

Equality and Education in Peruvian schools

YOUNG LIVES IMPACT AND LEARNING • CASE STUDY 5

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Sharing research findings with decision-makers and ensuring their uptake is a crucial task for the Young Lives Team. To inform and influence means looking carefully and strategically at how we communicate information and knowledge. Communications, like policy engagement, needs to be recognised as a multi-directional effort, with researchers and stakeholders positively involved in planning and carrying out communications work as well as the other aspects of the project, in order to create an environment where informed decision-making is possible.

By employing multiple engagement tools in a variety of ways, Young Lives Peru has become known as reliable source of research data and policy analysis for a diverse range of stakeholders working in education.

Education is perceived as key for development in Peru as it is for many developing countries. But research from Young Lives has found that indigenous and rural children are far more likely to suffer from diminished educational opportunities and outcomes than their urban counterparts. What role does communications play in helping Young Lives researchers use this evidence to influence educational policy in Peru and encourage a fairer system?

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The importance of diversity

Young Lives has employed a number of ways of disseminating its research findings on education and engaging with a variety of stakeholders. These include:

Hosting workshops: Over the past year, Young Lives in Peru has published 4 working papers in Spanish and organised a workshop to launch each. This gives us an opportunity to discuss our research and its policy implications with around 25 key stakeholders from the research community, NGOs, and government. These workshops are kept small to allow for more open interaction, and feedback from participants has been very positive. Resulting from this, Young Lives researchers now are often invited as presenters or discussants at academic or policy meetings for a variety of stakeholders (e.g. the World Bank and Plan International).

A one-day seminar: In September 2010 Young Lives organised an international seminar on *Access and Equity in Early Education: National and International Perspectives*, to present the findings of its research funded by the Bernard van

Leer Foundation, alongside research on education from other organisations. Young Lives Peru invited the Head of pre-school, primary and secondary education from the Ministry of Education, to comment on the findings and discuss their implications for policy, which has led to positive and ongoing discussions within her department at the Ministry.

Commenting on Government plans: In the run-up to Peru's presidential election, the Young Lives team had one-to-one exchanges with party members, commented on education plans and met with international education advisors.

Linking with Ministries and local governments: Young Lives has provided advice to the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) on the universalisation of pre-school (for children age 3 to 5) and age of entry into first grade. With the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MIMDES) we have maintained a link with the Head of the National Programme of Wawa Wasi, a pre-school programme for poor children from 6 months to 4 years. And at local level, the Young Lives country coordinator, Santiago Cueto, met with Director of Health and Social Well-being of the recently elected Lima Municipality as the new administration wanted information to support an expansion of the Wawa Wasi service in Lima. We were able to take the opportunity to explain our key findings from our programme of research on the Wawa Wasi services and suggested ways in which the Municipality could tackle some of the issues of inequality in Lima.

Engaging with the media: To coincide with the publication of each of our working papers, Young Lives researchers have written opinion pieces on education inequality for Peru's main newspaper and published comment pieces related to our research findings on education. Radio interviews and contributions to network newsletters widen our outreach. While this necessitates a considerable amount of researcher time, and a press officer who can make the links for them, this approach of regular and considered interaction with selected journalists and media outlets is paying off in terms of raised profile not only for Young Lives, but more importantly for issues of childhood poverty in Peru.



Making the links between research and action

Through this combination of concerted action Young Lives Peru is known as a reliable source of information on education issues for academic and government institutions, politicians, activists and members of national and international networks.

The Director of Regular Education at MINEDU has attended various Young Lives academic and policy activities as a participant and a discussant and has encouraged the Ministry's partners to use Young Lives findings as an input for some of their legal directions. The Director's office also asked for Young Lives input into an aide-memoire supporting a recent resolution on the legal age for starting primary school, the final text of which included qualitative data from Young Lives. In parallel, Young Lives has supported the expansion of the Wawa Wasi programme by undertaking three studies and suggesting ways to strengthen its future work.

While it is not possible to claim attribution, all major candidates in the 2011 Peru Presidential election promised to prioritise attention to Wawa Wasi and rural education, in alignment with Young Lives proposals and evidence on inequality.

Conclusion

By employing multiple engagement tools in a variety of ways, Young Lives Peru has become known as a reliable source of research data and policy analysis for a diverse range of stakeholders working in education. The strength of this reputation almost certainly rests on the decision to only engage in debates and discussions where Young Lives research can make the most impact but also on the commitment of Young Lives researchers to communicate their work.

Further reading

Patricia Ames, Vanessa Rojas and Tamia Portugal (2010) *Continuity and Respect for Diversity: Strengthening Early Transitions in Peru*, Bernard van Leer Foundation Working Paper 56

Patricia Ames, Vanessa Rojas and Tamia Portugal (2009) *Starting School: Who is Prepared?: Young Lives Research on Children's Transition to First Grade in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 47

Patricia Ames, Vanessa Rojas and Tamia Portugal (2009) *Childhood, Transitions and Well-being in Peru: A Literature Review*, Young Lives Technical Note 16

Santiago Cueto, Gabriela Guerrero, Juan Leon, Alvaro Zevallos and Claudia Sugimaru (2010) *Promoting Early Childhood Development through a Public Programme: Wawa Wasi in Peru*, Young Lives Working Paper 51

Caitlin Porter (2010) *What Shapes the Influence Evidence Has on Policy? The Role of Politics in Research Utilisation*, Young Lives Working Paper 62

