

Chronic Poverty Amid Growth:

Insights from Long-term Poverty Trajectories

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First published by Young Lives in October 2012

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ISBN: 978-1-904427-96-4

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Printed on FSC-certified paper from traceable and sustainable sources.

Funded by



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the
Netherlands

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Abstract

There has been growing interest in researching the dynamics of poverty, including poverty mobility. Looking at change over time and what caused this change can provide useful information for policymakers and those who seek to influence them. Young Lives is a longitudinal study of child poverty and provides ample scope to dwell on this area, making use of the three rounds of survey data and of qualitative data from sub-sample children. The focus in this paper is tribal households not conforming to the general trend of upward mobility. It locates these households, analyses their characteristics, and identifies the factors that cause the downward mobility of certain households. The specific context, the nature of negotiations the households have with the welfare institutions, and the experiential dimension of everyday struggles are discussed, keeping in mind the perspective of those in chronic poverty. We argue that the choices that poor people make can be seen as resistance to being labelled and that, by making these choices, they are also upholding the notion of agency and self-esteem. The paper concludes by drawing attention to structural aspects that shape poverty trajectories, and the policy implications of these.

Acknowledgements

The authors are extremely grateful to the Young Lives children, families and community members who make our research possible. We acknowledge the incisive comments and suggestions by Michael Bourdillon on the earlier drafts of this paper.

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About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, following the lives of 12,000 children in 4 countries (Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam) over 15 years. www.younglives.org.uk

Young Lives is core-funded from 2001 to 2017 by UK aid from the Department for International Development (DFID), and co-funded by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2010 to 2014.

The views expressed are those of the author(s). They are not necessarily those of, or endorsed by, Young Lives, the University of Oxford, DFID or other funders.

1. Introduction

In recent years there has been growing interest in researching the dynamics of poverty, including the poverty mobility of households and communities. Looking at how communities and households have changed over time and what caused this change can provide useful information for policymakers and those who seek to influence them. An analysis of qualitative data from Young Lives, a 15-year study of childhood poverty in four developing countries, suggests different movements of the communities within the state of Andhra Pradesh and of households within the same community.¹ While most of these households report an improved livelihood status, a few reported increased poverty. This paper looks at who these households are and where they come from (rural, tribal or urban areas). It then goes into detail on three cases and examines what factors cause the descent.

Young Lives is a study that seeks to improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty, and of the factors that contribute to breaking cycles of poverty and to reducing the inequality that underpins poverty. It is designed to provide credible evidence to inform the development and implementation of policies and practices aimed at children. The study makes child poverty visible, links the poverty of children with that of women, families, communities and regions, and explores the multidimensional factors that create and sustain poverty amongst children. It is thus expected to provide orientation for policy and programme development and improve implementation in order to address childhood poverty.²

The sample in all the four countries is clearly pro-poor as it includes relatively poor communities and does not represent the country as a whole. The study has five major survey rounds following children at three-year intervals with pre-designed survey questionnaires to collect information on a wide range of indicators on children's well-being. It started in 2002, Rounds 2 and 3 were in 2006 and 2009, and Rounds 4 and 5 are scheduled for 2013 and 2016. The consumption and wealth data from the survey are used to examine the dynamics of poverty in terms of changes in household expenditure, mobility between expenditure quintiles, and changes in household poverty status.³

Qualitative research, which began in 2007, supplements the quantitative data in selected sites with a sub-sample of 48 children, as well as members of their families and communities, based on specific criteria. Equal numbers of children from the Older and Younger Cohorts, and of boys and girls, have been included in this research (see Galab et al. 2011 for more details of the qualitative research in Andhra Pradesh).

The analysis for this paper is based on the data from the first three survey rounds and from the qualitative research in 2007, 2008 and 2010 in four communities spread across the three regions of Andhra Pradesh. While the survey data, analysed by location, cohort and caste,

1 The Young Lives study countries are Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. The rest of this section gives details of the study and the data on which this paper is based.

2 The study follows two cohorts of children. In each of the four study countries: 2,000 children born in 2001–2 and 1,000 children born in 1994–5. Equal numbers of boys and girls were selected from 20 sites. Together, these comprised diverse communities with different ways of life, urban and rural contexts and different ethnic groups.

3 Young Lives uses three measures to define household poverty: absolute poverty, relative poverty and a wealth index. In India, absolute poverty is defined as households with monthly per capita consumption below Rs. 563.16 for urban areas and Rs. 433.43 for rural areas (in 2006 prices), based on the figures used by the National Sample Survey Organisation of India.

are used to establish the trends in poverty mobility of households over the years, the qualitative data look into what happened between these rounds at the state, community and household levels. The data show that there was upward mobility in a good number of households. Case studies of three children whose families reported downward mobility are discussed in terms of their location, social group (caste), family life stage and other household characteristics, and analysed using the empowerment framework developed by Narayan and Petesch (2007) as a starting point.

2. Trends in quantitative data

During the first two years of the Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007–9), the economy of Andhra Pradesh in terms of Gross State Domestic Production grew on average at 7.9 per cent – a little more than the all-India GDP growth rate of 7.8 per cent for the same period (Government of Andhra Pradesh 2010; Panda and Ravi 2010). Poverty declined considerably particularly in the rural areas.

This is also borne out in the Young Lives study. Absolute poverty declined from 24 per cent of Young Lives households in 2006 to 16 per cent in 2009. The decline in poverty was a little faster in rural than in urban communities between 2006 and 2009, with more people poor in rural areas. Changes in the wealth index, which reflects the ownership of basic consumer durables and access to basic services, have also registered a greater improvement for rural areas than urban areas. This may be due to economic growth, as well as the implementation of rural poverty reduction programmes and social protection schemes. Prominent amongst these are:

- Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS – 100 days of wage work per household paid at a rate of about Rs. 100 per day, now increased to Rs. 137 in Andhra Pradesh)
- Midday Meal Scheme (children in Grades 1 to 10 are provided with a midday meal at school that consists of 400 calories and 12 grams of protein)
- Rajiv Arogyasri (health insurance scheme)
- Indiramma (rural housing scheme and development of villages with all necessary infrastructure)
- The Girl Child Protection Scheme (aimed at preventing gender discrimination by empowering girls and encouraging parents to educate them, through direct deposits from the Government that can be accessed when the girl is 18 and after she has completed Grade 10)
- Public Distribution System (PDS) of food grains (made available at subsidised rates to poor people through ‘fair price shops’)
- Poverty alleviation projects pursued through women’s self-help groups (SHGs).⁴

⁴ Groups of 10–15 poor women who operate a sort of financial union, saving together and lending each other money from a common fund. The aim is to reduce poverty by enabling women to have access to credit without needing collateral. The Government gives credit to these groups, on certain conditions, to assist them with lending. It also helps the banks to lend to the SHGs.

Although human development indicators have shown improvement in Andhra Pradesh, there are significant gaps, for example by region, rural or urban location of residence, social class/caste or gender. The Andhra Pradesh Human Development Report for 2007 indicates that some areas show signs of improvement while in others the inequalities are sharp and persistent (CESS 2008). High inflation, as experienced with fast-rising food prices, is a serious concern and undermines the purchasing power of poor households, forcing families to buy cheaper, lower-quality food with poorer nutritional content (for example, more calories and less protein). Such choices will have particularly negative impacts on pregnant women and on children (Dev 2010). Inflation is one of the significant factors that adversely affect poorer groups.

The Young Lives quantitative data mirror this trend and show that about 70 per cent of children are moving out of poverty, in large part probably because of MGNREGS, PDS, access to SHGs and credit and income-generation programmes linked to SHGs. Various other studies, like those of Dreze and Khera (2009), Dev (2011), Pankaj and Tankha (2010) and Uppal (2009), also confirm the contribution of MGNREGS to the economic status of poor households. However the Young Lives data show that though the mobility trend indicates an ascent by a good number of households, there seem to be some who move down and others who remain in 2009 where they were in 2006.

This paper explores the specific mix of factors that produces downward mobility and how and why the factors that produce upward mobility among the rest of the sample did not enable these households to move out of poverty. Why have these households not benefited from targeting and from the host of schemes that seem to help the others? In other words, who are the children who remain poor or become poorer? What kind of households are getting left out of the multiplicity of schemes and programmes that have benefited many in similar circumstances? As Table 1 shows, the households of children in both Young Lives cohorts have become richer overall, whether this is measured by the wealth index or by their real per capita expenditure.

Table 1. *Wealth index and monthly real per capita expenditure (Rs.) (all children)*

	Wealth index*			Expenditure (Rs.)	
	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 2	Round 3
Younger Cohort	0.41	0.46	0.51	766.5	872.3
Older Cohort	0.41	0.47	0.52	899.6	1,076.7
Total	0.41	0.46	0.52	812.3	942.3

All figures are averages. Expenditure data not available for Round 1.

*Wealth index constructed as a figure between 0 and 1. It reflects the welfare of household members in terms of the quality of the dwelling, use of durable goods, and access to basic services.

Source: Galab et al. (Young lives India Country report, Round 3) 2011.

The consumption and wealth data from the Young Lives survey are also used to examine the dynamics of poverty in terms of changes in household expenditure, mobility across expenditure groups, and changes in household poverty status. The disaggregation of growth in consumption according to social group reveals that the 'Other Castes' (which include 'Upper Castes') had the highest consumption levels, while the 'Scheduled Tribes' had the

lowest consumption in both Round 2 and Round 3.⁵ Data are also analysed according to 'poor' and 'non-poor' groupings.⁶ Table 2 presents the movement of households between these two categories from Round 2 to Round 3. Consumption was higher for the households of Older Cohort children than for those of Younger Cohort children in both the rounds, probably because these households (with older children) are at a later stage of the life-course and have more labour available within the household, improving their relative position. The consumption of Older Cohort households has also increased more rapidly than that of Younger Cohort households. The chances of moving out of poverty were slightly higher in urban than rural areas.

However, some households show a downward trend and impoverishment even as most others in the cohort showed an upward trend.

Table 2. *Household poverty transition, 2006–9 (%)*

Younger Cohort – 1,972 children	Poor in R3 (2009)	Non-poor in R3
Poor in R2 (2006)	37.2	62.8
Non-poor in R2	10.8	89.2
Older Cohort – 1,000 children	Poor in R3	Non-poor in R3
Poor in R2	30	70
Non-poor in R2	8.6	91.4

R2: Round 2 (2006), R3: Round 3 (2009).

Source: Galab et al. (Young lives India Country report, Round 3) 2011.

What factors explain the stagnation and downward trend of some families shown in Table 2? In order to understand this downward mobility better, qualitative data based on specific case studies are examined in this paper. In Round 3, of the 46 households interviewed in the qualitative sub-sample,⁷ nine reported a downward mobility and of these, six were from the 24 Younger Cohort households. The quantitative data also revealed that most of the downward movement was among households of the Younger Cohort, though the proportion is lower than in the qualitative sub-sample. The qualitative data come from the perceptions of the caregivers, which are based on their life experiences and the shocks they have suffered and not actual measures of consumption and wealth as is the case with the survey data. Therefore the paper examines with greater care what the factors were that contributed to downward mobility, especially among the Younger Cohort. An in-depth analysis of three case studies will examine the reasons.

Of the six households referred to above, three were tribal, two were Muslim (from urban areas) and one was from the Backward Castes in a rural community. Each of the cases offers a more nuanced understanding of the peculiar mix of conditions and factors because of which these households have failed to benefit, while others in broadly similar circumstances have become better off. Here we examine the cases of the three tribal

5 Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and Other Castes are social groupings defined by the Government of India.

6 Poor and non-poor groupings within the Young Lives sample are based on consumption expenditure and the wealth index. Absolute poverty is defined as households with monthly consumption below Rs. 563.16 for urban areas and Rs. 433.43 for rural areas (in 2006 prices), based on the figures used by the National Sample Survey Organisation of India.

7 Two households could not be interviewed in this round.

households, with particular reference to the empowerment framework of Narayan and Petesch (2007).

3. The empowerment framework and three poverty trajectories

Empowerment is fundamentally about enlarging the freedom of poor and marginalised people to make choices and take actions to shape their lives. The empowerment framework developed by Narayan and Petesch (2007) helps to go beyond measuring poverty mobility and enables understanding of processes and causes which could explain differences in mobility outcomes.

Narayan and Petesch offer a model which consists of interaction between two sets of factors: (a) changes in the *opportunity structure*, consisting of the dominant institutional climate and social structures within which disadvantaged actors must work to advance their interests; and (b) changes in the capabilities of poor individuals or groups to take purposeful actions, that is, to exercise *agency*. According to Narayan and Petesch (2007: 15),

The opportunities for poor people to express and realise their interests can blossom where incentives are in place to support their access to information, their political inclusion, their ability to hold their leaders accountable, and their capacity for local organising. Conversely, where information is closely guarded, local power structures are excluding and unaccountable, and poor people lack basic freedoms of association and collective action, possibilities for their empowerment and economic mobility narrow considerably.

Agency is about people's ability to act individually or collectively to further their own interests. It refers to having the means to envision and make choices that can lead to their moving out of poverty. Narayan and Petesch argue that the likelihood of this outcome is a product of two broad forces: incentives and structures in the wider society, plus the assets and capabilities – both individual and collective – that poor and disadvantaged people can mobilise to achieve their goals. Individual and family assets and capabilities include the material assets and human capabilities that are available to poor men and women individually and to a family as a unit. They include social, political and psychological aspects and influence what a person is able to do or be.

Collective assets and capabilities enable poor people to organise and mobilise to be recognised on their own terms, to be represented, and to make their voices heard. For example, poor people's SHGs can be quite effective for increasing assets, solidarity and self-confidence among their members. As groups consolidate and federate and gain in numbers, they achieve recognition and political clout in the wider society. These enhanced capabilities in turn can increase their access to new economic and political opportunities (Narayan and Kapoor 2005). On the other hand, poor people's empowerment and mobility are also influenced by intra-family inequalities in status and power. While this framework helps in analysing downward mobility in the three cases presented below, we refine it as the underlying causes and processes are unravelled.

The three children whose cases we present below live in a village we are calling 'Patna'.⁸ Before outlining and discussing the cases, we provide background by describing Patna village.

3.1 Patna village: the home of the case study children

Patna is a remote tribal village in Srikakulam district, consisting of 18 hamlets or settlements. Each of the three children featuring in the case studies belongs to a different hamlet. The majority of Patna's population is from the Scheduled Tribes, with a small number of Forward and Backward Caste households. Agriculture, horticulture and non-timber forest produce, such as honey, fruit or soap nuts, are the prime sources of income in Patna. The land is very fertile, with a lot of water resources, and the main crop is cashew. The season for cashew starts in April and continues for three months. The Government has allotted land to members of the Scheduled Tribes – around 1 to 3 acres of dry land per household, for horticulture. Apart from cashew, the area is suitable for growing mango, pineapple, pulses, cereals and commercial crops like turmeric. Weekly markets bring people from the hamlets and neighbouring villages, including those living on the hilltops. They receive some of their groceries in exchange for the forest produce that they have collected. Some other barter exchanges also take place.

Without government programmes and schemes, people would face food shortages between April and June. During this period they depend largely on non-timber forest produce, which they are compelled to sell to the government-run Girijan Co-operative Corporation. However, they are paid very low prices compared to the open market as the prices are fixed in advance.

In 2007 the average daily wages were Rs. 50 to 70 (US\$1.00 to US\$1.30), with men and women being paid different rates. The Integrated Tribal Development Agency (ITDA) is an important source of employment for young people, who are being recruited as community teachers in large numbers, even those who have only ten years of basic schooling and no further training. Earlier, there were no government programmes and schemes, and people had to work for survival. Currently, under the PDS, the Government provides 4kg of rice, at Rs. 2 per kg per person, per month (with a maximum of 20kg per household) which otherwise costs Rs. 25 per kg in the market.

There are no all-weather access roads to any of the settlements of the village. Most habitations are accessible by road, though the approach roads are difficult to travel on, partly because some of the settlements are in hilly, forested areas. The community experiences frequent cyclones and roads are cut off by water flowing from the hills. Public transport consists of infrequent bus services, so people walk long distances to reach the nearest towns. All three case-study families live in hamlets or settlements which are about 3 to 4 kilometres from the main village.

The *sarpanch* (head of the village panchayat) represents the opposition party and is of the impression that the flow of public funds and sanction of programmes are limited compared to the *panchayats* represented by the ruling party.

⁸ All names of communities and respondents have been replaced by pseudonyms.

3.2 Case study: Chandani

Chandani, a Younger Cohort girl and the elder of two daughters, belongs to the Jatapa tribe. In terms of quintiles based on the wealth index, this household was in the second-poorest quintile in Round 2, moved to the poorest in Round 1 and stayed in that quintile in Round 3. Her caregiver says:

Our position never improved; we wanted to save but couldn't. We work in the MGNREGS and repay our debts. The money we earn is used to repay debts so we have never saved. In these ten years [since marriage] we have tried very hard to do better but couldn't. We faced lot of hardships in these ten years, so we were not able to improve.

Four years after Chandani's birth, her mother and father had their second daughter and gradually the household expenses started increasing. Chandani's mother did not work during these years as the children were young and needed her care and attention. The household recorded a decrease in income and an increase in expenditure due to the births. Their debt remained unpaid and the interest accumulated with a single earning member in the family, whose income was just sufficient to feed the family.

Chandani has been boarding in a government hostel for tribal girls since the age of 5 in order to attend school. She was 8 years old in 2010 and had returned home for a mid-term break when the third round of qualitative field work had begun, and she looked healthy. After about a week and a half, when the team visited her again to include her in a group activity, she seemed to have lost weight. In response to a casual observation by the facilitator, she said, "Mother now gives me little food." This indicated to us that Chandani's mother had problems providing enough food for her daughter, in spite of the Government's efforts to support tribal communities.

In the individual interview, while sharing their experiences of the family's economic mobility, Chandani's parents talked of how they have not moved forward in spite of the absence of all types of shocks (except those related to ill-health) that affected other households in the community. Chandani's father lost his parents very young and, as the eldest son, had to shoulder the responsibility for the family. On being married, the couple started their life with a debt that the husband had taken on in order to educate his younger brother (he had this responsibility as the older brother) who is now employed as a government teacher and does not recognise any obligation towards his brother. The husband had also taken out a loan for his own marriage. The couple have been working hard all these years to clear the debts and are very careful about spending money. Unlike many households in the village they did not even buy a TV.

Chandani's father and mother were sick when their daughter was about 2 years old. Then on and off small ailments persisted. Even when she was in the hostel, Chandani suffered an ear infection, fever, vomiting and stomach ache and had to be hospitalised a couple of times. Not trusting the government-run, ill-equipped primary health centre, her parents took her to a private hospital, which added to the debt burden of the household. More recently, in 2010, her father had a severe gastric problem and could not go to work for two months. Again they incurred high expenses in seeking private healthcare. Her mother could only work intermittently as she also had to look after her sick husband.

The couple felt that their position never improved and has in fact been deteriorating. They wanted to save but could not do so; they work in the MGNREGS and the money they have earned has been used to repay their debts. In the last ten years they have tried very hard to improve their situation but could not as they faced lot of hardship. If they have any health

problems, they need to beg and borrow money from someone to go to the hospital. This, they feel, is awkward and humiliating.

Chandani's mother had applied for the Government's Girl Child Protection Scheme, which provides government support to girls for education and marriage. She visited the office concerned several times to follow this up and request the inclusion of her daughter in the scheme but did not succeed. Feeling frustrated, she gave up and says that even the Government is not with them in their hardships. She preferred not to be a member of the women's SHG as she dreaded the pressure of repaying loans. Being poor, she was doubtful of her ability to save money and repay loans regularly.

The situation continues, the only change being that Chandani's mother has gone back to work, occasionally making use of her registration with the MGNREGS.

3.3 Case study: Krishna

Krishna, a Savara boy (another tribal community in Patna village), is the second of three children, the other two being girls. The elder girl is about three years older than Krishna and attends a government school while boarding in the hostel attached to the school. Krishna and his little sister attend the local government school. Most of the Savara tribes live on hilltops, have a dialect of their own and depend mostly on non-timber forest produce for their livelihood. The hamlet where Krishna lives is located on the plain but is quite remote with limited transport connections. Krishna's family was in the poorest wealth quintile in Round 1 and remained there in Rounds 2 and 3.

His family is an extended unit, with two of his cousins and a grandfather living with them. Krishna's uncle (his father's older brother) died and his widow eloped with another man, leaving her two children to be cared for by Krishna's father. He and his wife work as daily wage labourers and are the only wage-earners in the family. The paddy that is grown on the family's small piece of land is used for subsistence in addition to the 20kg that they procure every month through the PDS. Being poor, Krishna's father had to borrow money from money-lenders at a high rate of interest to meet the expenses of his expanded family. He became an alcoholic and fell into the debt trap. While he spent most of his income on alcohol, it was left to Krishna's mother to manage the family. The oxen and cows that the family had were gradually sold to clear the debts, adding to their hardships.

By the time the researchers returned in 2010 for the third round of qualitative fieldwork, the family had lost Krishna's grandfather. They had spent a lot of money on healthcare services at the private hospitals as the government hospital was badly equipped. After his death, following the cultural norms, in order to perform all the last rites and rituals, the family borrowed again from money-lenders and the debt trap became worse.

The financial difficulties encountered by the family, coupled with the father's alcoholism, led to marital conflicts that resulted in the mother leaving the family, with the children left with the father for a few days until she returned.

3.4 Case study: Saroja

Saroja's family, from the Jatapa tribe, was in quintile two, the second-poorest quintile, in Round 1 when Saroja was about a year old. They had dropped into quintile 1 by Round 2 and remained there in Round 3. They live in a small hamlet belonging to Patna village and comprising about 15 households. In 2010, during the third round of the qualitative study, Saroja boarded at the Mini Gurukulam for girls (a residential government school for tribal

children). Earlier she had attended the local government school where she repeated Grade 1 due to low performance, a decision taken by the teacher in the interest of the child. Saroja's mother struggled hard to secure admission into the Mini Gurukulam, which she considered important for Saroja to provide her with good education and keep her away from the home environment, which she thinks was not conducive to learning. Saroja's older sister, who is in the 7th grade, attends a similar school. The family is in no position to pay for private schools.

A couple of months after Saroja's birth, both Saroja and her mother fell seriously ill and took quite a long time to recover. The family incurred huge expenses at the private hospital. The only source of finance available was a money-lender. Saroja's mother used to be a member of the SHG, through which she had received a loan of Rs. 9,000, like the other members of the group. As the loan was not repaid, her group did not receive any further credit and became defunct. Unable to access loans from the women's group, Saroja's parents have no choice but to borrow from a money-lender, to whom the interest has to be paid on a weekly basis (every Tuesday) at 2.5 per cent (10 per cent per month and 120 per cent per annum). Saroja's grandparents were poor themselves and could not extend a helping hand.

Saroja's mother reported Rs. 2,000–3,000 per year as the minimum expenditure on healthcare. The year 2010 was quite bad for the family, with all the family members falling ill, several times. Saroja's mother and father missed about ten days of work each month between them through ill-health.

The family depends on daily wage work. The couple worked hard and felt that the situation had gradually improved until Saroja's father became addicted to alcohol during the period when her mother was sick. In two years the situation worsened. The father often missed work, causing financial hardship to the household. Not attending work gradually became more common and Saroja's mother became the sole wage-earner in the household. She cried while explaining how difficult it was for her to run the family and said that she had had to struggle all her life.

For a couple of years Saroja's mother managed to find work as a domestic help with an employee of the State Government's poverty alleviation programme. Later she worked for the project officer of the ITDA, which meant moving to Hyderabad, the State capital, with the officer's family in the hope of receiving help from him. The officer was instrumental in securing admission for Saroja into the Mini Gurukulam, which took a long time because of the high demand for such schools.

Later the family was provided with a house under the Government's housing programme for poor people, which requires the household to make an investment. The subsidy is released in instalments as the construction progresses into different stages. Not wanting to forgo the opportunity, the family again borrowed money and the debt kept increasing over the period. The house is still incomplete: the Government stopped releasing money for it because the family couldn't provide their share of the money, and later the grant was cancelled. In the meantime Saroja's mother lost her father, again requiring money for the family to travel home and to perform certain rituals.

What is evident in the three case studies is that the opportunity structure is expanding in some areas while shrinking in other spheres. Several macro factors influence households such as those of Chandani, Krishna and Saroja. These are discussed below.

4. Exploring facets of the empowerment framework in relation to the case study households

4.1 Social group and location

The empowerment framework identifies the norms of behaviour and values and social hierarchies that govern one's ability to negotiate systems. Among the social groupings defined by the Government of India (Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Backward Classes and Other Castes), Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are the poorest, with a poverty ratio of 16 per cent in rural areas.

We pointed out earlier that growth in consumption varied with social group. The order of consumption levels among the social groups in the Young Lives sample remained the same in Round 3 as in Round 2. Urban consumption was higher than rural consumption in both the rounds: consumption for urban households rose from Rs. 964 in Round 2 to Rs. 1,123 in Round 3 (an increase of 16.5 per cent), while it rose from Rs. 759 to Rs. 881 for rural households (an increase of 16 per cent). Belonging to a tribal community is a distinct disadvantage.

However, belonging to a social group is not sufficient to explain people's circumstances. Their geographic location is also significant for mobility and access to markets, other livelihoods and services such as health and education. The tribal population is generally located in remote, isolated areas, which makes access and mobility difficult, thereby impacting their livelihood choices and socio-economic conditions. Tribal populations therefore face a double disadvantage of social category and location, which limits the pace of growth when compared to growth in urban or other rural communities. Further, the condition of tribal communities in hilly regions is generally worse than those in the plains. Although tribal regions do have a range of special government provision (free residential schools, youth training and employment programmes, the inclusion of local horticulture in MGNREGS and so on)⁹ and are given more attention, this is not sufficient. Much greater effort and much more policy support is required in the more remote tribal settlements. Special programmes and strategies are required to reach them with respect and sensitivity.

Like Patna, many other tribal communities are restricted by lack of information and access to other regions, weak economic and political support and limited capacity to organise themselves for collective action. Therefore they grow at a much slower pace than communities advantaged by the presence of these factors. Further, changes in children's lives may be at least in part related to changes at the community level.

⁹ The Horticulture Department had been providing subsidies to individual farms in order to promote horticulture and provide employment, but people had to work on their farms themselves. Now labour costs are met by the MGNREGS and so these farms are more productive.

4.2 Institutional climate, SHGs and exclusion

Poor institutional climate, where norms operate in an exclusionary manner, is yet another factor in sustaining chronic poverty. Government schemes, the education system and safety nets are expected to help households like those of Chandani, Krishna and Saroja. However these schemes are not experienced as being sensitive, inclusive and caring, especially by poor people. The fact that Chandani's mother could not access the Government's Girl Child Protection Scheme was significant, and exclusion continued to remain a dominant experience. Social exclusion is the breakdown of the relationship that links an individual to society (Klanfer 1965). All the links between an excluded person and society around them – family ties, economic integration, citizenship – are at risk of being damaged or severed.

People living in poverty gain a certain identity from sharing in the group dynamic of SHGs, where the collective gives them the strength to deal with their poverty. The links they build become a means to resist exclusion and achieve a certain amount of support and security. However, as Chandani's case illustrates, a good number of poor people are excluded from SHGs too. Saroja's case also indicates how the rules of the government housing scheme excluded her family from owning a house and the SHG did not seem to facilitate collective action on her behalf. The importance of promoting social justice for those who are excluded is not prominent within the frame of reference of policymakers. The thrust remains on numbers and statistics of those who benefited from schemes and programmes. The need to examine who is excluded is never the focus, and therefore households like Chandani's and Saroja's continue to struggle.

A number of studies (Kemp et al. 2004; Appleton et al. 2009; Palmer 2007) show that poor people strongly believe that education is the pathway to progress and movement out of poverty. Therefore ensuring basic education for children, including girls, is viewed as a priority. This is evident from the narratives of all three children where their mothers say that they want their children to be admitted to schools and also stay away from the everyday poverty struggles and the experience of deprivation. They prefer their children to be admitted to residential schools where they can study in peace in the right environment. However, the way in which the 'opportunity structure' operates needs attention. There is stiff competition for admission into these residential schools. The fact that the system operates to include or exclude children from certain groups and locations (those who are poor or belong to specific tribes, ethnic groups, and so on) is a matter of policy concern.

4.3 Low wages and risks associated with ill-health

Subsistence agriculture, access to forest resources and wage work are the dominant livelihoods of poor people in the tribal regions. With small parcels of land, households such as Chandani's, which are dependent on rainfall for irrigation, prefer to grow rice to ensure food security. In the Young Lives study, downward mobility among households is seen in an area which ironically is resource-rich: people grow multiple crops and fruits throughout the year and receive good rainfall. Livelihood diversification and asset creation are important strategies to deal with poverty and associated with challenges related to the opportunity structure in the empowerment framework. Although wage work is available, wages do not conform to the minimum prescribed by the state.¹⁰ Therefore people need to look at other sources of income. This partially explains the indebtedness of poor households.

10 Under the MGNREGS the current mandated wage rate is Rs. 137 per day for 100 days. However, the average availability of work is only for 40 to 50 days. Tribal households have to find other sources of work where wages are much lower.

We have mentioned weather conditions that frequently disrupt Patna's connections to the outside world. These shocks are beyond their control but the requisite improvement in infrastructure (in the form of better roads and drains) by the Government has not taken place. Repeated occurrence of shocks, whether covariant or idiosyncratic, can constrain households from building their assets.

In addition to cyclones, people in this village also face poor sanitation, with open drains and the absence of a proper system of rubbish disposal. This has caused unhealthy and unhygienic living conditions. Shifts in eating habits and consumption patterns, the influx of goods sold in plastic wrappers and the indiscriminate dumping of rubbish and animal excrement have created health problems in the community.

The case study of Chandani has shown how her family had to incur huge expenses in situations of ill-health, which added to the existing debts of the family. Similarly, Saroja's mother incurred large expenses at the private hospital when she and her family members were sick, and Krishna's grandfather also had to be taken to a private hospital for treatment.

Poor people report more health shocks, which affect the formation of human capital, the only capital available to poor households. Losses of existing assets and increased expenditure as in the case of health-related shocks push families into the debt trap, from which it is often difficult to escape. Unless households receive support at the right time to mitigate the impact of shocks, the low asset level coupled with the impact of shocks can make them more vulnerable.

In the Young Lives sample the health situation of households appeared to be a cause of concern. In rural and tribal areas almost all the households reported illnesses that affected more than one person in the family. A good amount of their income was spent on their health needs. For example, when a member of one of the households had chikunguniya fever, that household had to spend Rs. 500–1,000 on medicines. Due to the absence of adequate care in government hospitals, people were forced to go to private hospitals and pay for services. The Rajiv Arogyasri health insurance scheme implemented by the Government is expected to meet private healthcare costs for poor people in cases of chronic illnesses that need hospitalisation, surgery etc. However, day-to-day health problems, the treatment of which can be a burden on poor families, are not included under the scheme. Poor people often complain about this and therefore it would be worth re-designing the scheme to meet all their health needs. In fact, many argue that insurance schemes for the poorest of the poor cannot be viable.

Generally, welfare and social protection measures are expected to help households experiencing shocks in the form of ill-health or droughts, floods and other environmental shocks. However 'when systems of social protection do not work or do not exist or simply do not reach those trapped in chronic poverty, family and community solidarity is the best defense against deprivation' (Godinot and Wodon 2006: 301). This takes us to examining how individual or cultural factors operate at the level of the household when asserting one's dignity may result in exclusion from wider society. The idea of upholding individual and household dignity is significant in understanding the way poor people exercise choices and negotiate well-being. This is elaborated further in the next section.

4.4 Asserting dignity as agency: a form of resistance?

Sense of agency is interpreted as optimism, drive, self-confidence, perseverance and aspirations and ability to take risks (Narayan and Petesch 2007). It is often argued that limited agency among poor people can adversely affect a household's ability to move out of

poverty. However, for a person who has experienced deep struggles on various fronts, maintaining her dignity is another form of agency that needs to be recognised instead of labelling poor women such as Chandani's mother as 'lacking in agency'. Such an interpretation is tantamount to blaming poor people for their condition.

In Patna the *sarpanch* belongs to the Telugu Desam party, the lead opposition party, which seems to partly explain the limited flow of government funds to this village. The *panchayat* has 14 wards and several bodies working for welfare, including 57 women's SHGs, NGOs and a local church. For Chandani's family, access to these potential sources of help, which could have enhanced their capabilities, was a major challenge.

The interview with Chandani's mother revealed that her inability to use the SHGs was linked to her reticence arising out of the nature of negotiations that took place with the SHG leader. On probing, it was found that the way SHG rules were explained drove her away rather than making her feel that the SHG could be a way out of her indebtedness. Understanding and support from the SHG was lacking. She experienced trepidation when the SHG's rules were explained. Following local norms and power structures, many SHGs focus excessively on a member's ability to pay back loans as a criterion for membership, subverting formal rules. When narrating her experience, she came across as a person who is dignified, preferring not to join the SHG rather than experience shame and humiliation in her community.

Struggling with acute poverty and indebtedness from the time she got married, Chandani's mother seemed sensitive to the absence of support from other SHG members. "We have faced so many difficulties but no one helps us" was her candid statement. The extent of risk (of non-payment) perceived by her, resulted in her choosing to remain out of the SHG and thus being unable to benefit from its support. The absence of reciprocity and the resultant sense of isolation she experienced demonstrate the erosion of traditional community bonds in a modernising tribal society. She continues to struggle and persevere in her own quiet and dignified manner.

Respecting rules as explained was far more important than risking defaulting on a loan for Chandani's mother, who did not experience support in this purportedly participatory and empowerment-oriented programme meant for poverty alleviation. The individualisation of troubles at the family level and a feeling that one should manage one's own circumstances is another element of agency where dignity is more important than the risk of experiencing public or community shame.

Excessively individualist forms of development schemes and programmes are often in sharp contrast to the traditional community-oriented support strategies. In the former, tribal people have to declare themselves as poor, which for Chandani's mother was not acceptable. She preferred to maintain her self-esteem and dignity, which needs to be viewed as one form of resistance to the market forces and state governance structures, in the face of which she prefers to suffer in silence. This needs to be viewed as a form of assertion and agency.

Similarly, the indignity experienced by Krishna's mother when she was struggling to make ends meet while her husband spent his income on alcohol needs to be seen from her perspective. It is out of distress that she left home, although she did return. Leaving home needs to be seen as a form of assertion to perhaps make the husband realise what she experienced every day – the pressure of feeding the children, looking after the health needs of an ageing father-in-law and making ends meet with a debt burden looming large. In the case of Saroja's mother, the inability to repay the SHG loan restricted access to further loans and she decided "we will not take help or credit from others, if we take from others it will be a

problem to repay". Instead she now borrows from a money-lender at an exorbitant interest rate of 60 per cent per annum.

The ability of SHG leaders or members to provide support seems to be absent when viewed from the perspective of this household, which has become poorer. Other studies also show that about 10 per cent of poor people are left out of SHGs in Andhra Pradesh (SERP 2009). This raises questions about the ways in which the government opportunity structure operates, where those in debt or experiencing acute poverty remain excluded. The pro-poor strategy of the Government does not touch these households. Attempts to reach them need to be intensified.

When conditions are not conducive to accessing services, opportunities are only notional, as seen in the case of Chandani's mother who did not get support from government schemes or programmes, was dejected, became aloof and finally turned to religious institutions for help.

4.5 Indebtedness: household endowments, intergenerational factors and stage of life cycle

In the empowerment framework the assets and capabilities are described in terms of the five dimensions, which are material/physical, human, social, political and psychological (Narayan and Petesch 2007). These can only be acquired by a family over time if the household begins with an endowment that lasts until the assets are gradually acquired. One of the enduring disadvantages for poor people is their indebtedness. In the absence of specific endowments or where the family life begins with debts, as was the case with Chandani's father, the household may remain in or fall into poverty. Therefore where the households are in their life cycle – early, middle or late – and how they start will have implications for their likely wealth trajectories. It is therefore also important to understand what endowments a household begins with. Normally, poor households tend to face a difficult time during the early stages of the household cycle and until the children begin to work, and then their wealth is gradually likely to improve and then again often decline as the children leave home. Krishna and Chandani's fathers had to deal with expenses during the early stages of their life cycles (because of the death of a father, the education and marriage of a brother and the birth of children).

The experiential dimension of the man who was orphaned with a younger brother to take care of, at the age of 13, and who inherited a debt burden, needs attention. Through a long-drawn-out struggle over 20 years, he ensured that his younger brother received higher education right up to Masters level. He married only after the younger brother was settled into a job and married; and his own wife continues to struggle at multiple levels. For example, in addition to not having money, living up to the social norm of demonstrating fertility and bearing children in quick succession, and dealing with health expenses, both created considerable stress. During this period of their life cycle, having just one member earning was insufficient to deal with household expenses and clearing the debts.

Cumulative economic and psychological distress is seen in the case of Krishna's household, where the death of an uncle placed an added responsibility on Krishna's father, who had to look after his brother's children. Krishna's mother worked hard but with the death of the grandfather, the expenses related to obligatory rituals added to the family's debt burden. This was also seen in the case of Saroja's household when her grandfather died. The alcoholism of Krishna and Saroja's fathers and their inability to deal with the pressures and consequent indebtedness increased the struggles of these households. Similarly Krishna's mother left the house for a few days due to marital conflict and tensions caused by the father's alcoholism.

While Narayan and Petesch (2007) point out that cohesive family relations can provide a powerful resource for accumulating assets and capacities and for exercising agency, what we find is that poverty itself can create serious conflict and tension within the family.

Scant state support was available for these households, which were forced into indebtedness at the hands of money-lenders who charge a very high rate of interest. This suggests that SHGs and banks also marginalise or exclude the poorest.

Following the empowerment framework (Narayan and Petesch 2007), each of the cases illustrate how the dominant social structures, the formal institutions of the state and the private sector are often inaccessible by or unhelpful to the poorest of the poor. The form and structure of these institutions and the assumptions they make need to be located within the larger structural context, which shapes the relationship between state policies and the poor. For example, the assumptions they make on how welfare schemes work need to be interrogated in the light of the experiences of poor people.

5. Withdrawal of the state and structural issues

India is the world's fourth-largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity (World Bank 2012) and has experienced about 21 years of neo-liberal policies. Andhra Pradesh is one of the states that pursued the structural adjustment programmes directed by the World Bank (Reddy et al. 2001). The influence structural adjustment has had on government policy, social sector spending, poverty and decision making is far-reaching. We have pointed out that while the economic growth in India and in Andhra Pradesh has been remarkable, poverty reduction has been slow and challenges still remain. Inequalities among the Young Lives sample remained more or less the same between 2006 and 2009 (Galab et al. 2011) and in fact appear to be rising. Similarly, reductions in rural poverty are not necessarily due to growth but are probably the result of several government programmes.

The three case studies presented and discussed above reflect the flawed neo-liberal policies which recommend withdrawal of the state and suggest that the Government's role is only to 'enable'. The failure to support very poor people such as the families of Chandani, Krishna and Saroja points to broader structural issues which are omitted from the empowerment framework, which localises the problem of poverty between citizens, their immediate contexts and their governments and local institutions. In fact, for the poorest of the poor, the ability to access even subsidised schemes (such as housing) that require a contribution from the user remains limited as these people do not have the means to contribute. Their choice is therefore to remain excluded from the scheme or to incur debt, borrowing money at exorbitant rates of interest. In such a scenario withdrawal of the state from the social sector would prove to be disastrous.

One of the major criticisms of World Bank policies is that the process of trade liberalisation and its suggestion of reduced public spending creates inequalities and jobless growth, and increases poverty (Kelley and D'Souza 2010). Further, the negative impacts of the World Bank on local democratic processes and on the environment also need to be examined when the inability of the chronically poor to move out of poverty is analysed. For example, mining is proposed in several places, many of which are tribal areas and the resource appropriation

leaves the tribal people struggling with newer systems which hold promise but function in a manner that makes them inaccessible to many. How do the poor show resistance? One way is quiet acceptance of their predicament and another is to join the Naxalite-Maoist insurgent groups, which confront the Government through armed violence.

Poverty mobility is a dynamic process influenced by the interaction between the opportunity structure and agency. The three case studies bring out clearly how being low on the opportunity structure due to constraints beyond their control, and possessing poor assets and capabilities while suffering a variety of shocks, can prevent poor people from exercising choices and from fighting for better deals for themselves. The state, which is expected to offer social protection to these very households, eludes them.

6. Conclusion

The specific issues facing children are often lost when national datasets are used that consider only households and fail to consider inequalities within them (Saporiti 1994). In poverty studies, while quantitative data reveal trends and patterns, it is the detailing of how diverse factors converge or operate at the individual level, at the interpersonal level and at the level of the household that provides explanatory power to examine closely why some families of children in the Younger Cohort became poorer. The case studies of Chandani, Saroja and Krishna, all from tribal households, reveal how multiple, interlocking sets of disadvantages leave poor people feeling exhausted, powerless, excluded, insecure and vulnerable. They illuminate how poverty dynamics operate where micro processes interact with broad macro factors in creating chronic poverty amongst certain households.

Although there is considerable poverty mobility in the sampled households, the three case-study households and a few others have been experiencing chronic poverty for over ten years. Factors emerging from an analysis of the case studies that explain the downward movement include

- location of the households (more tribal households)
- households at the beginning of the family life cycle
- households with young children, meaning fewer hands to work
- households which started off on debts rather than on endowments
- households suffering shocks (economic and health shocks in particular).

The paper argues that an analysis that captures the role of agency and opportunity structure in shaping poverty mobility can inform strategies that support transitions out of poverty. Further, a host of social, cultural and psychological aspects of how an individual or a household negotiates the opportunity structures and institutions based on their experiences of these systems need attention. For some, dignity is to be preserved under any circumstances. They want to avoid loss of face and they experience many of the institutions as unhelpful, cold and distant from their realities. Modernisation and the gradual erosion of tribal culture seem to be causing traditional and kinship ties, the sense of obligation, mutuality and support, to break up. The deterioration in the quality of common property resources and the penetration of government schemes which focus on individual beneficiaries are other possible factors that cause households to experience a loss of psychological support.

The experiences of the case-study households provide insight into how some families' downward mobility can be much against the normal trend in the same community. Descent and ascent are outcomes of the process of poor people trying, amongst other factors, to maintain and protect their dignity and self-esteem. The idea of dignity and self-esteem must be included in the empowerment framework: poor people make choices that cause them to be excluded from social schemes in order to preserve this. This explains how and why targeted approaches have not worked for some and why they experience downward mobility.

The factors facilitating upward mobility and those causing a descent are not the same and so similar policies and programmes may not hold good for the two very different population groups who move out of and into poverty. As Anirudh Krishna (2007) argues, differences in the reasons for escape and descent will also require that distinct anti-poverty policies are put in place. He suggests that two sets of policies are necessary; one set to help promote escapes from poverty and a different set to control against descents into poverty. The need to take into account the complex processes, dynamics and multiple influences in children's lives is clear.

Finally, there is a compounding of the influence of macro factors – multilateral aid agencies strongly influencing national policies (such as reduction or removal of subsidies, a push for privatisation and so on) which affect poor people. These agencies have redefined the role of government and governance structures and the prevailing institutional climate – all of which affect poor people directly.

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Chronic Poverty Amid Growth: Insights from Long-term Poverty Trajectories

There has been growing interest in researching the dynamics of poverty, including poverty mobility. Looking at change over time and what caused this change can provide useful information for policymakers and those who seek to influence them. Young Lives is a longitudinal study of child poverty and provides ample scope to dwell on this area, making use of the three rounds of survey data and of qualitative data from sub-sample children. The focus in this paper is tribal households not conforming to the general trend of upward mobility. It locates these households, analyses their characteristics, and identifies the factors that cause the downward mobility of certain households. The specific context, the nature of negotiations the households have with the welfare institutions, and the experiential dimension of everyday struggles are discussed, keeping in mind the perspective of those in chronic poverty. We argue that the choices that poor people make can be seen as resistance to being labelled and that, by making these choices, they are also upholding the notion of agency and self-esteem. The paper concludes by drawing attention to structural aspects that shape poverty trajectories, and the policy implications of these.



About Young Lives

Young Lives is an international study of childhood poverty, involving 12,000 children in 4 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 4 study countries: Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam.

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

Young Lives Partners

Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Professor Jo Boyden.

- *Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Ethiopia*
- *Centre for Economic and Social Sciences, Andhra Pradesh, India*
- *Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University), Andhra Pradesh, India*
- *Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (Group for the Analysis of Development), Peru*
- *Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (Institute for Nutrition Research), Peru*
- *Center for Analysis and Forecasting, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam*
- *General Statistics Office, Vietnam*
- *Child and Youth Studies Group (CREET), The Open University, UK*
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