

# Building relationships to leverage change: Young Lives and Ethiopia's Ministry of Education

YOUNG LIVES IMPACT AND LEARNING • CASE STUDY 2

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Relationships between national government departments, donor agencies and the Young Lives study are integral to the success of linking research to policy and practice and the programme's partnership with Ethiopia's Ministry of Education Technical Working Group (TWG) is no exception.

After being presented with preliminary findings from the Young Lives survey of schools in Ethiopia in late 2010, the TWG set up a special task force to work with the Young Lives team and other academics to provide guidance on issues of major policy concern and how they might be investigated using the schools survey data.

In a context where attribution difficulties mean we never have perfect proof that our research has led to policy change, Young Lives relationship with the Task Force re-emphasises the importance of continuous engagement with policy stakeholders throughout the research cycle – not just at the end.

***Research in Ethiopia by Young Lives has found school to be one of the most important institutions in children's lives. The same study also suggested that the government, donors NGOs, private organisations, and the community need to cooperate in order to increase access to education, and to prioritise the quality of education. How successful has Young Lives been at influencing those responsible for leveraging change?***

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Since Young Lives invited a ministry official to attend its international conference in Oxford in 2009, the Ministry has been an active collaborator with Young Lives, commenting on the design of research questions and tools as well as playing a key role in facilitating policy-relevant discussions of the study's findings.

## **Sharing findings, stimulating debate**

When planning how to share the preliminary findings from its school survey, Young Lives recognised that the Ministry and key donors could also provide useful guidance through their joint Technical Working Group (TWG) about which topics would be of most policy relevance and interest to them. It was also anticipated that their responses may also influence the focus of related research.

A presentation was made to the Group on 17 November 2010, which was attended by around 20 participants from the Ministry and key donors, including bilateral and multilateral donors (DFID, the Dutch, Finnish and Italian development agencies, USAID, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP, the EU and World Bank).

In addition to the useful comments made at the time, the TWG also suggested that a smaller task force should be established to help Young Lives keep them informed of their work, give feedback on the design of research, and involve them in recommending areas of focus for future analysis.

The Education Task Force was composed of a group of 13 people from the Ministry and international organisations and multilateral donors (EU, UNICEF, World Bank) as well as bilateral donors (DFID, and the Dutch, Italian, and Finnish cooperation departments) which first met on 14 December 2010 to discuss a list of issues prepared by researchers from Young Lives Ethiopia.

## **First steps towards policy influence**

The Task Force expressed great interest in the work of Young Lives, notably in terms of equity and quality of education and the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP) process and the question of exclusion. The Task Force also wishes to evaluate specific educational interventions and has asked Young Lives to help assess their impact.

By keeping the Task Force updated about the papers the Young Lives team is writing, researchers created further interest in its work and helped stimulate debates on various policy-relevant issues, notably on equity and quality of education, as well as open the way for the dissemination of the research findings.



## Lessons learned

*Change begins at home:* It is still too early to talk about whether Young Lives work with the Task Force has led to policy influence or change but we can say that the relationship has changed the way Young Lives researchers engage with policymakers.

*Policy influence is a slow process:* The first round of the school survey has been useful in establishing a baseline, but Young Lives will need to carry out a second round to be able to evaluate the impact of recent policy interventions.

*The earlier the engagement, the better:* Young Lives has learnt that because the policy environment is so complex, processes are slow and relationships need time to nurture, the programme has to involve key policy actors from the outset.

## Conclusion

Education is a key issue for Ethiopian development. The government together with donors have agreed that it is important to promote school quality improvement. The Ministry of Education Donor Task Force is an important channel for Young Lives to be able to interact with and potentially influence both government and key donors interested in education by relating our findings to other work and policy priorities.

In a context where attribution difficulties mean we never have perfect proof that our research has led to policy change, Young Lives relationship with the Task Force re-emphasises the importance of continuous engagement with policy stakeholders from the outset of our research – not just at the end.

