



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**

**Young Lives**   
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

## Changing Childhoods: Social Change, New Risks and Opportunities for Children

Kirrily Pells and  
Martin Woodhead

5 November 2013



## WHY THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT MATTERS FOR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT (I)

- Children's development is shaped by:
  - direct experience of the immediate physical, social, cultural and institutional environment
  - indirect influences of the macro-level economic, social and policy environment (Bronfenbrenner 1989; Evans 2006; Super & Harkness 1986).
- Opportunities and risks for children's development embedded in the environment, including:
  - *physical* (e.g. poor quality housing and lack of sanitation); *social* (illness and punitive parenting); *cultural* (values and practices which may discriminate against particular children) and *institutional risks* (poor quality schooling, including violence). (Heft 1988; Grantham-McGregor *et al.* 2007; Walker *et al.* 2007; Wachs & Rahman 2013).

## WHY THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT MATTERS FOR CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT (II)

- Multiple risk can have a compounded or cumulative effect on children's development (Behrman *et al.* 2010; Stevens 2006)
- Children are not passive (Marsten 1994, 2001). Children engage with their environment and through interactions with caregivers, siblings and peers (Dunn 1988)
- Children growing up in poverty typically face a higher burden of risk yet research focused on European and North American contexts (Bornstein *et al.* 2012).



## CHANGES IN THE LIVING ENVIRONMENT: NEW OPPORTUNITIES AND RISKS FOR CHILDREN (I)

- Changes in the environment (e.g. economic growth or crisis, social norms, environmental shocks, social policies) affect children's development:
  - directly (e.g. flood or ECCE programme) but moderated by coping strategies or actions of caregivers
  - indirectly (e.g. social protection schemes)(Shaffer 1996)
- Globally poverty reduction, improved access to services and schooling reduced many risks for children:
  - Under-5 mortality halved since 1990 (UNICEF *et al.* 2013)
  - School enrolment increased by 20 percentage points in sub-Saharan Africa 1999-2010 (UNESCO 2012)
- BUT new concerns over the quality and effectiveness of institutions, policies and services and increasing inequality in some contexts (UNICEF and UN Women 2013).

## YOUNG LIVES

12,000 children and their households in 4 countries over 15 years

Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru & Vietnam

Changing community, household and school contexts for two age cohorts in each country:

- 2,000 children born in 2000-01
- 1,000 children born in 1994-95

Pro-poor sample: 20 sites in each country selected to reflect country diversity, rural-urban, livelihoods, ethnicity etc.

Three survey rounds (2002, 2006 & 2009) and three qualitative rounds (2007, 2008 & 2011).



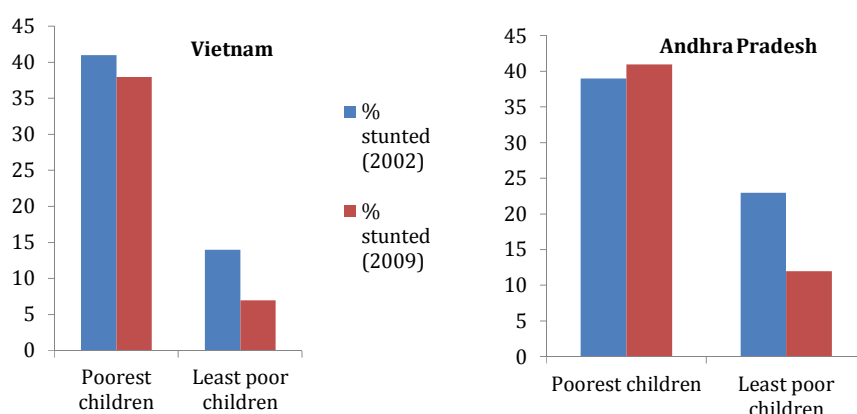
## KEY FINDINGS

1. The poorest children are at risk of being left behind despite rapid economic growth
2. Children in poor families experience repeated environmental and economic shocks and have fewer resources to help them cope
3. Rapid expansion of basic services, roads and communications is increasing opportunities for many children and families, but new forms of exclusion are emerging
4. Almost all Young Lives children have been enrolled in school, but for education to transform their opportunities, quality must be improved
5. Many children balance school with work which is often unpaid but contributes to family livelihoods and teaches life skills
6. Rapid social change is creating new dilemmas about how best to protect children and prepare them for the future.

## 1. THE POOREST CHILDREN ARE AT RISK OF BEING LEFT BEHIND DESPITE RAPID ECONOMIC GROWTH

- Strong economic growth and reductions in absolute poverty, reflecting trends typical of other LIC/MICs.
- However, economic growth does not achieve poverty reduction for all (Sumner 2010).
  - Ethiopia had reduced poverty rates to a similar level as India by 2011, even though India has around 3.5 times the Gross National Income (GNI).
  - By 2012 Vietnam had two-thirds the poverty level of Peru, despite having only a third of the GNI per capita.
- Average household wealth and consumption levels increased in all four countries between 2002 and 2009 but large gaps persist between the poorest and least poor households.

## REDUCTIONS IN STUNTING AMONG CHILDREN BY ECONOMIC STATUS (Older Cohort age 8 in 2002 and Younger Cohort age 8 in 2009)



## 2. CHILDREN IN POOR FAMILIES EXPERIENCE REPEATED ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECONOMIC SHOCKS AND HAVE FEWER RESOURCES TO HELP THEM COPE

- Poor households tend to be located in the areas most at risk of exposure to environmental hazards, have more precarious livelihoods and so are prone to recurrent shocks
- Following the global economic crisis households described a marked increase in economic shocks and food price inflation
- Children who experienced food shortages are at additional risk of poorer outcomes in physical health, learning and subjective well-being:
  - were 60% less likely to have a healthy body mass index (BMI)-for-age in Peru
  - scored lower in cognitive achievement tests in AP and Ethiopia
  - reported lower self-rated health in Vietnam and AP
  - reported lower subjective well-being in Ethiopia and Peru.

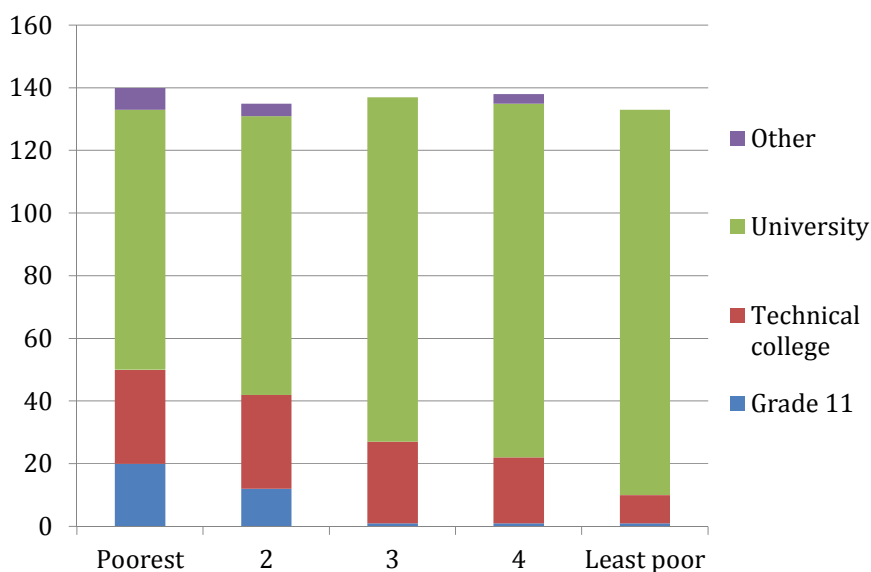
## 3. RAPID EXPANSION OF BASIC SERVICES, ROADS AND COMMUNICATIONS IS INCREASING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MANY CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BUT NEW FORMS OF EXCLUSION ARE EMERGING

- Access to basic services, including electricity, safe drinking water and improved sanitation has increased significantly and in general benefitted poorer communities.
- Rapid expansion of road systems and communication technologies has increased opportunities for migration and access to information, but also risks reinforcing pre-existing inequality. The poorest households are less likely to have access to mobile phones and the internet.
- Community physical disadvantages compound social disadvantage, such as minority status. Disadvantage becomes concentrated, with children living in these areas having poorer indicators of well-being in multiple domains.

#### 4. ALMOST ALL YOUNG LIVES CHILDREN HAVE BEEN ENROLLED IN SCHOOL, BUT FOR EDUCATION TO TRANSFORM THEIR OPPORTUNITIES, QUALITY MUST BE IMPROVED

- Increased aspirations for schooling most striking intergeneration change. Between 60 and 80% of 15 year olds aspire to jobs requiring university education
- Children and families view education as a route out of poverty towards a better life and improved social mobility:  
“We are not going to suffer like this in the mud....it’s better that I go and study.” (Marta, age 15, Andahuaylas, rural Peru)
- Families often invest scarce resources in sending their children to school: “I worry when I don’t have money, sometimes I can’t make ends meet, and so I sell my cows...before I had enough money, I lived well, now I am short of money as my children are studying, that’s why I’m short.” (Marta’s mother)

#### CAREGIVERS’ ASPIRATIONS FOR CHILDREN AGE 12, BY WEALTH QUINTILE, PERU

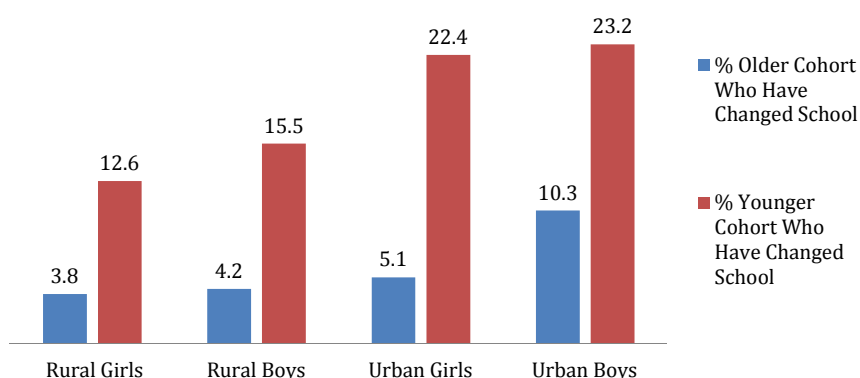


## CONCERNS OVER SCHOOL QUALITY, EFFECTIVENESS AND RELEVANCE

- In Ethiopia and Peru, increases in the ability of 8 year olds to read a single sentence were only significant among children from the least poor quintile
- Gaps in children's learning outcomes on vocabulary, reading and maths tests at age 8 have been linked with levels of parental education, urban-rural divisions (particularly in Ethiopia) and household wealth (to a lesser extent in AP)
- Concerns about the relevance of schooling for future transitions to the labour market and the availability of skilled work. In Vietnam school enrolment in upper secondary school (after the age of 15) and attainment is low compared surrounding middle-income countries (Philippines, China, Malaysia and Thailand).

## GROWTH OF LOW-FEE PRIVATE SCHOOLING RISKS REINFORCING SOCIAL AND GENDER EQUALITIES

Children who have changed school by age 8, Andhra Pradesh



## 5. MANY CHILDREN BALANCE SCHOOL WITH WORK WHICH IS OFTEN UNPAID BUT CONTRIBUTES TO FAMILY LIVELIHOODS AND TEACHES LIFE SKILLS

- Few young children (8 years old) report working for pay but the majority of children perform household chores or work on family farms and businesses
- Many children negotiate schooling and raised expectations for the future of their families as a whole, at the same time as maintaining their traditional working roles
- In AP 8 year olds spend c.8 hours per day in school and 2 hours studying at home. However, girls also spend three hours undertaking tasks on family farms or businesses, in comparison with 2.1 hours spent by boys.
- In Peru, only 7% of children in the least poor quintile worked on family farms or businesses, at age 8, this increased to 26% of children in the poorest quintile.

## WORK REMAINS FUNDAMENTAL TO MANY CHILDREN'S CURRENT ROLES AND AS PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

- Work is a source of pride:  
 “Look, you are a blessed one. You are being looked after by your son and there is no need for you to work. He is not only earning but also taking care of you.’ I felt very happy. I want to get a good name, I still want to work hard and do better things.” (boy, Andhra Pradesh)
- Pay for school materials, uniforms and transportation costs
- Manual skills remain essential for the future:
- “As it is, we are 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.” (boy, Andhra Pradesh)



## 6. RAPID SOCIAL CHANGE IS CREATING NEW DILEMMAS ABOUT HOW BEST TO PROTECT CHILDREN AND PREPARE THEM FOR THE FUTURE

- Existing norms shape choices (but also are increasingly challenged by) girls' and boys' education, opportunities and mobility
- Schooling is a new route to 'becoming somebody' and to acquire a 'good name' but 'traditional' values remain
- Some caregivers fear that if daughters study away from home they may acquire a 'bad name' and reduce their marriage prospects
- Children migrating to urban centres in the search for what is perceived to be better quality education or to enable children to stay with families more able to support their schooling
- Access to information challenging 'traditional' gender roles and expectations.

## EFFORTS TO ELIMINATE TRADITIONAL PRACTICES MAY RESULT IN NEW CONCERNS AND SOCIAL RISKS IF THEY DO NOT ENGAGE WITH THE UNDERLYING CAUSES

- Ethiopia: intensive advocacy and legal prohibition of early female marriage and female circumcision
  - Clashes with local perceptions of protecting girls from risk of social ostracism, STIs and pregnancy
  - In some regions evidence of resistance and clandestine actions
- "It was done at her request. After she witnessed a girl insulting another who was not circumcised, my daughter came home and asked me to organise her circumcision. She told me she does not want to be insulted in the same way. [...] We did the circumcision in the evening for the fear of the local officials who could punish us." (Mother, Oromia, Ethiopia)
- Eliminating a physical risk may result in new concerns and social risks. Stigma, social isolation and even abandonment can be faced by uncircumcised girls.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS: ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS & 'BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD' (1)

- The disconnect between growth and substantial or equitable benefits underlines the importance of ensuring pro-poor growth, and supported by the extension of quality services, such as education and health care and jobs.
- Social protection schemes have the potential to increase the options available to poor households, by avoiding debt-traps and ensuring families have access to productive livelihoods.
- To avoid the concentration of disadvantage in certain communities area-based policies have the merit of avoiding the complexities of targeting individual households and the risk of resentment within communities.

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS: ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS & 'BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD' (2)

- High educational aspirations and increases in enrolment offer a strong foundation upon which to build learning for all. However, there are currently large differences in school quality and effectiveness and illustrate the need for better-quality, well-resourced and managed school systems.
- More balanced approach to children's work which focuses on the structural causes, and supports the poorest households. School flexibility is also important in order to enable children who are combining schooling with work to remain in school.
- Policies addressing traditional practices need to take account of the broader structures that shape risk. Ensuring that young people can access good quality schooling, health services and employment opportunities is an important part of reducing attachment to traditional practices.