRSP process was relatively superficial and restricted

---

4   For example, if the legislature is weak then linking with congressional committees is not necessarily the most effective place to start. Similarly, if we know the PRSP is drafted largely by the Ministry of Finance, then we should not limit ourselves to the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Children's Department.

– the real negotiations would be between the donor community (which wielded considerable power through significant aid flows), MOFED and key sector ministries (Tefera, 2005).

In terms of children and representation of their needs, we also realised there was a dearth of understanding of children's rights issues among government and civil society organisations (Gutema *et al*, 2005), especially in terms of how broader macro development and poverty reduction policies might impinge directly and indirectly on their lives. In light of this environment, it was clear that policy influencing should target MOFED and DAGs, but simultaneously seek to build capacity among legislators, regional governments (where policy decisions are implemented), and mainstream civil society groups so that they would also come to endorse efforts to design more child-sensitive policies.

What we were less prepared for, however, was the speed with which the political context would shift. Although we were aware that national-level elections would take place a few months before the SDPRP draft was to be finalised (May 2005), few analysts were able to predict beforehand the contentious nature of the election process. Unexpectedly high turnout and a surprisingly strong showing by the new coalition of opposition forces had two major implications: a) discussions about (and including media coverage of) the PRSP were overshadowed by highly charged debates about the election, election fraud and violent unrest in Addis Ababa; b) the credibility of the main civil society umbrella group, the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA) was eroded in the eyes of the government due to its alleged link to the opposition. This resulted in the demise of an already fragile (but previously thawing) relationship between civil society and the ruling party/government. As a result, the ability of Young Lives to portray its evidence as non-political and research-based, combined with the project's long-standing affiliation with the governmental EDRI, constituted essential elements in being able to secure a platform to launch our findings and policy recommendations.

This suggests that in societies in flux, policy research endeavours need to carve out a co-operative but separate identity from mainstream policy networks and epistemic communities[5]. Such a strategy does, however, pose dilemmas for advocates, particularly those from Northern-based institutions. On the one hand there is the pressure to locate oneself and operate in the way that will most effectively raise issues of concern. On the other there is considerable pressure to work in solidarity with local civil society. But while the latter is valuable in terms of process, the Young Lives experience suggests that, rather than adhere rigidly to only working through civil society groups, there is a need to take a more flexible, situation-specific approach in order to ensure social-change oriented *outcomes*.

d) Networking and identifying key players

Accumulated learning by researchers and activists has shown that a sense of government and community 'ownership' of a research project is likely to facilitate the acceptance and recognition of the research findings (eg, Pham, 2003). Following Keeley and Scoones' (2003) communicative interaction approach to policy influencing, one of the central aims of Young Lives has been to promote government and community buy-in from the outset. In the Ethiopian case this has been implemented by housing the research component of the project within EDRI, which is headed by the Prime Minister's Chief Economics Advisor; securing approval from the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Committee for the dissemination and advocacy components carried out by Save the Children, as well as the formation of a project advisory panel (comprising key sector ministry officials

---

5   Epistemic communities consist of colleagues who share a similar approach on an issue. "They maintain contact with each other across their various locations and fields, thus creating valuable channels for information flow, the possibility of introducing and discussing new perspectives and an informal basis from which to make public pronouncements" (www.odi. org.uk/RAPID/Lessons/Theory/Themes_epistemiccommunities.html).

and donor and international organisation representatives).[6] In addition, at the seminars with donors and government officials, where we launched our research findings, we also invited key players in the PRSP development process to give presentations on how they were seeking to incorporate children's rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the MDGs into the second SDPRP. In this regard, rather than seeking only to criticise existing government policies, or to embarrass prominent officials into action, we instead provided space for officials (from EDRI, MOFED and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs) to reflect on the relationship between broad poverty development strategies and children's rights, and to develop an argument as to how they were trying to strengthen these linkages.

Building on insights about the Ethiopian policy process and advocacy environment outlined above, we also paid particular attention to ensuring that we had formal and informal discussions with key figures in the PRSP drafting process. In this regard we were in a fortunate position as one of the researchers was involved in an advisory capacity, or was serving as what Kingdon (1984) terms a 'policy entrepreneur', that is, an actor in or close to government who is willing to make an investment in moulding issue-specific policy strategy development. Although we did not gain access to information that was not publicly available in some form, this link helped us to prioritise where to focus our research and advocacy energies, to better understand what type of information was needed and how decisions would be made. Armed with this knowledge, informal discussions with the head of the PRSP technical committee within MOFED were held over the course of the research process, facilitated by the fact that this person was also simultaneously a member of the Young Lives Ethiopia advisory panel. This in turn enabled us to identify key individuals within the powerful planning departments of each of the main sector ministries, who represented their ministry's perspective in the PRSP committee. It also provided us with an opportunity to directly disseminate our research findings and related policy recommendations[7].

We also sought to network with civil society groups seeking to influence the PRSP process, but closer networking with MOFED suggested that government officials were wary of the CRDA and PANE. This was not only because their respective roles had not been clearly communicated to the PRSP committee, but also because there were questions about the rigour of their analysis and evidence base. This experience further highlighted that partnership projects like Young Lives need to be flexible about who delivers its policy messages. As Start and Hovland (2004) argue, the messenger matters in facilitating the translation of ideas into policy action. That is, some persons/institutions are viewed as appropriate sources of particular types of research while other research and related recommendations may be considered to be outside an organisation's mandate and accordingly rejected out of hand. Perhaps not surprisingly, NGOs and donors tend to value NGO studies, while government officials and international financial institutions express greater confidence in research that they themselves commissioned or endorsed (Court *et al*, 2005: 162).

---

6   While there is obviously a danger that such relationships with formal government structures could potentially limit both the content and way in which we disseminate our research findings, to date we have not faced any such constraints.

7   While these linkages were very beneficial to the uptake of our research findings, we recognise that this approach would not always be replicable (or desirable) in different contexts. It should also be noted that not all organisations have such access to the state and thus have more limited options. Others make a conscience decision not to be too closely linked to the government. The optimal level of engagement with the state is of course difficult to determine (see Jaquette and Wolchik, 1998; Jones forthcoming). We were able to take advantage of a specific political window due to prior investment in the development of a longer-term relationships with key government officials and a formal partnership with a government institution (EDRI).

e) Framing research messages

One of the key differences between research that is confined to library shelves and research that leads to policy change is the way the findings are packaged (IDRC, 2004). We need to consider: i) the use of culturally and audience-appropriate discourses, ii) the construction of pithy narratives that do not unnecessarily 'dumb down' what are often complex messages, as well as iii) the development of specific concrete policy recommendations.

In the first case, the insights from social movement theorists are illuminating. Tarrow (1994) for example argues that collective action does not result from a simple conversion of objective socio-economic conditions into demands for change, but rather depends on subjective perceptions of injustice and the way in which political discourses are framed in culturally resonant ways.

> *Movements frame their collective action around cultural symbols that are selectively chosen from a cultural tool chest and creatively converted into collective action frames by political entrepreneurs* (ibid: 119).

In this regard, research projects seeking to influence policy change need to be aware of what types of arguments are culturally palatable. For example: do international conventions command respect or ignite anti-colonial/imperialist tendencies? Are social welfare measures viewed as a sign of progress or do they provoke negative memories of a state socialist past? In the Ethiopian case, while international conventions and standards hold some sway, due to the powerful position occupied by donors, there is simultaneously a culture which is weary about accepting international norms without first assessing their feasibility in a development context that confronts multiple challenges (eg, low-income country, multi-ethnic society, recent history of political turmoil, etc). Therefore the current emphasis is on ensuring that international frameworks are 'localised' – for example, rather than speak of the UNCRC, officials prefer to look towards the national version, the 'National Action Plan for Ethiopian Children'. In this vein, it is essential for Northern organisations to partner with Southern institutions who will be much more attuned to cultural sensitivities.

A second dimension of appropriate framing relates to the way in which research findings will be remembered. King *et al* (2005) argue that skilful narratives and pithy summaries are needed to encapsulate the key elements of the research conclusions. Given the public, and in particular the media's, penchant for messages in sound-bite format, there is a frequent danger that the impact of findings will be diluted or even misinterpreted if they are stripped from their context. King *et al* (ibid) for example discuss the well-known example of research on the importance of investing in primary education in order to facilitate development. Over time this has been simplified down from the authors' original conclusions, which also included the importance of the post-basic education and training environment, and the influence of the wider non-educational environment on educational outcomes. Here the overarching message that Young Lives Ethiopia sought to communicate was that children are not only impacted by education and health sector policies – broader development and poverty reduction policies can have a profound (and perhaps greater) impact on their well-being, and thus children's rights need to be mainstreamed into national policy frameworks.

By adapting the language of gender mainstreaming – which has been widely adopted throughout development circles – we sought to convey the message that not only do all sectoral ministries need to consider the direct or indirect impact of their policies on children, but that policy makers need to pay

attention to the potential synergies or contradictions among policies on child outcomes. In particular we wanted to highlight contradictions or inconsistencies with general development policies on the one hand and child-specific policies on the other, which are often unintended and go unnoticed by policy advisors and analysts. Policies designed to increase aggregate household income (such as credit generation schemes for women to purchase livestock) for example may have an unintended negative impact on children if they result in less caring time for children or in the involvement of children in animal herding: that is, if alternative policy measures (eg, community childcare mechanisms and communal grazing policies) are not simultaneously adopted.

Lastly, as Saxena (2005) argues, researchers seeking to change policy need to be proactive about teasing out the policy implications of their findings, rather than leaving such interpretation to policy makers who may distort conclusions to better meet their own political interests. If researchers do not do this, there is also the risk that 'In the process of an idea being turned into action, it may turn from a silk purse into a sow's ear' (ibid: 749). In the case of the Ethiopian PRSP process, our connections with the PRSP technical committee and donors had underscored the need to translate our findings into specific quantifiable progress indicators that could be measured using existing data sources. In other words, if we wanted the second SDPRP to be more child-sensitive, what indicators would we recommend be included in the list of indicators against which Ethiopia's progress and hence aid flows would be evaluated? Boiling down complex mixed-method, multi-level analyses on children's nutrition, education and labour status to concrete indicators is, of course, a daunting task. Accordingly, once our findings were clear, we carried out content analyses of ten other PRSPs which had been identified as comparatively child-sensitive (Marcus *et al*, 2002; Heidel, 2004) to identify possible indicators that could be adapted to suit the Ethiopian context. We then summarised these findings in a five-page policy brief which we distributed widely to the government and donor PRSP technical committees (see Appendix 1 below for a summary of these indicators).

In addition to indicators, the Ethiopian DAG emphasised the importance of ensuring that the research-based policy recommendations that we developed were not stated in general terms (eg, 'mechanisms to support women's triple work burden – productive, reproductive, community – are needed to improve child well-being') but rather were linked to specific existing policy frameworks. They urged us to develop policy conclusions that would suggest revisions to particular policy programmes: for example, 'the August 2004 New Safety Net programme's recommendation to introduce community-based childcare mechanisms needs to be adequately funded and implemented in all regions in order to ensure that children's nutritional status does not suffer when poor women are compelled to leave their children unattended when they are involved in income-generating activities outside the house'. This emphasis on detailed concrete information is consistent with Summer and Tiwari's (2005) observation that while international-level advocacy often requires an identification of relationships that hold true across a range of country contexts, national-level advocacy often necessitates detailed case studies.

3. Conclusions

Although the final SDPRP II draft is yet to be released, even at this juncture Young Lives Ethiopia's efforts to use its research findings to advocate for a more child-sensitive second PRSP offers some important insights about bridging policy and research. Progress to date has included:

- being asked by the PRSP technical committee to provide a draft of the key points identified in our research that need to be incorporated in the second PRSP in order to better tackle childhood poverty

- the adoption of some of our key points by the civil society umbrella grouping involved in the national-level consultations on the PRSP draft

- the identification of women's and children's experiences of poverty as a key challenge to be addressed in the final version of the document.

The final section of this paper begins by summarising the ways in which the Young Lives experience supports the findings of existing literature in this field. It then turns to the ways in which we believe this case study could expand our collective understanding about effective research-based advocacy in developing country contexts and about the remaining challenges.

The Young Lives Ethiopia initiative adds additional support to the conclusions reached in the recent Journal of International Development volume on 'Bridging Research and Policy in International Development' (Volume 17, Number 6, 2005).

1. **Research needs to be credible, and if it combines research from different disciplinary traditions and methodologies it is likely to prove more persuasive** than isolated mono-disciplinary work. This is due to what Ahmed (2005: 767) dubs the 'multiplier effect'. In seeking to persuade the key drafters of the Ethiopian second SDPRP about the importance of incorporating children's rights into the document, econometric analysis was powerful, while in-depth qualitative research enabled us to understand our findings in human terms and to make sense of sometimes seemingly counter-intuitive quantitative results.

2. **Given the complexity of the policy process, the intent to shape policy change is significant.** As O'Neil (2005: 762) argues:

    This might seem like a rather fragile proposition, that practical influence on policy depends to a large degree on the state of mind of researchers, but the hard evidence of many cases support the claim that intent matters. It matters precisely because the confusions, tensions and accidents of the policy process itself turn out to be so complicated and unpredictable. …Research will only have a reliable influence on policy if it can survive if research is designed from the start and carried out and translated to the policy people with a resolute and explicit and specific intent.

In this vein – given the demands by policy makers for our research findings to be translated into specific, context-appropriate indicators and policy recommendations – if shaping the second SDPRP had not been a conscious aim, it is unlikely we would have taken the necessary steps to undertake this interpretative task. The effort required to package an academic-style research paper into readily accessible policy-relevant messages is considerable and cannot be left to chance.

3.   **The politico-institutional context clearly matters too.** In a country like Ethiopia, where the bureaucracy and MOFED enjoy disproportionate power, it is critical for a project focusing on childhood poverty not to limit itself to the Ministries of Social Affairs, Education and Health but to engage with officials with real budget-related decision-making power. Similarly, in an at best fledgling democratic environment, where government-civil society relations are still fragile, initiatives to shape policy need to mindful of these tensions. The Young Lives Ethiopia experience suggests that a dual strategy of engagement with officials as a separate organisation, but networking and capacity building (in terms of awareness-raising about the linkages between children and poverty reduction strategies) with civil society coalitions is most conducive to ensuring social change.

4.   **The importance of securing strong relationships with key players or policy entrepreneurs cannot be underestimated.** Without these linkages Young Lives would have been working in the dark in terms of officials' information needs, decision-making hierarchies, processes and timelines. Moreover, the research findings are unlikely to have been accorded the necessary credibility if stakeholder buy-in in Young Lives as a legitimate research project had not been previously established.

5.   **Framing of messages in succinct, easily remembered and culturally-resonant ways provides a linguistic bridge between often complex academic texts and policy action.** This packaging needs to take into account politico-cultural and ideological sensitivities, and for this Southern partners' insights are essential. Reference to international best practices can strengthen policy recommendations but only if care is taken to ensure that ideas are adapted to the local context.

In addition to commonalities with recent reflections on effective research-based policy influencing, the Young Lives Ethiopia experience also offers some fresh insights about the timing of policy engagement; the politics of bridging research and policy; the value of long-term partnerships between NGOs and researchers; securing stakeholder buy-in; investing in capacity building; and the particular challenges of working on children's and macro-development issues.

1.   **It is imperative to add a temporal dimension to understanding the political and institutional context in which advocacy is to be carried out.** Mapping exercises are necessary, but often tend to be quite static. Instead they should also identify areas that are fluid and fragile, as well as key political junctures at which the balance of power and institutional arrangements could be vulnerable to significant change. This could include elections (as was the case in Ethiopia), outcomes at major international events (eg, G8, MDG summit in 2005), the disintegration of actor coalitions, or even the emergence of conflict situations. Advocacy and dissemination strategies need to factor in the possibility of such abrupt shifts in the political context and need to be sufficiently flexible to cope with a new environment.

2.   Whereas Lockwood (2005) rightly stresses the need to be cognizant of the politics of bridging policy and research in the international arena,[8] in some national contexts **research-based advocacy may secure credibility precisely because it is seen as 'neutral' or 'non-political'.** For example, Young Lives and the CRDA in Ethiopia were both relatively critical of the limited attention paid in the first PRSP to the social impacts of the country's economic development strategy on different vulnerable groups of the population. Young Lives' critiques, however, were

---

8   Lockwood (2005) focused on the limited efficacy of initiatives to bridge policy and research in debates about foreign aid because of a tendency to hide behind technocratic solutions rather than openly recognise the problem as one of political will.

palatable because they were underpinned by research from a relatively large and diverse sample, whereas CRDA insights (representing a large coalition of NGOs) were quickly marginalised due to what was perceived as their divergent political views.

3. **While analysts of policy and research linkages have recognised the value of alliances between researchers and advocacy organisations, too little emphasis has been placed on the sustainability of these relationships.** The Young Lives model suggests that investment by donors such as DFID in fostering long-term alliances between a research consortium and an international NGO is valuable. It provides a credible platform from which various research initiatives can be launched over time, rather than having to build up legitimacy from the ground up in each new research endeavour. The more general challenge is to persuade donors that longer-term research projects will reap greater overall dividends than multiple 1-2 year research initiatives which is the current trend.

4. Although there is increasing recognition that it is important to foster stakeholder buy-in to research projects (from the design stage onwards) in order to ensure 'ownership' and subsequent usage of the results, more could be done to involve stakeholders more actively. **Inviting policy decision makers to also present their thinking in public fora organised to disseminate your research findings breaks down the sense of 'stakeholders as targets' and instead promotes a model of 'stakeholders as partners'.** It also provides decision-makers with an opportunity to engage actively with issues that they are perhaps not particularly familiar with. For example, in the case of Young Lives, MOFED officials and the Prime Minister's chief advisor prepared presentations on the linkages between children and economic policy rather than simply listening passively to someone else's research findings.

5. **Capacity building can play a potentially important role in shaping the politico-institutional context.** If a mapping exercise reveals, for example, that parliamentarians are relatively weak political players and that the media and civil society have limited capacity to offer important checks and balances on the power of the government, a longer-term strategy to influence policy could consider investing in capacity building with these groups. Part of the Young Lives strategy to shape the Ethiopian PRSP process explicitly included the organisation of a capacity building workshop with parliamentarians on the subject of children and the PRSP. This was done in order to raise their awareness of key issues and strengthen their ability to ask pertinent questions as the PRSP is implemented over the next five years. Due to an unforeseen delay in election results and the formation of a new parliament, this exercise has had to be postponed. We believe, however, that engaging with legislators in such a proactive manner could help to develop new allies over time (which, as a 15-year longitudinal project, Young Lives can afford to do).

Given that informal dialogues and reviews of the NGO shadow first SDPRP revealed that mainstream civil society groups are also poorly informed about children's rights and how they could be mainstreamed into poverty reduction strategies, we also organised seminars with civil society umbrella groups—the CRDA and PANE. Our aim was to raise awareness about these linkages, and hopefully over time to have children's rights accorded the same prominence as a cross-cutting issue that gender equality is given.

Lastly, based on disappointing media coverage of the seminar we organised to launch our findings, we are also planning a capacity building workshop for journalists. This will provide training about different and more nuanced ways of reporting about children and childhood poverty. Indeed, given that children and children's voices are too often excluded from development debates, capacity building with a broad array of government organisations and NGO partners is particularly important.

Appendix 1

Suggested indicators for a child-friendly PRSP

While we recognise that the development of indicators to measure progress on tackling childhood poverty needs to be context-specific, we suggest that the following five broad areas could serve as a useful checklist: i) age-disaggregated poverty data; ii) more comprehensive nutrition, education and health indicators; iii) indicators to measure protection from abuse and exploitation; iv) social protection indicators to cushion children from the negative spill-over impacts from rapid economic development; v) indicators to evaluate children's opportunities to voice their views and participate in their communities.

In order to measure progress in tackling childhood poverty more effectively, there is a need to **disaggregate all national poverty monitoring data by age,** to capture the differential impacts of development policies on adults and children. Possible examples include:

- labour-force statistics
- use of the justice system
- use of health care services
- targeting for social protection measures, based not on numbers of household heads but the number and age of children per family.

There is also a need to develop additional indicators to address **children's educational experiences** more effectively. Drawing on the Republic of Guinea's and Honduras' PRSPs, these could include the following indicators, disaggregated by gender wherever possible:

- net enrolment rates for both primary and secondary school
- student completion rates for primary education (Grades 1-8)
- number of school laboratories built and operational
- pupil:teacher ratios
- proportion of teachers trained in teacher training institutes for a minimum of one year
- per capita expenditure on primary school education.

Despite the prevalence of malnutrition featuring prominently in the poverty analysis section of the SDPRP, indicators to measure progress in reducing **child malnutrition** were not included in the SDPRP's Matrix on Indicators and Indicative Targets. In order to better assess changes in the multi-dimensional causes of malnutrition, the following indicators should be included in the second SDPRP:

- immunisation against measles
- percentage of children stunted, wasted and underweight
- proportion of families with access to latrines

- proportion of households who have added nutrition-rich horticultural products (eg, tomatoes, carrots) to their food production

- per capita expenditure on primary healthcare for children and ante-natal and post-natal care for mothers, and the percentage of lactating mothers who receive conditional cash or food transfers.

The introduction of indicators to measure dimensions of **child protection from violence and exploitation** is also imperative, especially in terms of physical and sexual abuse, child labour and child trafficking. The first SDPRP does not include such indicators, but international good practices drawn from the PRSPs of Honduras, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam and the Republic of Guinea suggest that the following indicators could be used:

Abuse
- the number of people who have received awareness-raising training on child protection principles and counter-measures against abuse and harmful traditional practices (eg, local authorities, school teachers, employers) *(Republic of Guinea)*
- the number of legal aid centres or hotlines established
- the number of homeless children/children at risk/abused children rehabilitated or provided with counselling *(Republic of Guinea, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Vietnam)*
- the presence of expenditure items and the volume of funds allocated for childhood protection within the national budget *(Kyrgyzstan)*
Juvenile justice
- the number of judicial personnel trained to deal appropriately with minors in conflict with the law, and the number of cases of judicial follow-up *(Republic of Guinea)*
- the number of child/youth offenders rehabilitated through rehabilitation centres *(Republic of Guinea)*
Children with disabilities
- the number of service providers who have received special training to work with children with disabilities and their caregivers *(Republic of Guinea)*
Child labour
- a reduction in the percentage of children in the labour force and the average number of hours worked, as measured by labour force surveys or Living Standards Measurement Surveys (LSMS) (both paid work and household chores)
- the number of rehabilitation centres for child labourers or the number of cases of intervention to assist children working in hazardous situations *(Honduras)*
- the number of officials and teachers trained to engage in advocacy and raise awareness among religious leaders and other authorities about the need to protect children against harmful and disabling forms of labour *(Republic of Guinea)*
- the number of posters distributed in communities to raise awareness about harmful forms of child labour *(Republic of Guinea)*
- the number of households covered by the introduction of social safety net programmes for the poor in order to protect children against the pressures to become involved in child labour *(Vietnam)*
- domestic legislation revised to ensure consistency with international standards and conventions about child labour *(Kenya)*
Trafficking
- the development and maintenance of a database on child trafficking, and the number of officials who receive awareness-raising training on the issue *(Republic of Guinea)*

In order to cushion children against some of the contradictory impacts of agricultural development-led industrialisation, it will be important to develop **child-focused social protection measures**. Indicators to monitor progress on these may include:

- the number of scholarships awarded to secondary school students
- the number of households able to access credit or given conditional cash transfers for educational purposes
- the number of early child development and childcare programmes operating at the community level.

The fourth basic underlying principle of the UNCRC, **child participation**, is often neglected in the design of development and poverty reduction strategies. However, the Kyrgyz PRSP seeks to move beyond a view of children as targets of development and to include them as participating citizens in the development process, through establishing a network of children's and youth organisations working to realise their rights. Similarly, in Guinea the number of teachers and children trained about the UNCRC, the number of children involved in a children's parliament, and the quantity of resources allocated to it are all measured. The Vietnamese PRSP (2002: 82) also accords importance to the availability of newspapers in minority languages so children can further their linguistic abilities in their mother tongue. Additional context-specific targets could also be identified through participatory consultation processes with affected communities and groups of children.

References

Ahmed, M (2005) 'Bridging research and policy development', *Journal of International Development*, 17(6), 765-73

Antony, P (2003) 'Policies for children: its infancy and implications in India'. Paper presented at a Young Lives conference entitled *Childhood Poverty: Longitudinal Studies for Policy Making*, 8-9 September, 2003

Court, J, I Hovland and J Young (eds) (2005) *Bridging Research and Policy in Development: Evidence and the Change Process*, London, Overseas Development Institute

Court, J and S Maxwell (2005) 'Policy entrepreneurship for poverty reduction: bridging research and policy in international development', *Journal of International Development*, 17(6), 713-25

Craske, N and M Molyneux (2002) *Gender and the Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan

Crewe, E, I Hovland and J Young (2005) 'Context, evidence, links: a conceptual framework for understanding research-policy processes' in *Bridging Research and Policy in Development: Evidence and the Change Process*, London, Overseas Development Institute

DFID (2005) *Research Funding Framework*, DFID, UK

Dryzek, J (1994) *Discursive Democracy: Politics, Policy and Political Science*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

Fraser, N (1989) *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press

Gutema, B, N Jones, B Tefera and T Woldehanna (2005) *Mainstreaming Children: A child-focused analysis of Ethiopia's Sustainable Development Poverty Reduction Programme's poverty analysis, policy goals and targets*, IDRC report (unpublished)

Heidel, K (2004) *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers: Blind to the rights of the (working) child?* Duisburg, Kindernothilfe and Heidelberg, Werkstatt Okonomie

IDRC (2004) 'Making the most of research: research and the policy process'. Presentation prepared for a forum entitled *Making the Most of Research: Research and the Policy Process*, IDRC, Ottawa, Canada, 21 June, 2004

Jaquette, J and S Wolchik (eds) (1998) *Women and Democracy: Latin America and Central and Eastern Europe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press

Jones, N (2006) *Gender and the Political Opportunities of Democratization in South Korea*, New York, Palgrave

Jones, N (2005) 'Triangulating research, policy engagement and practice to tackle childhood poverty: reflections on Young Lives (2000-2005)'. Paper presented at *Childhoods 2005: Children and Youth in Emerging and Transforming Societies*, 28 June – 3 July, Oslo, Norway

Joshi, H (2001) 'Longitudinal data as an aid to the policy maker: Some British examples'. Paper for the *Annual Conference of the Economists*, Perth, Australia

Keeley, J and I Scoones (2003) 'Understanding environmental policy processes: a review', *IDS Working Paper 89*, Brighton, University of Sussex

King, K, R Palmer and R Hayman (2005) 'Bridging research and policy on education, training and their enabling environments', *Journal of International Development,* 17(6), 803-17

Kingdon, J W (1984) *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*, New York, Harper Collins

Komarecki, M (2003) *Promoting Human Rights and Social Policies for Children and Women: The role of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS),* Report to UNICEF

Lockwood, M (2005) 'Will a Marshall Plan for Africa make poverty history?', *Journal of International Development*, 17(6), 775-89

McGee, R and K Brock (2001) 'From poverty assessment to policy change: processes, actors and data', *Working Paper 133*, Sussex, Institute of Development Studies

Marcus, R, J Wilkinson and J Marshall (2002) 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) – fulfilling their potential for children in poverty?' *Journal of International Development* 14(8): 1117-1128

Moser, C (2003) '"Apt Illustration" or "Anecdotal Information"? Can qualitative data be representative or robust?' in K Ravi (ed) *Q-Squared: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods of Poverty Appraisal*, Delhi, Permanent Black

O'Neil, M (2005) 'What determines the influence that research has on policy-making?', *Journal of International Development,* 17(6), 761-64

Pham, T L (2003) 'Managing research and advocacy in Vietnam'. Paper presented at a Young Lives conference entitled *Childhood Poverty: Longitudinal Studies for Policy Making*, 8-9 September, 2003

Platt, L (2003) 'Putting childhood poverty on the agenda: the relationship between research and policy in Britain 1800-1950', *Young Lives Working Paper No. 7*, London, Young Lives

Pollard, A and J Court (2005) 'How civil society organisations use evidence to influence policy processes: a literature review', *Overseas Development Institute Working Paper 249*, London, Overseas Development Institute

Saxena, N (2005) 'Bridging research and policy in India', *Journal of International Development,* 17(6), 737-46

Shanks, E and C Turk (2003) *Refining Policy with the Poor: Local Consultations on the Draft Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy in Vietnam*, Policy Research Working Paper, World Bank

Start, D and I Hovland (2004) *Tools for Policy Impact: A Handbook for Researchers*, London, ODI

Sumner, A and M Tiwari (2005) 'Poverty and economic policy: what happens when researchers disagree?', *Journal of International Development*, 17(6), 791-801

Tarrow, S (1994) *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, New York, Cambridge University Press

Taylor, M (2005) 'Bridging research and policy: a UK perspective', *Journal of International Development,* 17(6), 747-57

Tefera, B (2003) 'Advocacy in the Ethiopian context and implications for Young Lives'. Paper presented at a Young Lives conference entitled *Childhood Poverty: Longitudinal Studies for Policy Making*, 8-9 September, 2003

Villa, E (2003) 'The experience of policy making for childhood in Peru'. Paper presented at a Young Lives conference entitled *Childhood Poverty: Longitudinal Studies for Policy Making*, 8-9 September, 2003

White, H (2002) 'Combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in poverty analysis', *World Development*, 30(3), 511-22

Young, J (2005) 'Research, policy and practice: why developing countries are different?', *Journal of International Development*, 17(6), 727-34

The Young Lives Partners

Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), India

Department of Economics, University of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

General Statistical Office, Government of Vietnam

Grupo de Análisis Para El Desarrollo (GRADE), Peru

Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, UK

Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (IIN), Peru

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, UK

Medical Research Council of South Africa

RAU University, Johannesburg, South Africa

Research and Training Centre for Community Development, Vietnam

Save the Children UK

South Bank University, UK

Statistical Services Centre, University of Reading, UK

Young Lives is an international longitudinal study of childhood poverty, taking place in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam, and funded by DFID. The project aims to improve our understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty in the developing world by following the lives of a group of 8,000 children and their families over a 15-year period. Through the involvement of academic, government and NGO partners in the aforementioned countries, South Africa and the UK, the Young Lives project will highlight ways in which policy can be improved to more effectively tackle child poverty.

Working Paper 21 examines efforts to bridge multi-disciplinary research, policy engagement and practice in order to help improve children's life quality in diverse developing country contexts. This paper highlights the importance of mapping the policy context and of re-conceptualising policy making as a non-linear dynamic process, involving multiple actors with varying perspectives.

Attempts by Young Lives Ethiopia to mainstream child-sensitive policies into the second Ethiopian Poverty Reduction Strategy process are examined in detail, and are assessed against five criteria identified in the relevant literature:

- Quality evidence: Young Lives sought to acquire quality evidence by drawing upon a large sample from five of the country's most populated regions; employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies; and adopting a multi-disciplinary approach.

- Intent: Research designed explicitly to influence policy will be more likely to do so. Young Lives research was designed to explore the impacts of the first Poverty Reduction Strategy process in order to inform debates on the development of the second.

- Context: An understanding of the context in which policy decisions are made is crucial. Young Lives experience suggests that simultaneous engagement with officials and capacity building with civil society organisations is essential to ensure social change. The speed at which the political context can shift (for example, following elections), and the necessity of designing flexible policy influencing strategies is also highlighted.

- Networking and identifying key players: Cultivating a sense of government and community ownership of a research project is likely to accord credibility to research findings. Young Lives sought to engage key PRSP players and invited them to present their thinking about the incorporation of child-specific policies.

- Framing research messages: Messages need to be succinct, culturally resonant and able to summarise often complex academic arguments without over-simplifying. Young Lives Ethiopia seeks to communicate that children are not only affected by health and education policies, but also by broader development and poverty reduction strategies.