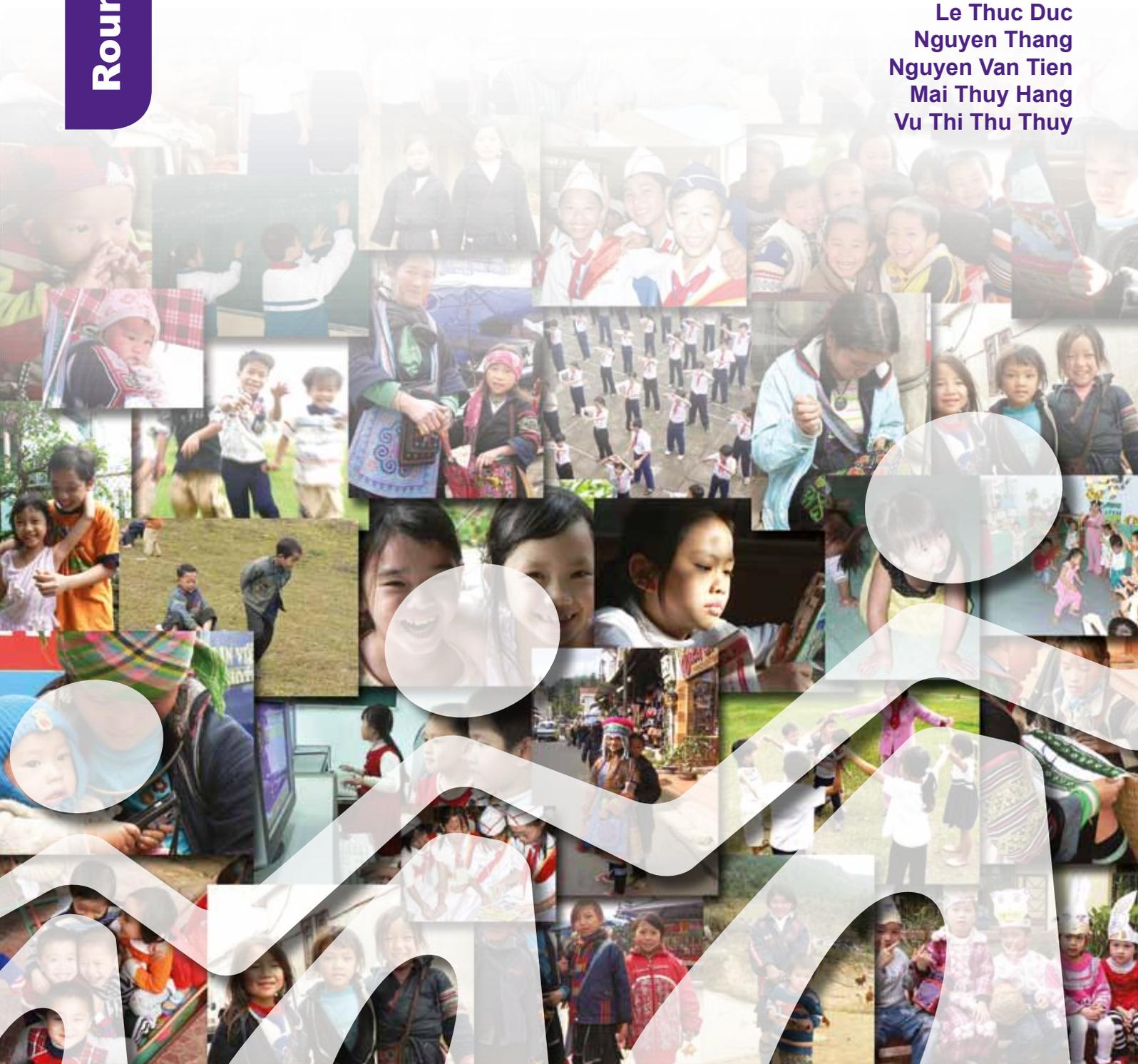


# How Do Children Fare in the New Millennium?

Initial findings from VIETNAM

Le Thuc Duc  
Nguyen Thang  
Nguyen Van Tien  
Mai Thuy Hang  
Vu Thi Thu Thuy



## **Round 3** Survey Report

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Initial findings from Vietnam

**September 2011**

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Initial Findings from Vietnam

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>ADB</b>	Asian Development Bank
<b>CPRGS</b>	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
<b>FDI</b>	Foreign direct investment
<b>MOET</b>	Ministry of Education and Training
<b>MOIT</b>	Ministry of Industry and Trade
<b>MOH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MOLISA</b>	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
<b>MPI</b>	Ministry of Planning and Investment
<b>NA</b>	National Assembly
<b>PPVT</b>	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test
<b>SCiV</b>	Save the Children in Viet Nam
<b>SRV</b>	Socialist Republic of Vietnam
<b>VHLSS</b>	Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (2002, 2004 and 2006)
<b>VLSS</b>	Vietnam Living Standards Survey (1992/3 and 1997/8)
<b>VND</b>	Viet Nam Dong (monetary unit)

# Executive Summary

In Round 3 of data gathering, from mid-September 2009 to early January 2010, the Young Lives team in Vietnam visited 2,939 of the Young Lives children and their households (1,963 of the 8-year-olds and 976 of the 15-year-olds). The accumulated attrition rate over seven years is 2 per cent. Among the children remaining in the sample, girls account for 49.3 per cent. The proportion of ethnic minority children in the sample is about that in a nationally representative sample.

The data suggested that progress in absolute poverty reduction continued in all sections of the population in Vietnam, but was most significant for ethnic minorities and children whose caregivers had had no schooling. There was also some (slower) progress in relative measures of poverty for some population groups. The progress in poverty reduction, however, should not be interpreted as a true reflection of the nationwide progress on this matter. Specific demographic characteristics – the households in the sample have either 8-year-old, or 15-year-old children – were instrumental in the poverty reduction.

Progress in poverty reduction occurs in conjunction with another favourable dynamic, as the rate of upward mobility (across the poverty line, from poor to non-poor) is much greater than that of downward mobility (from non-poor to poor) for the period between Round 2 and Round 3. Poverty in the rural sector is more dynamic than it is in the urban sector, in the sense that a greater percentage of poor rural households escaped poverty and a greater percentage of non-poor rural households became poor over that period than did urban households.

Over the years from Round 1 to Round 3 (2002 to 2009), the wealth index increased for all the groups of households considered. The relative positions of the regions by wealth index remain largely unchanged from previous rounds of the surveys, and there is no clear trend of an increasing gap in wealth index between the groups. In all the rounds of the surveys, the wealth index is positively associated with the level of schooling of the caregivers of the Young Lives children.

Access to safe water in the urban sector has largely been universal, and therefore the progress made in supplying safe water was mostly because of the rural sector. The gap between the urban and rural sectors decreased in percentage points from 41 per cent in 2002 to 24 per cent in 2006 and went down further to 19 per cent in 2009. For both sectors, the rate of access to improved sanitation facilities increased gradually from Round 1, and in 2009, 62 per cent of the Young Lives sample households had access to improved sanitation.

Recent developments, however, have led to a situation where more people experienced economic and livelihood shocks than in previous rounds of the survey. We find that this was in large part because of the increase in the price of food in 2007–9. Economic/livelihood shocks hit the poor and the non-poor households in all the regions, but the biggest increases happened in the Central Coast region, in both the rural and the urban sectors. There is also a general trend of increasing environmental shocks.

The continuation of economic growth and the implementation of poverty reduction programmes have brought about an overall improvement in children's health. The Younger Cohort (born in 2001–02) have better measures of weight-for-age and height-for-age than the Older Cohort, born in 1994–95. There was a reduction in rate of stunting in all the sub-groups under study, although with the exception of children whose caregivers had no education.

There was also no reduction in the rate of underweight for the children whose caregivers had no schooling, and progress in underweight reduction among ethnic minority children was insignificant.

There is almost no paid work done by the 8-year-old children, even among children from poor households. For the children who do some work on their household farm, or herding for their households, the average time use was about two and a half hours per day. However, the time spent doing this kind of work varies widely between regions and sections of the population. The time spent at school is about five hours for most children. As far as other activities done by the Younger Cohort are concerned, the evidence shows that the higher the caregiver's level of schooling is, the more time the children spend on study at home and taking extra classes.

A fraction (6 per cent) of the Older Cohort do paid work. The rate of child labour is higher, however, for some groups, such as poorer quintiles and the adolescents whose caregivers did not complete primary school. For many of the children who do paid work, the working day is longer than eight hours. The average length of a working day for children in the Northern Uplands and the children from ethnic minorities is nearly ten hours.

Primary school education is nearly universal in Vietnam. The overall rate of enrolment among Young Lives children is as high as 98 per cent, even though for some disadvantaged groups the enrolment rates were about 90 per cent. Most of the children started school at the age of 6 and the late starters were concentrated among the children whose caregivers had no schooling.

Vietnam's favourable record on primary education enrolment, however, is now being undermined by country's increasing body of out-of-school children. Vietnam now has the largest number of out-of-school children in South-East Asia, and is one of ten countries with more than 1 million out-of-school children. By Round 3 of the Young Lives survey, over 20 per cent of the Older Cohort had already left school. The differences in the enrolment rate for the 15-year-olds between urban and rural sectors, and between the poor and the non-poor groupings, are sizable. Less than half of the poor 15-year-olds attended school in Round 3, while the figure for their non-poor counterparts was 78 per cent.

Virtually every Younger Cohort child who goes to school is exempted from tuition fees because of government regulations with respect to primary school children. That is not the case for upper secondary education, and our data show that only 18.6 per cent of the Older Cohort adolescents still attending school are receiving school aid, mostly in the form of reductions in or exemption from tuition fees. The main reasons for these adolescents being eligible for school aid include their household's poverty, residence in communities with difficult socio-economic conditions, and being from an ethnic minority. Nearly half of the adolescents from the lowest wealth index quartile get some school aid, and over 70 per cent of the 15-year-olds from ethnic minorities are exempted from tuition fees.

Extra classes (paid for by parents) are taken by students from all sections of the population, including the bottom wealth index quartile, the poorest communities, and the children whose caregivers did not complete primary school. In the Red River Delta and some districts of the urban sector in Central Coast, nearly every student takes extra classes, but in other communities in the Northern Uplands or Central Coast rural, only a minority of students do so. Ninety per cent of students say that they take extra classes to improve their academic performance in their regular classes. The next most important motivation is the perception that the extra classes help students practise for exams. Only a few students say that they attend

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extra classes because they do not learn enough in their normal school classes. We find that for both cohorts, wealth index and level of schooling of caregivers have significant positive impacts on a child's participation in extra classes. For the Older Cohort, however, the girls are more likely to take, and spend more time on, extra classes than the boys. There is not such a significant gender gap for the Younger Cohort.

Young Lives evidence demonstrates that children born after the millennium in Vietnam have more favourable indicators in health and education than those born in 1994–5. However, progress in care for children has not been even across regions, sectors and ethnic groups. The government commitment to the development of children in Vietnam is well reflected in a series of major policy documents, such as the National Plan of Action for Children 2001–2010, the National Strategy for Education Development 2001–2010, the National Educational Strategy 2011–2020; the 2010–2015 National Program for Child Protection, and a number of Decisions by the prime minister, and Decrees by the government. The real impacts of the documents are yet to be evaluated. What is certain is that the government needs to step up measures to ensure that adequate healthcare and education services are available to the children in disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, the interventions have to reach the children at a very young age. This country report may help to identify some major groups of children and the areas of services policymakers may consider for interventions.

# 1. Introduction

This report presents initial findings from the third round of the Young Lives survey of children and poverty carried out with the Young Lives children and their families in Vietnam in late 2009. The main objective of the report is to describe the key preliminary results obtained from Round 3, analyse the changes in the profile of child poverty in Vietnam since Round 1, and identify the key policy messages. It does not aim to give a comprehensive overview of all the findings from Young Lives. Rather it gives a broad outline of some of the key indicators of childhood poverty and changes that have taken place in lives of the children in the sample over the seven years between the first round of data collection in 2002 and the third in 2009.

Over the past decade Vietnam has had one of the best-performing economies in the world including fast-rising GDP and per capita income rates. Vietnamese men, women, and children are now living longer, they are healthier, have higher incomes, and generally are better off than they were 25 years ago. Even during the recent economic slowdown and despite high inflation rates, the economic growth rate continued to grow and was at 6.78 per cent in 2010. Propelled by this impressive economic growth backed by investment in social programmes, Vietnam has now reached lower middle-income status and will achieve nearly all of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals.<sup>1</sup>

But despite these overall improvements, Vietnam's children (over 26 million or about 30 per cent of the population) are not benefitting equally from this new prosperity. Gaps between the rich and the poor, between boys and girls, and between the ethnic majority of Kinh and the country's many minority populations are clear.

The report aims to answer the following key questions:

- What are the key factors that affect children's lives and either increase or reduce poverty and its effects?
- What impact does poverty have on children, during childhood and into adulthood?
- To what extent are current policies effective in reducing childhood poverty?

Data are mainly presented for the entire age group cohort, in most cases separated into wealth groups and/or by rural/urban location. The full richness of the Young Lives data is not reflected in this preliminary report, but we hope that it contains enough information to prompt other researchers, policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders to start to engage with the data.

## *Report structure*

The first section of the report introduces the socio-economic context of Vietnam and some of the issues and policies currently affecting children and childhood poverty. The second section gives an overview of the methodology used by Young Lives to collect this third wave of data. The next section presents some preliminary analysis of data from the third round – which shows both changes that have occurred for the children over the three rounds of data collection since 2002, and compares the situation of the Younger Cohort children in 2009 with that of the Older Cohort in 2009, when both were aged 8 years. Indicators of child well-being

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1 UNICEF Vietnam: <http://www.unicef.org/vietnam/overview.html> (accessed 11 August 2011).

including household wealth and consumption, health, education and subjective well-being are examined.

Although the analysis is preliminary it gives important insights into trends over time, key factors affecting children in Vietnam and the extent of inequalities between children of different groups. The analysis enables us to pinpoint policy implications for tackling childhood poverty as well as important and interesting avenues for future research.

### About Young Lives

Young Lives is a long-term international research study investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty. Young Lives is tracking 12,000 children in four developing countries – Ethiopia, Peru, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh) and Vietnam – over 15 years. This is the timeframe set by the UN to assess progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Through interviews, group work and case studies with the children, their parents, teachers, community representatives and others, we are collecting a wealth of information not only about their material and social circumstances, but also their perspectives on their lives and aspirations for the futures, set against the environmental and social realities of their communities.

We are following two groups of children in each country: 2,000 children who were born in 2001-02 and 1,000 children who were born in 1994-95. These groups provide insights into every phase of childhood. The younger children are being tracked from infancy to their mid-teens and the older children through into adulthood, when some will become parents themselves. When this is matched with information gathered about their parents, we will be able to reveal much about the intergenerational transfer of poverty, how families on the margins move in and out of poverty, and the policies that can make a real difference to their lives.

The longitudinal nature of the survey and our multidimensional conceptualisation of poverty are key features of Young Lives. Much existing knowledge about childhood poverty is based on cross-sectional data that reflects a specific point in children's lives, or relates to only one dimension of children's welfare. Children's own views on poverty and well-being are seldom explored. Research is rarely tied in a systematic way to investigation of broader societal trends or policy changes.

The potential of the project lies in its focus on tracking children's progress throughout childhood – over 15 years. We collect quantitative data and qualitative data at the individual, household and community level. Quantitative data is gathered through comprehensive surveys that include interviews with the children themselves as soon as they are old enough to participate directly, with their parents and caregivers, and with key community members (such as teachers, village elders or elected council representatives). Data is collected in each round on households' economic circumstances, livelihoods, assets and social capital. The questionnaires also collect evidence relating to coping strategies such as migration, parental education and other experiences, child outcomes and the extent to which children and their parents and carers use services (e.g. health-care, pre-school care or education programmes). In this way we can create a detailed picture of children's experiences and well-being linked to information about their households and communities and set within the national context. This provides us with data suitable for in-depth analysis of children's poverty and the effectiveness of government policies that concern their lives and well-being.

Young Lives is a collaboration between key government and research institutions in each of the study countries alongside the international NGO Save the Children-UK. It is coordinated based in the Department of International Development at the University of Oxford, UK. In Vietnam the Centre for Analysis and Forecast within the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (CAF-VASS) works alongside the Government Statistics Office (GSO) to carry out the survey. A small team within CAF-VASS is responsible for data management and analysis, policy research and engagement with government and external stakeholders.

## 2. Country context

### *2.1 Socio-economic development in recent years*

Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in January 2007 is widely seen as an important milestone in the process of the country's integration into the global economy. This process has entailed both opportunities and challenges, and is probably the key event that has changed the country's external and domestic climate in the period 2007–09 as compared to the one that prevailed in the early years of the twenty-first century. However optimistic the government was, in the first couple of years of WTO membership, Vietnam found the challenges considerable. This period coincided with the global economic recession following the banking crisis of 2007, which included the world food price crisis in 2007–08. Between 2006 and 2008 average world prices for rice rose by 217 per cent and those for corn went up by 125 per cent (Steinberg 2008). Prices of important commodities imported by Vietnam also increased. For instance, the price of oil reached an all-time high of US\$147.27 during a trading session in July 2008, more than a third above the previous inflation-adjusted high (Read 2008).

The economy of Vietnam, which has been very open for over a decade, suffered from these adverse shocks. World demand for Vietnam's exported garments and footwear dropped significantly by the first quarter of 2009. According to data released by the Vietnamese General Statistics Office (GSO) in January 2009, the value of textile and garment exports was down 33.2 per cent on-year, while that of footwear exports was down 26 per cent on-year. For the first time since 1991, exports decreased in 2009. The revenue from exports in 2009 was 8.9 per cent lower than in 2008 (MOIT 2010). This was a major reason for economic slowdown in the late 2000s. The rate of growth decreased from 8.5 per cent in 2007 to 6.2 and 5.3 per cent in 2008 and 2009, respectively. The growth rate in 2009 was the lowest since 1999, the year of the Asian financial crisis.

Inflation reached a two-digit level (12.6 per cent) in 2007 and peaked at 19.9 per cent in 2008. The prices of foods that make up a large part of the consumption basket of people on low incomes rose substantially during these two years. Specifically, the price index of food increased by 11.2 per cent between December 2006 and December 2007.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, between 2007 to 2008, the average annual price of food went up by 36.6 per cent.<sup>3</sup> These macro shocks actually represented a real test to the process of poverty reduction, which had been impressive after 1993, but showed signs of slowing down, as data from recent household surveys show. According to datasets from the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VASS 2010), the poverty headcount rate declined from 16 per cent in 2006 to 14.5 per cent in 2008, i.e. by 1.5 percentage points, as compared to a drop by 3.5 percentage points in the preceding two-year period: from 19.5 per cent in 2004 to 16 per cent in 2006. The most recent Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey shows that the proportion of people living below the official poverty line was 10.7 per cent in 2010 (GSO 2011). This is what is generally expected, as poverty reduction normally becomes increasingly resistant to economic growth when it comes to the poorest people in society. However, a recent report by the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) points to a large body of evidence about how macroeconomic instability in the 2007–09 period has affected low-income workers and

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2 For our analysis, food includes food bought in canteens and restaurants.

3 General Statistics Office (2010) <http://www.gso.gov.vn/default.aspx?tabid=628&ItemID=8185>

households significantly, and thus slowed the pace of poverty reduction in recent years (VASS 2010).

The gap in poverty rates between the country's Kinh majority and its ethnic minorities remains significant. VASS's report (2010) also reveals that, in 2008, the poverty rate for the former group was 9 per cent, while the rate for the ethnic minorities was as high as 50.3 per cent. The government has made numerous interventions, notably in the form of a number of programmes for poverty reduction that target poor communes with high concentrations of ethnic minority inhabitants.

The biggest targeted poverty reduction programme in Vietnam over the last decade is Programme 135.4 Related to Rounds 2 and 3 of the Young Lives survey is Phase II of the programme (P135-II), which runs from 2006 to 2010 and targets poor and mountainous communes in the 50 provinces that are home to the majority of Vietnam's ethnic minorities. The total budget was nearly US\$1.3 billion, of which the government of Vietnam contributed US\$950 million and international donors contributed US\$343 million. The main objectives of P135-II included the following: to facilitate agricultural production in the isolated mountain areas; to improve the socio-cultural life of people facing extreme hardship; and to reduce the poverty rate significantly. The implementation of P135-II led to the construction of basic infrastructure, such as electric power transmission facilities, rural roads, schools and medical centres in the targeted communes. The programme also improved livelihoods through better access to social services, and instigated capacity building for officials at all levels to implement the programme better.

Besides the gap in wealth between the ethnic majority and the ethnic minorities, the disparity in socio-economic development between regions is another issue of concern. Economists often consider Vietnam to have eight eco-agricultural zones which have different topography, climate and soil characteristics and related patterns of economic activity.<sup>5</sup> The five provinces in which the children in the Young Lives sample live are in four of Vietnam's eight regions. The province of Lao Cai is located in the North East region, which, together with the North West, makes up the Northern Uplands. The characteristics of the Northern Uplands include mountains, a high concentration of ethnic minorities, poor transportation facilities and limited market access. The North East is the third poorest region, after the North West and North Central Coast.

The province of Hung Yen is in the Red River Delta, which is the second most prosperous region of Vietnam, after the South East region. The Red River Delta is, after the Mekong Delta, the second largest rice-producing region in the country. It is characterised by a high population density and scarcity of land. The level of schooling of the population in Red River Delta can be regarded as better than that of the other regions with Young Lives sites.

South Central Coast hosts the Young Lives urban sector – the city of Da Nang – and the province of Phu Yen. The former is prosperous, but the latter is not. Generally South Central Coast is average in terms of poverty, and the infrastructure in this region can be considered as mixed. Education is good in Da Nang, but about the nation's average in the rural part of the

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4 Programme 135 is the name of the programme for socio-economic development for the especially poor communes in remote isolated mountainous areas in accordance with the prime minister's Decision of 135/1998/QĐ-TTg of July 1998. The main goal of the programme is to improve the livelihoods of residents in these communities, especially those from the ethnic minority groups. The programme has been operating since 1998.

5 More information on this can be found in Tran Tuan et al. (2003: 14)

region. Like the Young Lives sample in Lao Cai, the sample in Phu Yen includes ethnic minority children.

Finally, the province of Ben Tre is located in Mekong Delta, which is known as the 'rice basket' of Vietnam. Other important economic activities of the population in Mekong Delta include fishing and shrimp farming. Despite the relatively favourable economic conditions, the region is a little under-developed in terms of infrastructure and education. Regional characteristics are found important in the outcomes to be discussed in this report.

## ***2.2 Recent developments in policies related to children***

Policies related to children have always featured prominently on Vietnam's development agenda, and this is particularly true with respect to poor children and those from ethnic minorities. Being aware of the essential role of child protection and care in improving the quality of the country's human resources, the Vietnam government has ratified a series of policy documents. This sub-section presents the recent most important documents concerning children's education and health.

### *National Plan of Action for Children*

In 2010 the National Plan of Action for Children 2001–2010 was reviewed as part of the preparation for its successor, the 2011–2020 plan. The new plan is based on four basic rights of children: survival, development, participation and protection. According to the Department of Child Protection and Care under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), almost all the targets set out in the 2001–2010 plan have been achieved except for those relating to child protection and entertainment. However, even for those reported achieved, there exist questions about which children really experience improvements.

In reviewing targets for 2001–2010, MOLISA's assessment report also indicates some challenges in education, including the high cost of schooling, inequality between rural and urban areas, and obstacles faced by ethnic minority children. It is recognised that children in disadvantaged areas are more likely to start schooling late and drop out. For ethnic minorities, language barriers and lack of school readiness are identified as major challenges. In terms of education quality, issues of methodology, assessment and the place of vocational education in the curriculum need further reform to ensure that children are equipped with the social skills they will need for modern life.

With the experience obtained from the previous period, the 2011–20 plan is potentially a good basis for intervention programmes developed by other ministries. It is worth noting that the plan clearly proposes initiatives to promote children's participation in decisions that concern them, through platforms such as annual child forums at provincial level. The plan sets out general directions, which will be followed by specific intervention programmes by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism. Furthermore, in the new plan we expect more outcome indicators, which could help to reduce inequality and ensure that all children benefit. Under the framework of the plan, the National Programme for Child Protection was formulated by MOLISA and submitted in November 2010.

### *National Strategies, Decisions and Decrees concerning education*

The National Strategy for Education Development (NSED) 2001–2010, approved by the government in 2001, aimed to ensure the access of all children to education. The targets

set in the NSED include the following: to increase the Net Enrolment Rate (NER) to 99 per cent for primary school and 90 per cent for lower secondary school by 2010; to eliminate the gender gap in primary and secondary school enrolment by 2005, and the gap between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities by 2010; to improve the quality of education; and to increase full-day schooling at primary level by 2010. The Vietnamese government has ratified a series of policies to deal with inequality in education. Currently, MOET is drafting a Decision supporting ethnic minority students and poor students from rural areas enrolled in boarding schools in disadvantaged communes identified by the National Poverty Reduction Programme (Programme 135). Under this Decision, these students will be entitled to free accommodation and a monthly subsistence allowance.

Decision 55/2007/QĐ-BGDĐT, dated 28 September 2007, by the Ministry of Education and Training frames the minimum standards for primary schools. The standards are categorised under the headings of (1) operations and management, (2) teacher standards, (3) infrastructure, learning and teaching facilities, (4) education socialisation (increasing donations from the private sector and contributions from better-off households), and (5) education quality and extra-curricular activities. Regarding the number of teachers required, the Decision set out a ratio of 1.2 teachers per class in schools with half-day schooling. For schools with full-day schooling, the teacher–class ratio is 1.5. The teachers, apart from subject knowledge, are also required to provide further support to students with disabilities, and those from ethnic minorities and poor families.

In Decision 239/QĐ-TTg of February 2010, the prime minister approved the plan for the universalisation of preschool for 5-year-olds. The goal of the plan is to ensure that most 5-year-olds attend pre-school classes for a year before they start school. In these classes, the children are given care and educated in order to be ready to enter primary education at the age of 6. It is stipulated in the prime minister's Decision that by 2015, as many as 95 per cent of Vietnam's 5-year-olds will attend pre-school classes for the whole day.

Furthermore, in May 2010, the government ratified the Decree 49/2010/ND-CP, which sets out the conditions for exemption from tuition fees and for cash grants for educational materials and equipment, and the level of tuition fees for the period 2011–15. The Decision confirms the continuation of the policy on free tuition for all primary school children, regardless of their background. It also defines the groups that are eligible for tuition fee exemption at secondary level. Students from poor households are entitled to exemption from 50 per cent of tuition fees. The subsidy goes directly to schools to pay for tuition. Children are also given a grant for books and learning equipment. Although the decree was put into effect in July 2010, it has not been applied as there is no guiding circular.

The National Educational Strategy 2011–2020 is the backbone for all policies relating to the long-term development of the country's human resource base and the basis for intervention programmes. From the middle of 2010, the formulation process has been ongoing with the 21st draft. The objectives of the strategy focus on the universalisation of lower secondary school and the consolidation of life-long education<sup>6</sup> to ensure access to education for everyone. As far as quality is concerned, the strategy highlights the importance of life skills education and vocational guidance for students in upper secondary school, which are anticipated to be good foundations for the development of a labour force responsive to market demand.

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<sup>6</sup> This is a complementary type of education that provides literacy classes, catch-up courses for people who dropped out of education, short-term professional refresher training for adults, etc. It is sometimes referred to as 'regular education'.

In addressing problems and taking up opportunities, the strategy specifies nine solutions, of which three are considered breakthroughs: (1) reform of educational management; (2) development of human resources; and (3) continuing innovation in the curriculum, teaching methods and assessment.

### *National Programme for Child Protection*

The 2010–2015 National Programme for Child Protection identifies groups of children ‘in special situations’. These include infants, children without guardians, abandoned children, children with disabilities, victims of dioxin/Agent Orange, children with HIV/AIDS, street children, children living away from home, drug addicts, and children who have broken the law. By the end of the 2005–2010 period, there were one and a half million children in special situations, which is 6 per cent of all the children in Vietnam (Nguyen Hai Huu 2011). The goal of the 2010–2015 National Programme for Child Protection is to create an environment in which all children are under protection, especially children in special situations and other vulnerable children. Specifically, the programme sets the following targets for the end of the period:

- The rate of children in special situations is reduced to 5.5 per cent of all children;
- At least 80 per cent of the children in special situations receive assistance and care from their communities and the government in order to reintegrate and have the opportunity for normal development;
- At least 70 per cent of children with a high risk of being in special situations or with vulnerability are identified early enough for effective interventions to minimise or eliminate the risk;
- Half of Vietnam’s provinces/cities implement the Child Protection System, which includes centres for child social affairs, counselling offices, counselling points, networks of associates and groups of youth activists.

The National Programme for Child Protection plans to carry out five projects that aim to achieve the above targets. First is a set of communication, educational and campaigning activities to promote the recognition of children’s rights and safety and to change the behaviour of households, schools, communities, state offices and children themselves accordingly. Second is to build the capacity of the staff in the system of protection and care for children. Third is to develop material resources for the provision of child protection services. Fourth is to set up and to multiply the models in community-based assistance for children in special situations. Finally, the programme aims to build the capacity of the state administration in child care.

### *Other policies on child health*

Malnutrition is a major issue of policy concern toward children. Vietnam was reported to have an under-5 stunting ratio of 31.9 per cent in 2009 (National Institute of Nutrition 2010). One key issue in these debates is the role of milk in child nutrition, with some experts suggesting that adding milk to children’s daily meals is crucial for their height.<sup>7</sup> The ‘milk for school’ scheme is devised as a complementary solution to the inadequacy of existing nutrition programmes. Currently, there is still some discussion about this scheme. While the central government is still debating funding, targeting and implementation mechanisms, some provinces have already used local funds to provide milk to kindergartens. MOLISA has proposed piloting the model in

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<sup>7</sup> Currently annual per capita consumption of milk is 14 litres, whereas this figure is 23 litres in Thailand, 25 litres in China and 70 litres in Japan.

the 62 poorest districts, targeting 420,000 children. The pilot phase will be implemented in the three years of 2011–2013 with an estimated fund of around 2,000 billion dong. Under the pilot scheme, each targeted child would get 250ml of milk every day.

Also relevant here is the Ministry of Health's strategy for healthcare. While following the 2001–10 strategy the ministry is currently drafting a new one for 2011–20. A major part will be devoted to reviewing the previous phase. Predicting influencing factors will play an important part in the new strategy to ensure adequate interventions are initiated.

The Law on Health Insurance, ratified in November 2008 and in effect since 1 July 2009, is an advancement of the healthcare system, stepping toward universal health insurance. Under this law, children under 6 years, ethnic minorities and poor people in rural areas are entitled to free health insurance, while students from nearly-poor households pay an insurance premium equivalent to 6 per cent of the minimum wage.<sup>8</sup>

After one year of implementation it is recognised that poor and nearly poor people<sup>9</sup> have not yet benefited as expected. Although they have to pay only 20 per cent of the annual insurance fee, poor people seem reluctant to join, perhaps because the process is complicated.

In addition, inconsistent instructions from the Ministry of Health and the Vietnam Social Insurance make it even more difficult for health service providers to respond promptly to the requirements of the insured. The new health insurance system is helpful for many poor families but insufficient investment in clinic facilities and shortages of specific medicines make the insurance less attractive. Some experts find the objective of universal health insurance unrealistic. But they are quite optimistic that by 2014 the government could achieve the universalisation of basic health services including nutrition for children, maternal healthcare, free health services for children under 6 and access to clean water and sanitary facilities.

Though hundreds of policies have been put into effect to improve living standards and social welfare, there has been criticism that there has not been an adequate comprehensive social protection scheme to help mitigate shocks and vulnerability. In Vietnam social protection usually has small coverage, while benefits are low and impact limited. In recent years there has been a considerable increase in the numbers and range of such schemes in lower- and middle-income countries, intended to reduce poverty and support other social investments.

Decree 67/2007/ND-CP dated 13 April 2007 was formulated to specify targets for social protection schemes, including people living with HIV/AIDS, people with disabilities, elderly people without support from relatives, orphans, abandoned children, and people with mental health problems. The Decree was amended in April 2010 by Decree 13/2010/ND-CP, which increased the benefit levels and widened the coverage.

## *Summary*

Policies aimed at children in Vietnam are made in strategies, five-year plans, the government's Decrees, and the prime minister's Decisions. These documents set ambitious targets for the development of the country's human resources. One of their important features is that they aim to benefit disadvantaged groups of children, in particular ethnic minority children. There has been, however, much less documentation containing concrete evidence on how successfully the strategies, plans, Decrees and Decisions were implemented. The biggest debate currently

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<sup>8</sup> In 2009 the minimum wage was VND650,000 per month, approximately US\$32.8.

<sup>9</sup> Poor people are defined as those below the national poverty line, and the nearly poor are just above it but barely so and prone to falling into poverty.

going on in Vietnam is how to reform the education system. Another challenge for the government concerns the height of children. A recent prime ministerial Decision (579/QĐ-TTg of April 2011) states that one of the goals to be achieved by 2020 is that the average height of young people in Vietnam is to reach 1.65m. Reduction of stunting and malnutrition among children under 5 is therefore a major item in this Decision.

## 3. Methodology

Young Lives is designed as a panel study that is following the lives of 12,000 children in 4 countries over 15 years. The sample in each country consists of 2 cohorts: a younger cohort of 2,000 children who were aged between 6 and 18 months when the first survey round was carried out in 2002, and an older cohort of 1,000 children then aged between 7.5 and 8.5 years.

The children were selected from 20 sentinel sites that were defined specifically in each country. The concept of a sentinel site comes from health surveillance studies and is a form of purposeful sampling where the site (or cluster, in sampling language) is deemed to represent a certain type of population or area, and is expected to show early signs of trends affecting those particular people or areas. For example, monitoring a typical village of a given region may detect events and trends which will have an impact on most villages in that region.

The first round of data collection took place in 2002, the second round in 2006-07 and this report gives an initial analysis from the third survey of the households and children that was carried out in late 2009 to early 2010. In each case, the Young Lives child and his or her caregiver were interviewed and the height and weight of each child was measured. A community-level questionnaire was completed for each sentinel site to give contextual information about the children's lives and facilities available to them.

### 3.1 Young Lives sampling strategy

Young Lives was set up in Vietnam in 2001, when the research team selected the study sites using a sentinel site sampling approach. In Vietnam, a sentinel site was defined as a commune. A commune has a local government, primary school, commune health centre, post office, and a market. In the event that a commune selected as a sentinel site had insufficient numbers of one-year-old children at the time of the survey, a neighbouring commune with similar socio-economic conditions was also selected in order to reach the quota of children. Therefore, with 20 sentinel sites, Vietnam had 31 communes involved in the study sample.

Vietnam followed a five-step process in its sampling strategy:

1. Selection of five regions out of eight regions plus major cities in Vietnam.
2. Selection of one province out of all provinces in each chosen region.
3. Selection of four sentinel sites in each province with oversampling of poor sites.
4. Screening of all households in each sentinel site and listing of eligible children. Families with twins and triplets were excluded. Where there was more than one eligible child present in the household one of those children was selected using a random sampling technique.
5. Selection of a sample of 100 children who were born between January 2001 and May 2002 and 50 children who were born between January 1994 and June 1995<sup>10</sup> in each sentinel site using simple random sampling. Non-response rate (refusals by caregivers) was less than two per cent and replacement sampling was used.

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<sup>10</sup> With a couple of late outliers.

### *Selection of provinces*

In 2001, Vietnam had 61 provinces and cities, which were divided into 600 districts and 10,321 communes.<sup>11</sup> In terms of socio-economic development, Vietnam can be stratified into eight socio-economic regions: North-West, North-East, Red River Delta, North Central Coast, South Central Coast, South-East, Central Highlands, and Mekong River Delta. Additionally, the Young Lives team in Vietnam categorised all major urban centres (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hai Phong, and Ba Ria-Vung Tau) as a new region – the Cities region.

Out of these nine regions, five regions were selected through a process of iterative consultation with many different parties using various methods such as individual interviews and group meetings.<sup>12</sup> From each region, one province was selected. The provinces selected were Lao Cai (North-East region), Hung Yen (Red River Delta), Da Nang (City), Phu Yen (South Central Coast), and Ben Tre (Mekong River Delta).

### *Selection of sentinel sites*

The selection of four sentinel sites in each province was carried out by the provincial governments. For this purpose, provincial working groups were established. The groups ranked all communes in the province by poverty level: poor, average, better off and rich. Criteria used for ranking included: (1) development of infrastructure, (2) percentage of poor households in the commune, (3) child malnutrition status.

Four sentinel sites were selected using an over-poor sampling strategy: two communes from the poor group, one from the average, and one from the above average group (combined better off and rich). Other criteria used in the selection were: (1) represent common provincial/regional features, (2) commitment from the local government for the research, (3) feasibility conditions for the research logistics, (4) population size. Among the 31 communes selected, 15 were from the poor group (48 per cent), nine from the average group (29 per cent), and seven (23 per cent) from the above average group.

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<sup>11</sup> The current figure for Vietnam is 64 provinces and cities (Vietnam Government Website 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Including Principal Investigator (PI), National Coordinator (NC), Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) members who represent 29 government institutions, international donors, and local NGOs.

Figure 3.1. Location of Young Lives study sites



### 3.2 Representativeness of Young Lives sample in Vietnam

Due to the non-random sampling procedure and the purposive over-sampling of poor sites, the Young Lives sample in Vietnam is not nationally representative. Furthermore, the urban sector is under-represented with regards to both the total population share and the level of development. The chosen city region Da Nang is less socially, culturally and economically developed than other city regions in Vietnam such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. However, the Young Lives sample represents the national distribution of different ethnic groups and gender.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The resources do not allow us to achieve absolutely proportional representation of over 50 ethnic minority groups, none of which constitute over two per cent of the population. In Young Lives sample, the second biggest ethnic group is the H'Mong with 156 children in the project, representing over five per cent in Young Lives. The next largest ethnic group is the Dao with 64 children. All the others amount to fewer than 50 in the total 3000 Young Lives children. Nationally, neither the H'Mong nor Dao is among the five largest ethnic groups.

To assess the representativeness of the Young Lives sample, it was compared with two nationally representative comparison samples: the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey 2002 and the Demographic and Health Survey 2002. Examination of the common variables in the different surveys – child and household characteristics, access to electricity and drinking water – indicates that the Young Lives sample typically includes households with on average less access to basic services. A comparison of wealth index scores reveals that Young Lives households are on average slightly poorer than the average Vietnamese household. These differences reflect the pro-poor sampling approach chosen by Young Lives in Vietnam. Despite these biases in terms of the average characteristics of the children in the sample, it is shown that the Young Lives sample in Vietnam covers the diversity of children in the country: a careful analysis of the distribution of child characteristics included in the sample suggested that the data represent a wide variety of children in terms of wealth, consumption, health, nutrition, education and access to education, similar to nationally representative data sets. Therefore, while not suited for simple monitoring of child outcome indicators (as the mean characteristics will be different), the Young Lives sample will be an appropriate and valuable instrument for analysing correlates and causal relations, and for modelling child welfare and its longitudinal dynamics in Vietnam. For further information see Nguyen (2008), a technical note comparing the Young Lives survey to the VHLSS.

### ***3.3 Data Gathering in Round 3***

As in previous rounds, the data gathering process for Round 3 was overseen by staff from Vietnam's General Statistics Office (GSO) in cooperation with members of the Young Lives team at the Centre for Analysis and Forecast (CAF) of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS) and the team at Oxford University. The preparatory work was carried out from January to September 2009 and started with a review of the core questionnaires, the purpose of which was to adapt them to the context of Vietnam and to add the country-specific questions/sections. The revised version of the child questionnaires and household questionnaires was then translated into Vietnamese for a training workshop in March 2009. Following the workshop, the questionnaires were further revised for pilots in two districts in Hoa Binh province. After the pilots, the research team organised another workshop to discuss the lessons and obtain feedback from the fieldworkers. In the following months, the Vietnam team worked on the revision of other documents such as the Commune community questionnaire, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and child development instruments, the manual for household and child questionnaires and the manual for the Commune community questionnaire.

Separate questionnaires with age-appropriate questions were used with the two cohorts of children, while the same questionnaire was used for caregivers of all children and to collect community-level data:

- Household questionnaire for caregivers
- Child questionnaire for Older Cohort children (which included a self-administered questionnaire to cover sensitive questions around relationships and health behaviours)
- Child questionnaire for Younger Cohort children
- Community questionnaire (context instrument).

**Table 3.1. Contents of Young Lives core questionnaires**

<b>Child questionnaire – younger cohort</b>
Section 1 School and work activities
Section 2 Feelings, attitudes and perceptions
Section 3 Social networks, social skills and social support
Section 4 Risk aversion and time discounting tests
Section 5 Achievement tests (Peabody Picture Vocabulary test; reading and writing; mathematics)
<b>Child questionnaire – older cohort</b>
Section 1 Time use and activities (including work)
Section 2 Feelings and attitudes
Section 3 Schooling and school environment
Section 4 Child health
Section 5 Social networks, social skills and social support
Section 6 Household issues
Section 7 Children's children
Section 8 Risk aversion and time discounting tests
Section 9 Achievement tests
<b>Household questionnaire (both cohorts)</b>
Section 1 Parental background
Section 2 Household education and education history of child
Section 3 Livelihoods and asset framework
3a Land and crop agriculture
3b Time allocation of adults and children
3c Productive assets
Section 4 Household food and non-food consumption and expenditure
4a Household food consumption and expenditure
4b Non-food expenditure
Section 5 Family group and political capital
Section 6 Economic changes and recent life history
Section 7 Socio-economic status
Section 8 Child activities
Section 9 Health
9a Child health (including health care)
9b Food security
Section 10 Anthropometry
Section 11 Caregiver perceptions and attitudes
Section 12 (for younger cohort only) Child development

### ***Country-specific topics in Young Lives in Vietnam***

<b>Household questionnaire</b>
Section 2c Education aid
Section 2d Extra schooling

The Round 3 survey questionnaires and data will be supplemented by a survey of a sub-sample of Young Lives Younger Cohort children and their schools being carried out in

approximately 100 schools in around 30 communes in October 2011 (when most children will be in Grade 5). This survey will cover issues such as school environment and resources, teacher training and pedagogy, and student performance in maths and Vietnamese. It will allow us to link the data on children's school performance with information about the resources invested in their education, all linked to background information about child and family characteristics. It will provide measures which may be compared to representative data from national sources and will evaluate progress in the schools Young Lives children attend on national initiatives such as full-day schooling and improvements in school quality, including for ethnic minorities.

### *Training fieldworkers and team leaders*

To recruit the fieldworkers and team leaders, the GSO called for applications from enumerators who had experience of interviewing households and children for central and local offices of statistics. Preference was given to people who had worked for Young Lives in Rounds 1 and 2. Eventually, the GSO selected 72 staff and collaborators, who then attended Young Lives training courses in Hanoi, run by senior staff from the GSO and consultants from VASS, and attended by staff from Oxford. The survey training course consisted of the following components:

Course for interviewers and team leaders: The participants on this course were introduced to the content of the household and child questionnaires, guidelines for asking questions and methods for recording data. They were also taught how to use a personal digital assistant (PDA) and laptop for recording and archiving data. Sixty people (the interviewers and team leaders) as well as 22 supervisors from the GSO attended this course.

Course for the fieldworkers in charge of anthropometry: Twelve fieldworkers participated in this course. They were trained in the skills for measuring the weight and height of the child, the child's mother, and a sibling. They also learnt to conduct the tests on Child Development.

Course for team leaders: To prepare 12 team leaders, the GSO selected 12 senior participants (from the course described in part a., above), who had performed well, and had fieldwork experience and management ability. Twenty-two GSO supervisors also attended this course. The course participants were introduced to the Commune community questionnaire, Child Development Instruments and regulations related to financial issues. They were also taught how to organise people into groups for interviews and data recording.

At the end of the training session, tests were administered to evaluate the results of learning and 60 of the 72 trainees were selected to form ten fieldwork teams. Each team consisted of six people: a team leader, a person in charge of anthropometry, and four field interviewers. Among 40 interviewers, 30 were assigned to use a PDA for interviewing and recording data. In each of the teams, one interviewer used a paper questionnaire, while three others used a PDA.

### *Data gathering and supervision*

The initial sample of the 3,000 children selected in 2002 lived in 20 sentinel sites, which cover 31 communes/precincts of 14 districts in five provinces/cities (Hung Yen, Lao Cai, Da Nang, Phu Yen and Ben Tre). Over the years, a number of the children have migrated within and out of the provinces they were in in Round 1. For that reason, in addition to the main survey, in which all the Young Lives children and their households in the sentinel sites were interviewed, the survey teams conducted a follow-up survey to gather data on the children who had moved from the areas they lived in 2002.

The main survey started on 18 September and ended on 3 December 2009. In this phase, ten teams interviewed 2,873 household/children in 33 communes of the four provinces and the city of Da Nang. Eight teams were involved in the follow-up survey, which took place from 17 December 2009 to 6 January 2010. The teams followed the Young Lives children who had migrated to 30 provinces/cities throughout the country. In the follow-up survey, 66 out of 70 households/children were tracked and interviewed. At the end of all the data-gathering activities in Round 3, a total of 2,939 children and their households had been interviewed (see Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2. Number of Young Lives children by regions and cohorts**

Provinces	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3		Lost in Round 3	
			Main survey	Follow-up	Consent refused	Untraceable
Northern Uplands	600	593	575			2
Red River Delta	600	593	569		1	1
Central Coast urban	600	589	571			8
Central Coast rural	600	597	576			4
Mekong Delta	600	594	582			1
Migrated elsewhere					1	3
Total	3,000	2,966	2,873	66	2	19
Younger Cohort	2,000	1,970	1,922	41		
Older Cohort	1,000	990	951	25		
All	3,000	2,966	2,939		21	

Tracking data show that up to Round 3, of the initial sample, the total number of children lost (because of death or migration abroad) was 61, 40 of whom had already dropped out by Round 2. In Round 3 we found a further 19 children were untraceable, and two who refused to continue in the study. Of the 2,939 households/children with completed questionnaires, 773 children (233 Older Cohort and 540 Younger Cohort) were surveyed using paper questionnaires, while for the rest (743 Older Cohort and 1,423 Younger Cohort children) the data were recorded on the electronic devices (PDAs).

The general characteristics of the children and their households in the dataset of Round 3 are described in Table 3.3. As the table shows, the gender balance in the initial sample has been maintained, as the numbers of boys and girls are about equal in both cohorts. The proportion of ethnic minority children in the sample remains largely as in a nationally representative sample.

Table 3.3. General characteristics of the Young Lives sample in Round 3 (%)

		YC	OC	All
<i>Child characteristics</i>				
	Male	51.3	49.6	50.7
	Female	48.8	50.4	49.3
	Urban	20.9	20.2	20.7
	Rural	79.1	79.8	79.3
<i>Schooling of caregiver</i>				
	None	5.2	4.7	5.0
	1–6 years (primary school)	25.5	28.7	26.6
	Some secondary school	69.3	66.6	68.4
<i>Other characteristics of household</i>				
	Household head is female	12.2	12.9	12.4
	Ethnic majority (Kinh)	85.9	87.1	86.3
	Ethnic minority	14.1	12.9	13.7
	Average size ( in members)	4.6	4.5	4.6

GSO staff supervised the data gathering in the sentinel sites. Most of the supervisors had participated in Round 2. There were two to three supervisors in any sentinel site when the data gathering took place there. The supervisors observed to make sure that the fieldworkers conducted interviews and filled in questionnaires properly. The activities of supervisors included: (1) evaluating the data-gathering process; (2) participating in interviews; (3) checking the filled questionnaires randomly; (4) communicating with the local authorities; (5) checking that financial regulations were adhered to; and (6) assisting the teams with professional issues. In addition to the supervisory staff from GSO, supervisors from CAF visited the sites without notice in order to reinforce the checking for compliance with survey regulations.

## 4. Survey results and discussion

### 4.1 Poverty and poverty dynamics

#### *Absolute and relative poverty*

In Table 4.1.1, we present two important indicators of monetary poverty. The first one, absolute poverty, captures the percentage of households with per capita expenditure below the national poverty line. A trend of poverty reduction can be clearly observed for the Young Lives households in the period between Round 2 and Round 3. The poverty rate within the sample has been halved overall and some disadvantaged groups see even greater reductions. These trends are more marked than the ones the Vietnam Household Living Standards Surveys have identified in recent years, and are probably due to survey and life-cycle differences.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 4.1.1. Young Lives children living in poverty, both cohorts (%)**

		Absolute poverty			Relative poverty		
		2006	2009	% point change	2006	2009	% point change
Sectors							
	Urban	7.4	3.5	-4	2.2	2.2	0
	Rural	26.6	12.5	-14.1	11.9	12	0.1
Ethnicity							
	Ethnic majority (Kinh)	16.7	7.8	-9	5.8	6.7	0.9
	Ethnic minority	59.9	28.8	-31	35.7	30.3	-5.4
Schooling of caregivers							
	None	66.3	34.4	-31.9	42.7	35.7	-7.0
	Incomplete primary school	32.4	14	-18.4	12.3	12.9	0.6
	Complete primary, or above	14.4	6.6	-7.8	4.7	5.7	1.0
Cohort							
	Younger	23.4	12.3	-11.1	8.1	7.1	-1.0
	Older	21.3	7.5	-13.8	10.9	11.4	0.5
	All children average	22.7	10.7	-12	10.0	10.0	0

Poverty reduction in the rural sector is greater than in the urban sector. Likewise, the reduction in poverty of the ethnic minorities is greater than that of the ethnic majority. In 2006, poverty rates for the ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups (such as children whose caregivers had had no schooling) were very high. Programme 135 and the related policies targeting inhabitants of the mountainous areas (see country context section above) appear to have led to a large reduction in poverty among the beneficiaries.

<sup>14</sup> The national poverty line applied in this Report is based on the basket of food and non-food items consumed by households in the middle quintile for the VHLSS in 1993. The food basket was to provide each household member with 2,100 calories per day. This basket was recalculated for VHLSS in January 2006. Spatial (regional) price deflators are calculated by the VHLSS team at the World Bank office in Hanoi. To complete the calculation of the poverty line, however, we apply the price deflators for the period between Jan 2006 and the months of the Young Lives surveys separately for rural and urban sectors. The Young Lives sample is not nationally representative, is following the same households with children (as these mature), and therefore, the figures should be treated with caution and not compared to the corresponding ones in national documents.

Table 4.1.1 shows that the fall in the percentage of children living below the poverty line is considerable for some groups, particularly the ethnic minorities and children whose caregivers have little or no schooling. However, as will be shown below, these are the groups with the highest rates of child work (both unpaid within the household and paid work) and also more likely to have dropped out of school by age 15.

In Table 4.1.1 columns 3 to 6 concern relative poverty, an indicator that measures whether an individual or household's income is low relative to the typical consumption level of society. While it does not necessarily imply that basic, absolute, needs are not being met, it presents an aspect of social inequality, given that the median will track typical living standards within society (Boltvinik 1998). Here it is defined as the percentage of Young Lives households with per capita expenditure below 50 per cent of the median per capita expenditure in the sample.<sup>15</sup> The table shows how some sections of the population are relatively poorer than the median of the (whole) sample. We find very few of the urban households are in relative poverty, which in part reflects much higher consumption levels in urban areas. Relative poverty is concentrated in the ethnic minority groups and the households where children's caregivers have low levels of education. It is an encouraging sign that the biggest reductions in relative poverty happened for the groups where relative poverty was over 30 per cent in 2006. The changes in relative poverty were insignificant for the other categories considered in Table 4.1.1.

The difference in the poverty rates between 2006 and 2009, however, may not be interpreted unequivocally as a sign of the success of the government's poverty reduction policy. Part of the change in the poverty rate might be because of some demographic changes that happened in the Young Lives sample households. The first is the life-cycle effect: as their children grow up, parents acquire experience, and may accumulate wealth over the years, and that makes them less likely to be poor than younger couples. The life-cycle effect has been observed in the way that the poverty rates for the Older Cohort households were lower than those for the Younger Cohort (see, for example, Table 7 in Le Thuc Duc et al. 2008: 21). Secondly, a proportion of the Older Cohort have dropped out of school since Round 2 to work. Data in Figure 4.7.1 and Table 4.7.2 in Section 4.7 below show the hours the out-of-school children work and that say about their contributions to household incomes.

### *Poverty dynamics*

One of the themes Young Lives research focuses on is the dynamics of childhood poverty. Relevant to that issue is the likelihood of children's households moving up and down with respect to poverty line. This mobility is measured by two rates: one is the percentage of households escaping poverty over the period under study, and the other is the percentage of better-off households falling into poverty. The former tends to reflect progress in the country's socio-economic development, while the latter may mean that the economy has slowed or the population has become economically vulnerable.

The Round 3 survey data show favourable dynamics, as the rate of upward mobility between Rounds 2 and 3 is much higher than the rate of downward mobility – roughly seven in ten poor households experienced upward mobility, while one in twenty non-poor households became poor. Nearly three-quarters of the sample remained non-poor (see upper panel in Table 4.1.2). For both rounds of the survey, very few poor people in the urban sector remained poor, and as many as 6 per cent the urban population escaped poverty, while in the opposite direction,

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<sup>15</sup> The median is the midpoint of the distribution, and so is different to the arithmetic mean.

only 2 per cent of the urban population were non-poor in Round 2 but poor in Round 3. For the rural sector, the corresponding figures are 18.5 per cent and 4.5 per cent. Thus, poverty in the rural sector is more dynamic than in the urban sector. Part of the reason for a greater percentage point reduction in poverty rates for the rural population (compared to urban) is that more rural people were initially poor (and still are). For the same reason, the poverty dynamics for the disadvantaged ethnic minority groups are greater than for the ethnic majority group. Finally, when we divide the sample by the level of caregiver schooling, the households whose caregivers had up to five years of schooling have a greater poverty dynamic than the households whose caregivers had more than five years of schooling (see the lower panels in Table 4.1.2).

**Table 4.1.2. Households moving across the poverty line, R2–R3, both cohorts (%)**

		Poor R3	Non-poor R3
<b>Whole sample</b>	Poor R2	6.7	16
	Non-poor R2	4	73.3
By sector	Urban		
	Poor R2	1.5	6.3
	Non-poor R2	2.0	90.2
	Rural		
	Poor R2	8.1	18.5
	Non-poor R2	4.5	68.9
By ethnicity	Majority		
	Poor R2	4.2	12.6
	Non-poor R2	3.6	79.6
	Minority		
	Poor R2	22.3	37.4
	Non-poor R2	6.5	33.8
By caregiver schooling	Less than five years		
	Poor R2	11.8	26.3
	Non-poor R2	5.8	56.1
	More than five years		
	Poor R2	3.5	9.7
	Non-poor R2	2.9	83.9

The presentation of the poverty dynamic can be more detailed, with the description of the relative mobility between wealth quintiles (splitting the sample into five equal groups based on their wealth levels, as defined by the wealth index), rather than only the movement above and below of the absolute poverty line. Data show that movement from one quintile to the next sometimes happens. However, large movements (for instance, from the poorest quintile to the richest one, or the opposite) are very rare – 0.5 per cent or less. Table 4.1.3a presents movement between the quintiles. In the urban sector, more than half of the households remained in the same quintile as they were in in Round 2. One can observe that the number of upward movements is nearly the same as those downward (remembering that the whole sample wealth level was, on average, increasing over this period).

**Table 4.1.3a. Households moving across wealth quintiles (%)**

	Total	Urban	Rural
Moved upward	28.2	21.5	30.0
Stayed constant	42.3	55.7	38.9
Moved downward	29.4	22.8	31.1

*Note:* Quintiles are defined for the whole sample, not for sectors

Further, when only changes of at least two quintiles are considered, we see much less movement (Table 4.1.3b). It can be inferred from Tables 4.1.3a and 4.1.3b that most of the movements are changes to the next quintile, either upward or downward. Furthermore, the movements are symmetrical in the sense that the number of the upward movements equals that of the downward ones.

**Table 4.1.3b. Households moving two or more wealth quintiles (%)**

	Total	Urban	Rural
Moved upward two or more quintiles	9.4	6.7	10.2
Moved less than two quintiles, either way	81.1	86.6	79.6
Moved downward two or more quintiles	9.5	6.7	10.2

*Note:* Quintiles are defined for the whole sample, not for sectors

### *Wealth index*

The wealth index used by Young Lives is an important measure of a household's the socio-economic status, and is calculated as a simple average of the following three components: 1) housing quality; 2) access to consumer durables (scaled); and 3) access to services, expressed as a figure between 0 and 1.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> A household would have a maximum wealth index, which is 1, if it had all of the following: firstly, there were as many rooms in the house as members of the household; secondly, if the household members, together, owned all the basic durable goods such as a radio, fridge, bicycle, TV, motorbike, motor vehicle, mobile phone, landline phone and jewellery/watch; thirdly, if the house had brick or plastered walls, or a sturdy roof (such as corrugated iron, tiles or concrete), and if the dwelling floor was made of a finished material (such as cement, tiles or a laminated material); fourthly, if the household's source of drinking water was piped into the dwelling or yard; fifthly, if the household had a flushing toilet or pit latrine; and finally, if the household used electricity, gas or kerosene.

Table 4.1.4. Wealth index of all households (both cohorts)

		Round 1	Round 2	Round 3
Sectors				
	Urban	0.70	0.70	0.79
	Rural	0.38	0.46	0.54
Regions				
	Northern Uplands	0.26	0.32	0.39
	Red River Delta	0.52	0.59	0.65
	Central Coast urban	0.70	0.71	0.80
	Central Coast rural	0.42	0.52	0.59
	Mekong Delta	0.33	0.42	0.52
Ethnicity				
	Majority	0.49	0.55	0.63
	Minority	0.18	0.26	0.32
Schooling of caregiver				
	None	0.19	0.25	0.31
	Incomplete primary	0.34	0.42	0.50
	Complete primary	0.51	0.56	0.65
All households average		0.45	0.51	0.59

As Table 4.1.4 shows, the wealth index increased for all groups of households between 2002 and 2009. The only exception is the case of no change for households in the urban sector from Round 1 to Round 2 (2006). The relative position of the regions remains unchanged, and there is no clear trend of either a decreasing or an increasing gap in wealth index between ethnic or more educated/less educated groups. However, notable disparities between regions and ethnic groups persist, as well as between households with less educated and more educated caregivers. While the average wealth index of the Young Lives households in the city of Da Nang is as high as 80 per cent of the perfect wealth index, the corresponding figure for the Northern Uplands is just half of that. Da Nang is a big port city, where after economic development, even by 2002 (Round 1) wealth levels for Young Lives households were much higher than elsewhere. However, the rate of change in the Northern Uplands is faster than in Da Nang. Nevertheless, the average wealth index of the ethnic minority households is only a third of the maximum wealth index value.

Throughout the rounds of the surveys, one can observe that wealth index is positively associated with the level of education of the caregivers. The average wealth index of the households whose caregivers have no education is as low as 31 per cent. Our calculations show that in all the rounds of surveys, two-thirds of households whose caregivers have no schooling are in the lowest wealth index quintile. For the households where caregivers have had some schooling, but not completed primary school, the figure is one-third, and that is consistently so over the surveys.

Table 4.1.5 shows that the households with caregivers who have had no schooling are over-represented in the lowest wealth index quintile – while they represent less than 11 per cent of the total sample, they make up more than a third of the poorest households. More than 70 per cent of caregivers completed primary education or above, and represent just over a third of households in the lowest wealth index quintile.

**Table 4.1.5. Share of households in the lowest wealth index quintile by caregivers' level of schooling (%)**

Caregiver education level in R1	Whole sample	Lowest WI quintile		
	R1	R1	R2	R3
No schooling	10.9	36.5	34.6	36.5
Incomplete primary	17.5	29.3	25.4	26.3
Complete primary or above	71.7	34.3	40.0	37.2

## 4.2 Education

In Vietnam, the education system is currently divided into five stages: pre-primary (up to two years duration), primary (grades 1–5), lower secondary (grades 6–9), upper secondary (grades 10–12), and higher education. Primary education enrolment in Vietnam has been high, but children gradually drop out of school. The drop-out rate is higher for lower secondary school children, and even higher for children leaving school after completing lower secondary education. The government has been trying to address these problems for over a decade. By Resolution 41/2000/QH10 of 9 December 2000, the National Assembly (NA) approved the government proposal to make lower secondary school education universal by 2010. The Resolution stipulates among others, the following targets: firstly to ensure that at least 95 per cent of pupils who have completed primary school enrol in lower secondary school (for the communes with especially difficult socio-economic conditions, the target is 80 per cent); secondly, to ensure that at least 80 per cent of young people aged 15–18 have completed lower secondary education (70 per cent for the communes with especially difficult socio-economic conditions). A year later, by Decision 201/2001/QĐ, the prime minister ratified the Strategy for Education Development, 2001–2010, which specifies that by 2010 at least 99 per cent of primary-school-age children should be enrolled in school. Furthermore, in addition to the targets on the lower secondary school enrolment rate, the strategy requires that the rate of enrolment in upper secondary school be increased to 50 per cent by 2010.

Even if the enrolment targets are met, there will be a substantial proportion of children out of school after lower secondary school. In Vietnam, upper secondary education is quite academic. The vocational track has been small compared to the academic track. MOET's statistics show that in the academic year 2007/8, the total numbers of students in primary, lower secondary, and the upper secondary schools were 6,872,000, 5,858,000, and 3,070,000, respectively, while the number of students in all the vocational secondary schools was 615,000.<sup>17</sup> In practice, there remains much for the education system of Vietnam to do to meet the targets set in the government strategy. Indeed, in the academic year 2008/9, nationwide, there were over 746,000 children not going to lower secondary school – more than 12 per cent of lower-secondary-school-age children (Viet Anh 2010).

<sup>17</sup> MOET statistics, <http://www.moet.gov.vn/?page=11.11&view=3544> (accessed 3 July 2011)

In Round 2, most of the Young Lives children in the Younger Cohort were either in their last year of pre-primary education, or their first year of primary school. In Round 3 in 2009 the average child in the Young Lives Younger Cohort was in the third grade. The enrolment rate remains nearly 100 per cent for both girls and boys and in all regions, except the Northern Uplands where it is just below (94 per cent)

**Table 4.2.1. School enrolment rate and starting age, Younger Cohort**

		Enrolment (%)		Age of starting primary school
		R2 5 years old (in 2006*)	R3 8 years old (in 2009)	
Gender				
	Girls	90.8	98.5	6.04
	Boys	89.1	97.8	6.05
Sectors				
	Urban	95.5	99.3	6.03
	Rural	88.8	97.9	6.05
State of poverty				
	Poor	79.6	92.1	6.15
	Non-poor	93.3	98.8	6.03
Regions				
	Northern Uplands	85.4	93.6	6.08
	Red River Delta	99.5	99.7	6.01
	Central Coast urban	99.5	99.7	6.01
	Central Coast rural	89.1	98.7	6.08
	Mekong Delta	81.6	99.5	6.03
Ethnicity				
	Majority	92.2	99.3	6.03
	Minority	77.4	91.0	6.15
Education of caregiver				
	None	71.4	87.9	6.21
	Incomplete primary	84.5	98.6	6.07
	Complete primary or above	93.9	99.6	6.02
Whole Younger Cohort		90.1	98.2	6.05

Note: \* In 2006, enrolment was in pre-primary education.

The figures in Table 4.2.1 show that the greatest proportion of unenrolled children were mostly those with uneducated caregivers. As many as 12 per cent of the Younger Cohort children whose caregivers have no education, did not go to school at the time of the Round 3 survey. The great majority of these children were from ethnic minorities. The table also indicates that most children in the sample started primary school at the age of 6. The rate of late enrolment is small in all the groups under consideration, except ethnic minority children and children whose

caregivers have no schooling. The high overall enrolment rate is both a real achievement and an opportunity for investment in Vietnam's human capital. To maximise the returns from schooling, enrolment is a necessary, but not sufficient, element. Alongside this there are issues of both the poverty of households (leading to difficulties in children's engagement with education) and the quality of education received.

The Older Cohort were on average in the third grade of primary school when Round 1 of the survey was done. They were in lower secondary school in Round 2, and over half of them had entered the upper secondary school by Round 3. We find no significant gender gap in the rate of enrolment up to Round 2, although there is a difference by Round 3 (see Table 4.2.2).

**Table 4.2.2. School enrolment rate and starting age, Older Cohort**

	Enrolment (%)			Age of starting primary school
	R1 8 years old (in 2002)	R2 12 years old (in 2006)	R3 15 years old (in 2009)	
Child characteristics				
Girls	98.4	96.7	80.0	6.11
Boys	98.6	96.7	72.2	6.09
Urban	100.0	100.0	87.8	6.04
Rural	98.1	95.9	73.2	6.12
Poor	n/a	91.3	54.8	6.29
Non-poor	n/a	98.2	77.9	6.09
Regions				
Northern Uplands	93.9	93.9	66.7	6.22
Red River Delta	100.0	99.0	79.7	6.03
Central Coast urban	100.0	100.0	89.8	6.03
Central Coast rural	99.5	94.3	66.0	6.13
Mekong Delta	99.0	97.0	81.2	6.10
Ethnicity				
Majority	99.6	98.4	80.0	6.05
Minority	90.6	85.8	50.4	6.44
Schooling of caregiver				
None	88.7	85.4	45.8	6.61
Incomplete primary	98.5	95.4	60.3	6.09
Complete primary or above	100.0	98.6	84.1	6.04
Older Cohort	98.5	96.7	78.1	6.10

In each rural district of Vietnam, there are only a couple of upper secondary schools, and these accommodate a smaller number of students than the lower secondary schools. A significant proportion of children do not continue schooling after completing lower secondary school, which means that many children leave school by the age of 14, often after failing entrance exams for upper secondary school. For children in the mountain areas, schools – especially upper secondary schools – are far away from home and therefore, a decision to go

to upper secondary school may involve economic considerations as well as the child's test scores and performance in school. For children in the deltas and urban areas, however, nearly everyone who passes the upper secondary school entrance exam continues their schooling.

At around the age of 15 in Round 3, about a quarter of the Young Lives Older Cohort boys had already left school, while the drop-out rate for girls was less than 20 per cent. This difference need not be a reflection of gender discrimination (against boys) by parents but could have been because the girls performed better than the boys in the entrance exam for upper secondary school. Even though the enrolment rate remains relatively high for both the urban and rural sectors, the gap between these two sectors is significant. While slightly over 10 per cent of the urban adolescents had left school by Round 3, the rate for the rural sector was nearly double that. If we include the young people who were never enrolled in primary school,<sup>18</sup> about a quarter of the Older Cohort in rural areas are not expected to have upper secondary education. Enrolment in upper secondary school is particularly low for young people from poorer households. We can see that less than 55 per cent of the young people from the poorest households were still in school in Round 3. On the other hand, nearly 80 per cent of the adolescents from the non-poor households are continuing their education in upper secondary schools.

Given the socio-economic conditions in the Northern Uplands (with poor transport and limited market access), it was a big success for the region to have kept an enrolment rate of 94 per cent in Round 2. However, only two-thirds of the Older Cohort in the Northern Uplands were still enrolled in school at the time of the Round 3 survey. This enrolment rate is the same as in the rural Central Coast, and what these regions have in common is the fact that all the ethnic minority children in the Young Lives sample live there. The enrolment rate for ethnic minority children in the Older Cohort is around 50 per cent, which is significantly lower than the ethnic majority children (80 per cent). The enrolment rate of children whose caregivers who have no education is even lower – at 46 per cent. Our Round 3 findings show that the higher the level of education of the caregiver, the more likely the child is to be enrolled in school, and our records show that the primary caregivers of the children are mostly the mothers. The positive association between the education of the caregivers and the enrolment of the child suggests that education is an aspect of socio-economic status that may be transmitted from one generation to the next. It is also likely that low levels of maternal education and low levels of wealth are closely associated so maternal education also acts as a proxy for other disadvantages.

Finally, from the data on the age of starting primary school, one can observe that there is similarity between the cohorts for most groups of children, except the disadvantaged groups, which include poor children, ethnic minorities and the children whose caregivers have had no schooling. For these groups in the Older Cohort, the average age of starting primary school is higher than those for the corresponding groups in the Younger Cohort. This can be regarded as some progress made between 2002 and 2009.

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18 In fact, of the Older Cohort, only one child never went to school, and 19 other children dropped before completing grade 5.

### **4.3 Health and well-being**

#### *Underweight and stunting*

Children's health has been high on Vietnam's policy agenda recently.<sup>19</sup> Child malnutrition was high in Vietnam in the 1980s, when Vietnam was among the poorest countries in the world. The high rate of malnutrition was due in part to the inadequacy of energy and protein intake, owing to a diet dominated by rice and severely lacking in protein from meat, pulses and fish (Le Thi Hop 2003). However, since economic growth has come, following the socio-economic reforms of Doi Moi, there has been a noticeable change in the stature of children in Vietnam. Using VHLSS data, Le Thuc Duc (2010) demonstrates that there is a significant difference in height-for-age between two cohorts of children aged 5–14, one born in the decade just before the Doi Moi Reform and the one just after that (1979–88 as compared to 1992–2001). Furthermore, with economic development in the 1990s, the incidence of stunting for children under 5 declined by 16 percentage points in only five years, from 50 per cent in 1993 to 34 per cent in 1998 (Glewwe et al. 2004).

Young Lives evidence further supports these claims, showing that, with the continuation of economic development, children born after the millennium are less likely to be malnourished than those born in the mid-1990s. Table 4.3.1 shows how in 2009, aged 7 to 8, the Younger Cohort children were healthier than the Older Cohort children were in 2002, when they were about the same age. If the difference in the measures of health is interpreted as an indication of progress made in recent years, one can see the progress was significant for both sexes and in both rural and urban sectors, and for all the wealth index quartiles. Particularly strong progress, however, is made by the wealthiest quartile and in the urban sector. Progress among disadvantaged groups is less impressive. In fact, virtually no improvement is made by the children whose caregivers have no schooling. Likewise, the improvement for the ethnic minorities as a group is just one percentage point.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for instance, the National Plan of Action for Children 2001–2010, and the 2010–2015 National Programme for Child Protection discussed in section 1.

Table 4.3.1. Malnutrition indicators among 8-year-old children

	Underweight at age 8		Stunting at age 8	
	OC	YC	OC	YC
	(2002)	(2009)	(2002)	(2009)
Child characteristics				
Girls	33.6	21.8	25.3	17.6
Boys	40.0	27.2	29.9	22.0
Urban	25.5	9.7	17.6	6.5
Rural	39.5	28.4	30.0	23.3
By wealth index quartiles in Round 2				
Quartile 1 (the poorest)	41.1	36.3	39.7	32.0
Quartile 2	44.7	30.4	33.3	23.6
Quartile 3	35.9	22.3	24.2	16.1
Quartile 4	26.1	7.4	15.0	6.1
Regions				
Northern Uplands	41.6	38.8	46.2	35.6
Red River Delta	40.0	22.1	20.5	11.5
Central Coast urban	25.5	9.5	17.6	6.6
Central Coast rural	46.7	34.9	39.1	27.3
Mekong Delta	29.7	17.2	14.1	17.7
Ethnicity				
Majority	34.9	20.6	22.6	14.6
Minority	49.6	48.6	60.6	51.6
Schooling of caregiver				
None	47.2	47.7	54.7	53.1
Some, incomplete primary	37.4	31.1	30.8	22.6
Complete primary or above	34.9	19.9	22.2	14.4
Average	36.7	24.6	27.6	19.8

The overall rate of underweight among the two cohorts of children when each was aged 8 went down from 36.7 per cent in 2002 (for the Older Cohort) to 24.6 per cent for the Younger Cohort, which represents remarkable progress for Vietnam. With respect to the incidence of stunting, the corresponding figures are 27.7 per cent and 19.8 per cent. The higher the level of education of the caregiver is, the greater the improvement is in the rate of underweight between the two cohorts when aged 8. It is easy to observe the negative correlations between the rate of stunting and the level of caregivers' schooling. The same can be said about the rate of underweight.

When we look at the correlation between the children's nutritional status and the economic status of their households, we can perhaps infer that this form of inequality increased in Vietnam between 2002 and 2009, as the wealthier sections of the population (the urban sector and households with more educated caregivers) made greater progress than the disadvantaged groups. This suggests that government intervention in health protection for children in the disadvantaged groups is urgently desirable in order to prevent inequality from further increasing.

It seems therefore that economic growth does not automatically lead to progress in reducing malnutrition, as poorer Young Lives children are still lagging behind richer ones in this respect. However, there might be reasons for children's malnutrition other than parents' inability to afford meat, milk products, or other nutrient-rich foods. For example, parents might not pay enough attention to the role of vitamin A and other micronutrients. A survey on anaemia and

sub-clinical vitamin A deficiency carried out in late 2008 with 8,152 children under 5 years of age in 56 provinces of Vietnam found that:

sub-clinical vitamin A deficiency (serum retinol < 0.7µmol/L) was 14.2 per cent; anaemia prevalence (Hb<110g/L) was 29.2 per cent, ranking as mild level of public health significance. The prevalence of sub-clinical vitamin A deficiency varied among provinces and ecological areas. The young children aged < 24 months were found to be at high risk of anaemia and vitamin A deficiency. (Nguyen Xuan Ninh et al. 2010)

There is other evidence that is in line with our results about the high rates of underweight and stunting for the children in the Northern Uplands. Nguyen Thi Hai Anh and Le Thi Hop (2006) conducted a study in three areas of Lao Cai province in the Northern Uplands. The first area was the city of Lao Cai and the central towns; the second, the rural mountains adjacent to the first section; and the third covered some mountainous communes. Their results showed that the prevalence of malnutrition in children under 5 in Lao Cai was very high (according to WHO's classification), and it varied by area. In all of the indicators, child malnutrition was highest in mountain areas and lowest in the city and central towns. They found that the incidence of malnutrition in children under 24 months old was associated with factors that included location of residence, ethnicity, mother receiving no iron supplementation during pregnancy, incorrect weaning practice, child diarrhoea, family food insecurity, and mother being badly informed about child nutrition. Apart from confirming our findings that ethnic minority children are more likely to be malnourished, this shows that children are also more likely to be affected if their mothers are not well informed about health and welfare, which is perhaps one consequence of low maternal education levels.

### *Access to healthcare*

The argument made in the previous section for intervention, particularly to support ethnic minorities, can be further strengthened by evidence about the difficulties families face in accessing healthcare. The first column of Table 4.3.2 presents the percentages of the households that have experienced a situation when they would have liked to take a sick or injured Younger Cohort child to a healthcare facility but did not do so because of difficulties. Overall 6.5 per cent of the sample report needing to use the service but not being able to. Columns 2 to 6 present the percentages of households with specific reasons for the sick/ injured children not being taken to a healthcare centre.

**Table 4.3.2. Difficulties in accessing healthcare (Round 3, whole sample, %)**

		Needed service but did not use	Reasons for not using service*				
			Direct costs	Indirect costs	Distance, difficult access	Distrust quality of service	Child misses school
	Girls	6.0	1.01	0.91	0.77	0.62	1.20
	Boys	7.1	0.86	1.30	1.52	0.79	1.25
	Urban	4.7	0.85	1.28	0.47	0.43	0.94
	Rural	7.0	0.99	1.14	1.50	0.93	1.05
Regions							
	Northern Uplands	8.7	0.38	2.22	3.38	1.19	3.59
	Red River Delta	9.7	1.21	0.78	0.58	1.58	0.95
	Central Coast urban	5.0	0.68	0.91	0.24	0.23	1.19
	Central Coast rural	6.5	2.08	1.05	1.26	0.35	0.18
	Mekong Delta	2.8	0.70	0.56	0.56	0.19	0.37
Ethnicity							
	Majority	6.0	0.75	0.79	0.65	0.65	0.55
	Minority	10.1	2.02	2.99	5.56	1.87	3.50
	Whole sample	6.5	0.93	1.10	1.14	0.70	1.22

\* Households were able to give reasons other than the ones indicated in this table, and possibly more than one reason, so columns 2–6 may not correspond to the totals given in column 1.

Direct costs (medicine, hospital fees, etc.) are an issue reported by all the groups of households, but are most significant for households from the rural parts of the Central Coast region and for ethnic minority households. Indirect costs present another problem, which affects more households than direct costs, while the main drawbacks are reported as the distance to the health centres or the fact that children miss school (perhaps also because of distance). Our records show that the households in the Northern Uplands (which include a big proportion of the ethnic minority households) report another problem connected with distance, namely difficulty in (physical) access to the healthcare centres. Furthermore, the same groups (in the Northern Uplands and the ethnic minorities) are most likely to face the problem of children having to miss school in order to access health services. This is because of the infrastructural conditions in their communities. Thus, the difficulties experienced by households in the mountain areas in accessing healthcare present another factor that exacerbates the socio-economic inequality currently existing in Vietnam.

### *Access to safe water and sanitation facilities*

Infrastructure development is among the major policies and measures aimed at promoting the development of sectors and industries, indicated in the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) of Vietnam. The CPRGS states that infrastructure development will be 'based on the needs of the poor, [and will] develop policies and programmes to provide electricity, small irrigation works, clean water, sanitation facilities, and develop and rehabilitate the transport system, especially in poor regions and areas' (SRV 2003: 9). Success in the reduction of absolute poverty in Vietnam in the decade 2000–10 included an increase in the percentage of the population who had access to electricity, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities.

Access to safe water in the urban sector has been made largely universal, and therefore further progress concerns mostly the rural sector. In August 2000, the prime minister approved the National Rural Clean Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy up to 2020. In Phase II (2005–10), DFID, the Australian Government Overseas Aid Program (AusAid), the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation contributed funds. The strategy aimed to provide clean water for 85 per cent of the rural population by the end of 2010, hygienic latrines and livestock facilities for 70 per cent of rural households, and clean water and hygienic latrines for 100 per cent of rural primary schools, kindergartens, nurseries, clinics and houses of the communal People's Committees.

There has been significant progress in access to safe drinking water<sup>20</sup> and improved sanitation facilities<sup>21</sup> in each round of the Young Lives surveys since 2002 (see Table 4.3.3). Significantly more people have access to safe water in Round 3 than in was the case in Round 1, especially in the rural sector, where the rate of access to safe water increased from under half the sample in 2002 to about three-quarters in 2006 and more than four-fifths in 2009. With respect to the change in access to improved sanitation facilities, the trend of improvement is also marked, but more gradual.

**Table 4.3.3. Access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation**

(both cohorts)

		Safe drinking water			Improved sanitation		
		2002	2006	2009	2002	2006	2009
Sectors							
	Urban	87.5	99.3	99.2	84.2	95.8	96.2
	Rural	46.4	75.5	80.7	40.0	45.5	53.6
Economic status*							
	Poor	–	71.0	75.4	–	32.0	33.9
	Non-poor	–	83.0	85.6	–	62.7	65.8
Regions**							
	Northern Uplands	–	61.2	70.5	40.5	39.7	47.8
	Red River Delta	97.1	98.3	98.0	84.7	89.1	89.6
	Central Coast urban	87.5	99.6	99.8	84.2	96.8	97.4
	Central Coast rural	–	98.3	98.6	24.7	30.7	44.6
	Mekong Delta	72.7	44.2	55.5	10.5	23.5	33.0
Ethnicity							
	Majority	62.3	83.3	88.2	53.4	62.0	68.8
	Minority	–	61.8	61.3	18.7	16.5	22.7
Schooling of caregiver							
	None	15.7	60.8	59.5	14.8	11.0	15.1
	Incomplete primary	43.8	68.7	74.4	24.1	32.6	40.0
	Complete primary or above	62.9	85.6	90.2	59.7	67.1	73.9
Cohorts							
	Younger	54.1	80.7	84.1	48.6	54.5	61.3
	Older	55.0	79.4	85.2	48.7	58.2	64.5
Sample average		54.4	80.3	84.5	48.6	55.7	62.4

\*Economic status here is calculated using household consumption data which is not available for Round 1.

\*\*Data for access to safe drinking water in 2002 in the Northern Uplands and Central Coast rural, and for minority groups are not included because of concerns that the data in these regions were under-reported.

20 Safe drinking water includes piped water (into own, or relatives', or neighbours' dwelling/yard/plot), public standpipe/tube well, bore well, protected well, and rain water from non pro-cement roof (asbestos sheets).

21 Improved sanitation facilities consist of flush toilet/septic tank or pit latrine.

The rate of access to both of these services varies widely between regions. Even though it is not the poorest region, Mekong Delta has lowest rates of access to both safe water and improved sanitation facilities. People in Mekong Delta rely heavily on river water. Only one-third of households in the region have access to improved sanitation facilities. Ethnic minority households fare worse, with fewer than one in four of them having access to improved sanitation facilities. The lowest rate of access to improved sanitation is among the households of children whose caregivers have no schooling.

The rate of access to improved sanitation is strongly correlated to the level of caregivers' education. Furthermore, there is no clear difference between the cohorts in access to either safe water or improved sanitation. The rates of access for the Older Cohort are generally a little better than for the Younger Cohort, perhaps, because the households of Younger Cohort on average are slightly poorer than those of the Older Cohort.

### *Smoking and drinking*

Another issue that has important implications for young people's health and well-being is their use of addictive products, such as alcohol and cigarettes. As this matter can be regarded as sensitive, the Older Cohort (aged 15) were given a specially developed section of the questionnaire to fill in themselves, anonymously. Data from these self-administered questionnaires show that very few of the young people smoke. Only 2 per cent of Older Cohort boys smoke every day, with a further 3 per cent of the boys saying they do smoke but hardly ever. Girls hardly smoke at all, and less than 2 per cent of them say they drink alcohol at least once a month. Five per cent of the boys drink alcohol at least once a month, but the clear majority of boys never drink alcohol (see Table 4.3.4).

**Table 4.3.4. Smoking and drinking, Older Cohort (%)**

		Every day	Less than every day, but at least once a week	Less than ones a week, but at least once a month	Hardly ever*	Never
I smoke (cigarettes)	Boys	1.9	0.84	0.21	3.16	93.88
	Girls	0.61	0.2	0.41	0.61	98.16
I drink alcohol	Boys	0.63	1.9	2.53	31.85	63.08
	Girls	0.41	0.62	0.62	17.91	80.45

\* includes on special occasions

### **4.4 Work and time use**

The socio-economic status of the children's households, and their parents' preferences, affect the way the children use their time. In many poor households, children and their parents have very little choice about this, having to do what their circumstances require. In its turn, the way the child uses time will have an impact on his or her socio-economic status in the future. The time spent on education can be regarded as an investment in human capital, while the time used for work (usually on family farms) augments current income, and can help young people develop vocational skills different from those learned in school. However, all children should be given the opportunity to learn in school, at least to complete lower secondary education.

Table 4.4.1. Hours per day spent on core activities (Younger Cohort)

		Farm/herding work for household		At school	Studying at home/extra classes	Leisure
		Children doing this (%)	Average time <sup>a</sup>	Average time <sup>b</sup>	Average time <sup>b</sup>	Average time
Gender						
	Girls	3.17	2.5	4.97	2.99	2.08
	Boys	5.47	2.73	4.99	2.93	2.08
Sector						
	Urban	0	–	6	2.99	1.9
	Rural	5.49	2.65	4.71	2.95	2.13
Poverty status						
	Poor	7.93	3.2	4.71	2.48	2.03
	Non-poor	4.51	2.48	5	2.99	2.09
Region						
	Northern Uplands	13.04	3.49	4.74	3.17	1.98
	Red River Delta	1.03	1	4.31	4.45	2.52
	Central Coast urban	0	–	6.1	2.95	1.88
	Central Coast rural	6.57	1.5	4.63	1.97	1.97
	Mekong Delta	1.04	1	5.14	2.26	2.04
Ethnicity						
	Majority	2.21	1.51	5.03	3.01	2.09
	Minority	17.2	3.52	4.64	2.54	2
Schooling of caregiver						
	None	20.47	3.52	4.66	2.1	2.01
	Incomplete primary	3.89	2.45	4.9	2.38	2.02
	Complete primary	2.06	1.43	5.03	3.17	2.1
Younger Cohort		4.35	2.65	4.98	2.96	2.08

Note: <sup>a</sup>The average time is calculated for the children who have done at least one of these things;

<sup>b</sup>The averages are calculated only for children who are currently enrolled in school.

It is important to note that none of the 8-year-old children report doing paid work, while only 85 children, or fewer than 5 per cent of the Younger Cohort, report working on family farms or doing herding or similar work for their households.<sup>22</sup> More boys do the farm/herding work within the family than girls. As Table 4.4.1 shows, none of the urban children do any farm or herding work and only small numbers of children in the Red River and Mekong delta regions. This is not the case for the children in disadvantaged ethnic minority groups in the Northern Uplands where 13 per cent of children are working, or among children whose caregivers have low education, over 20 per cent of whom report doing this kind of work.

22 Here this includes tasks on family farm, herding sheep or cattle (household and/or community), other family business, piecework or handicrafts done at home. It does not include care for other family members (younger children, or sick relatives), or domestic chores (fetching water or firewood, cleaning or washing, cooking, shopping).

The time use reported in Table 4.4.1 includes only those children reporting at least one of these activities. Among the children who do farm or herding work, the average time they spend is about two and a half hours per day. The table shows that there is no clear difference between the boys and girls in the way they use their time. Both girls and boys in the Younger Cohort spent five hours in school, and three hours on study at home or taking extra classes. The average time for leisure was the same for girls and for boys.

There are, however, some differences in time use for the Younger Cohort children between the urban and rural sectors and the poor and non-poor children. The urban children do not spend any time on farm/herding work for their household, but spend over one hour more at school than their rural counterparts. The children from poor households do more farm/herding work for their household than the children from better-off households. We find no difference in average time for leisure between the poor and the non-poor children.

The Northern Uplands region has the highest average time used for farm/herding work of all the regions. This is about the same as the average for the ethnic minorities and the average for the children whose caregivers have no schooling. The higher the level of the caregiver education is, the less time children in the Younger Cohort spend on work and the more time they spend on education (including time in school, study at home and attending extra classes). The education of the caregivers, however, does not make any difference in the time available for leisure for these children.

The pattern of time use of the Older Cohort, aged around 15, differs significantly from that of the children in the Younger Cohort. Data show that as many as 6 per cent of the Older Cohort have done some paid work. The numbers of children working for pay in Central Coast rural and the Mekong Delta are higher than the other regions, while the rate in the Northern Uplands is the lowest. Young people from poorer families are more likely to work than non-poor ones. Of the adolescents who do paid work, it seems the standard eight-hour working-day does not apply. The young people in the Northern Uplands and those from ethnic minorities work nearly ten hours per day (see Table 4.4.2), which is very long compared to the average for the sample. Only in the urban sector, where the regulations are likely to be better observed, is the average length of a working day less than eight hours.

Table 4.4.2. Hours per day spent on core activities (Older Cohort)

	Farm/herding work for households		Paid work		At school	Studying at home or extra classes	Leisure time	
	Young people doing this (%)	Average time a	Young people doing this (%)	Average time a	Average time b	Average time b	Average time b	
Gender								
Girls	24.44	3.77	5.91	8.1	5.33	4.07	4.57	
Boys	34.23	3.61	7.01	8.29	5.3	3.68	5.11	
Sector								
Urban	12.69	2.44	5.58	6	5.04	4.09	4.68	
Rural	33.5	3.8	6.68	8.67	5.4	3.82	4.88	
Poverty status								
Poor	40.63	5.14	10.94	8.57	5.22	2.42	5.56	
Non-poor	28.06	3.51	7.44	8.16	5.32	3.91	4.78	
Region								
Northern Uplands	55.9	4.83	2.05	9.75	5.14	3.11	4.93	
Red River Delta	26.4	2.81	7.61	8.13	5.34	4.99	4.17	
Central Coast urban	11.76	2.09	4.81	6.11	5.04	4.15	4.69	
Central Coast rural	40.31	3.36	9.42	8.89	5.33	3.8	5.22	
Mekong Delta	12.69	2.36	8.12	8.25	5.71	3.24	5.19	
Ethnicity								
Majority	23.32	2.98	7.07	8.13	5.33	3.98	4.74	
Minority	69.29	5.24	2.36	9.67	5.16	2.81	5.51	
Schooling of caregiver								
None	65.65	5.38	5.21	8.4	5.2	2.51	5.65	
Incomplete primary	33.33	3.81	13.79	8.17	5.3	3.21	5.43	
Complete primary	23.37	2.98	23.37	8.21	5.33	4.1	4.58	
Older Cohort average	29.3	3.68	6.45	8.21	5.32	3.88	4.84	

Note: <sup>a</sup> The averages are calculated for the young people who have done some of this work;

<sup>b</sup> Time at school is the average for the young people who currently enrol.

As many as almost 30 per cent of the 15-year-olds do at least some farm/herding work for their families. The rate of participation is particularly high for the ethnic minorities and the children whose caregivers have no schooling. Among the children whose caregivers have some schooling but less than completed primary education, the rate is cut by half. By a difference of 10 percentage points, boys are more likely than girls to do some of the farmwork for their households. Similarly, the rate of participation among the poor children is higher than among the non-poor, and the rural children are more likely to do some of the household work than the urban ones.

Young people from poor households and ethnic minorities, and those whose caregivers had no schooling, are the groups with the highest average hours-per-day spent on work in farming

or herding for their households. Among the young people, who do some of this work, urban young people on average spend the least time on it. When the sample is divided by level of caregiver's education, we observe that, as the level of education increases, the average length of time the child spends working decreases, while the average time spent on study at home and taking extra classes increases.

Finally, we see some variation in the length of time spent on leisure by groups of adolescents in the Older Cohort. Interestingly, the young people from poor households have more leisure than those from the non-poor households, and the ethnic minority young people have more leisure time than the ethnic majority children. Most surprising however is the fact that the 15-year-olds have more leisure time than the 8-year-olds. That can be partially explained by the fact that a greater share of the 15-year-olds have already left school.

#### 4.5 Subjective well-being

Subjective well-being is another important dimension of prosperity and poverty. To assess their perceptions of their lives, a picture of a nine-step ladder was shown to the children. They were told that the top rung represented the best possible life for them, and the lowest rung the worst possible life. They were then asked where on the ladder they felt they personally stood at that time. For the purposes of this analysis, answers 1–3 have been grouped together to present a state of 'having a bad life', while the answers 7–9 are taken to mean 'having a better life than peers'.

**Table 4.5.1. Young people's perceptions of their quality of life, Older Cohort (%)**

		Having a bad life	Having a better life than peers
	Girls	10.8	25.7
	Boys	12.0	17.1
	Urban	8.6	28.4
	Rural	12.1	19.6
	Poor	30.1	5.5
	Non-poor	9.9	22.7
Region			
	Northern Uplands	17.9	12.3
	Red River Delta	5.6	25.9
	Central Coast urban	8.0	29.9
	Central Coast rural	9.9	13.1
	Mekong Delta	15.7	26.4
Ethnicity			
	Majority	9.1	23.4
	Minority	26.8	7.9
Schooling of caregiver			
	None	28.1	8.3
	Incomplete primary school	19.5	12.6
	Complete primary school	7.1	25.4
Older Cohort average		11.4	21.4

We find in Table 4.5.1 that over 11 per cent of the Older Cohort (boys and girls) consider they have bad lives (rungs 1 to 3 on the ladder). The table shows that girls are more optimistic than boys as more than a quarter of the Older Cohort girls consider their own life better than that of their peers, while only 17 per cent of boys think that way. Data show that the urban adolescents are more optimistic than the rural ones. Only 7 per cent of the adolescents whose caregivers have completed primary school consider their lives bad, while over a quarter of

them consider their lives to be better than those of their peers. On the other hand, nearly 30 per cent of young people whose caregivers had no education consider they have bad lives, and only 8 per cent think their lives are better than those of their peers. The perception of the young people in this group is about the same as that of the children in the ethnic minority group. Overall, there is some association between this type of subjective well-being and the household's socio-economic status. The higher the caregivers' level of education, the more likely the adolescents are to consider their lives to be better than those of their peers, and the less likely they are to say their lives are bad. However, we can see that just 5.5 per cent of the poor adolescents consider they have a better life than their peers do.

**Table 4.5.2. Children's perception of their quality of life, Younger Cohort (%)**

		Having a bad life	Having a better life than peers
	Girls	14.3	39.6
	Boys	13.4	40.1
	Urban	11.1	43.6
	Rural	14.5	38.9
	Poor	33.3	21.7
	Non-poor	11.1	42.4
Region			
	Northern Uplands	22.0	27.9
	Red River Delta	14.4	38.5
	Central Coast urban	11.3	43.4
	Central Coast rural	11.1	36.6
	Mekong Delta	10.6	54.0
Ethnicity			
	Majority	11.6	43.6
	Minority	27.2	17.6
Schooling of caregiver			
	None	30.2	15.3
	Incomplete primary school	20.8	34.3
	Complete primary school	10.0	44.6
Younger Cohort average		13.8	39.9

The data in Table 4.5.2 indicate that the Younger Cohort children seem more optimistic than the Older Cohort in the way they see their lives, and that is so uniformly for all the categories under consideration. As many as 40 per cent of the Younger Cohort children perceive their life as better than that of their peers. For the children in Mekong Delta, the figure is as high as 54 per cent. Even among the children whose caregivers have no education, 15 per cent feel that their lives are better than those of their peers. Moreover, nearly 22 per cent of the poor children see their own lives as better than those of their peers, although the fact that this is around half the average for the whole sample demonstrates how growing up in poverty is associated with a difference in self perception for children.

With regard to the question on whether one feels one's life is bad, with the exception of the Mekong Delta, the Younger Cohort children of all categories are less optimistic than the Older Cohort children in the corresponding categories. In Central Coast, it is interesting that the rate of children who consider their own life to be bad is roughly the same regardless of whether they are rural or urban. That rate is almost the same as that of Mekong Delta.

## Relationships and emotions

Another source of information on young people's perceptions is the self-administered questionnaire, piloted in Round 3 to ask questions of the Older Cohort about their relationships and behaviour. The way a young person feels about how they are treated by their parents is another measure of child welfare/poverty. An important aspect of the way parents care for them is whether the children feel able to speak about their feelings with their parents or caregivers. We find that more boys (over half) than girls (just over 40 per cent) are confident about this (see Table 4.5.3). Data show that half the girls report that it is a little true for them. Thus, girls are less definite on the matter.

**Table 4.5.3. 15-year-olds' perceptions of their relationships with their parents and of their own happiness (OC)**

		Certainly true for me	A little true for me	Not true for me	No answers
Usually feel able to speak about feelings with parents/ caregivers	Boys	52.9	39.2	5.9	1.9
	Girls	43.6	50.2	4.1	2.1
Most of the time I feel parents/ guardian treat me fairly when I do something wrong	Boys	64.4	24.3	9.8	1.5
	Girls	67.0	24.6	6.9	1.5
I worry a lot	Boys	10.6	52.0	37.4	0
	Girls	13.2	63.4	23.4	0
I am often unhappy, downhearted or tearful	Boys	6.5	30.0	63.5	0
	Girls	9.1	43.6	47.3	0

The majority of the girls and boys feel that most of the time they are treated fairly (certainly true or a little true) by their parents/guardians when they do something wrong. However, 10 per cent of the boys do not feel that way, while fewer girls (just under 7 per cent) feel they are treated unfairly.

Few young people in the Older Cohort report worrying a lot, only 11 per cent of boys and 13 per cent of girls, while the majority of them say it is either only a little true for them or not true at all. The figures suggest that girls are slightly more likely than boys to report they worry a lot. There is a similar pattern in the children's reporting about being unhappy, downhearted or tearful. Over 60 per cent of boys are never unhappy, downhearted or tearful, while more than half of the girls said they were either often or sometimes unhappy, downhearted or tearful.

## 4.6 Shocks and adverse events

The majority of the districts where Young Lives children live experience shocks and adverse events, at least environmental shocks. The period between the second and third rounds of the survey included Vietnam's accession to the WTO, the start of the global economic recession of the late 2000s, and the world food price crisis in 2007–08, all of which seem likely to have caused shocks. Data show that nearly one-third of all the Young Lives households identified the increase in food prices as one of the events that affected the household economy negatively. Of these households, 313 (11%) considered the increase in food prices as the most significant shock, while 205 (7%) and 156 (5%) households considered it as the second most and the third most significant shock, respectively. The increase in food prices is most reported by households in Central Coast, both urban and rural, where about half of the households reported suffering from the event. The Northern Uplands, where less than 15 per cent of the households reported this event, is the area the shock in food prices was felt least. Data on

food price increases were not collected in the 2006 survey, precluding comparison between Rounds 2 and 3, but concurrent statistics from Vietnam's General Statistics Office show that food prices increased nationally by 38 per cent over the three years of 2004–06 while from 2007 to 2008, the average annual price of food went up by 36.6 per cent. Therefore, food price shocks are likely to have hit households in 2006 as well.

Having separated the reports regarding food prices from the other economic/livelihood shocks, however, Table 4.6.1 shows that there still remains a tendency towards increased economic/livelihood shocks. The Northern Uplands and the Central Coast rural are the regions that suffered the most from these. The disadvantaged groups, such as the ethnic minorities and the households with caregivers who had no schooling, reported the highest rate of general economic/livelihood shocks (other than food price ones).

**Table 4.6.1. Shocks and adverse events experienced since Round 2 (whole sample)**

		Economic/ livelihood shocks (except food price)		Food prices	Environmental shocks		Illness or death in families	
		2006	2009	2009	2006	2009	2006	2009
	Urban	13.7	27.3	46.9	8.1	41.6	31.8	35.4
	Rural	25.4	32.9	28.4	40.3	48.8	27.0	23.7
	Poor	28.0	29.9	34.4	45.7	56.9	29.6	28.1
	Non-poor	21.5	32.2	31.5	30.3	46.2	27.5	25.9
Region								
	Northern Uplands	36.3	41.0	14.5	64.7	39.1	32.2	24.4
	Red River Delta	10.6	25.2	23.0	31.2	46.0	17.0	22.3
	Central Coast urban	13.9	25.9	47.4	7.8	42.9	32.5	36.9
	Central Coast rural	22.6	41.4	56.7	26.5	67.0	41.8	26.4
	Mekong Delta	31.8	25.8	19.8	38.7	42.4	16.8	21.0
Ethnicity								
	Majority	21.3	29.4	32.6	29.0	46.3	26.7	26.2
	Minority	33.3	46.6	29.8	63.5	53.7	35.7	25.6
Schooling of caregiver								
	None	30.1	45.0	32.2	54.7	55.0	32.7	24.8
	Incomplete primary school	25.8	30.0	31.5	39.4	49.5	30.9	27.8
	Complete primary or above	21.5	30.2	32.3	29.6	45.7	26.6	26.0
	Whole sample average	23.0	31.7	32.2	33.8	47.3	28.0	26.1

The households were also asked about environmental shocks that affected their welfare negatively. The increase in the percentage of households reporting being hit by shocks between Round 2 and Round 3 is most significant for the Central Coast region, which is often regarded as the 'typhoon belt'. The rural province of Phu Yen in Central Coastal region suffered most from environmental shocks.<sup>23</sup> The Northern Uplands province of Lao Cai, on the other hand, has the lowest percentage of households suffering from environmental shocks. Because of their altitude and inland position, the Northern Uplands provinces are rarely hit by storms or large-scale floods. In other regions, poor households are more likely to be environmentally vulnerable than non-poor households. This could be because non-poor households are more able to prevent their health or property from being damaged by the

<sup>23</sup> In September 2009, just after the survey had started, a strong storm hit the province. Two-thirds of the households in Phu Yen reported that they had suffered from environmental shocks over the three years since the previous survey, an increase from one-quarter in Round 2. This increase might be due to the fact the storm was so recent.

environmental shocks. That same reasoning can be used to explain the difference in the rate of the ethnic minority households and ethnic majority households reporting being affected by environmental shocks, as the rates of poverty for these ethnic groups differ.

The frequency of adverse events, such as illness or family death, is similar to Round 2. This kind of shock is reported more by urban than rural households, and further study may be necessary to explain why this might be. We do not observe a clear difference between the frequency of these shocks reported by poorer or better-off households (though the impact of the event may well be different). Furthermore, with the exception of the Central Coast city of Da Nang, the frequency of illnesses and family deaths are about the same in the regions. Finally, the level of caregiver education does not seem to be associated with a difference in the likelihood of being hit by this type of shock either.

#### ***4.7 Vietnam-specific issues: Out-of-school children, tuition fee exemption, and extra classes***

The country-specific topics for Vietnam in this survey round focus on education. The existing research and evidence emerging from Young Lives suggest that the gaps between educational opportunities for children from different communities are substantial. Truong Huyen Chi (2009) carried out a sub-study on ethnic minority education in Vietnam between October and December 2008 and found that 'despite a conspicuous expansion in access to basic education for ethnic minority students, the majority–minority gap in educational achievement persists'. Her case studies suggest that an uneven allocation of resources partly accounts for the varying record of performance across regions, i.e., between lowlanders and highlanders, and between 'those who are the direct beneficiaries of socio-development aid and those who are not' (Truong Huyen Chi 2009: 6).

Even though the gap between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities and inequality between regions continue to be high on the agenda, in this section we focus on the issues that are most relevant to poor children from all regions and all ethnic groups. The first is a problem emerging in Vietnam: out-of-school children. The second is conditions for tuition fee exemption (or partial exemption), which is essential to enable poor children to stay in school. And the final one is the issue of extra classes, which is the currently most debated issue relating to Vietnam's education system.

##### *Out-of-school children: a growing problem*

Vietnam's favourable record on primary education enrolment is now being undermined by the problem of out-of-school children. Children may have chosen (or needed) to drop out of school, or were not admitted to upper secondary school because they failed the entrance exam. Given that variable school quality and household factors affecting children's participation and learning in school may affect children's chances of passing exams, it is likely both these factors will disproportionately affect poorer or minority group children. According to UNESCO's Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2008, the number of students who had dropped out of school in Vietnam increased sharply in recent years. Around 2008, the number of children who had dropped out of school in Vietnam was the highest in South-

East Asia, and Vietnam was among ten countries in the world with more than 1 million out-of-school children.<sup>24</sup>

Following Tran Huu Tru (2010), who draws on data from the Ministry of Education and Training from the academic years 2006/7 to 2008/9, the number of pupils in general education decreased by 1,158,841, of whom 703,334 were lower secondary pupils and 159,391 were upper secondary pupils. This happened despite the general increase in the population. In his study, Truong Cong Thanh (2009) wrote that out-of-school children lived mainly in communities with difficult economic conditions and/or a high concentration of ethnic minorities. Truong Cong Thanh's study quotes MOET's deputy minister, Nguyen Minh Hien, saying that there are two major factors that led to the high incidence of school dropouts. The first was related to the unfavourable socio-economic conditions in their localities, which includes characteristics such as poverty, long distances to schools with insufficient transportation, and even hunger and lack of clothes that are good enough to wear to school. The second is the achievement syndrome in education.<sup>25</sup> The latter point made by the MOET's deputy minister can be understood in the following way. Because of achievement syndrome, a student might have been granted formal progression he or she did not really deserve. For instance, in normal conditions, a student who underperformed would have to repeat a grade, but because of achievement syndrome (of the teacher and perhaps the school as well), the student is allowed to move on to the next grade. As a result of such a decision, or the accumulation of such wrong decisions, the student ends up in the wrong class and therefore cannot follow. Dropping out is a likely outcome for students in this situation.

Given that the rate of enrolment of Young Lives children in primary schools is high overall, looking at the children and young people who drop out of school can give us an idea of which population groups are not benefiting as much from education. Over the three years between Rounds 2 and 3, over 20 per cent of the Older Cohort have left school. Table 4.7.1 shows that the change in enrolment between Round 2 and Round 3 differs significantly between categories. For instance, the rate of children from poor families leaving school is twice as high as that of children from better-off families, and the rate in the Northern Uplands and the rural areas of Central Coast is nearly three times that in the urban Central Coast. With respect to ethnicity, the school-leaving rate for the ethnic minority is twice that for the ethnic majority.

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24 The other countries with more than one million of out-of-school children were India, Nigeria, Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali and Niger (UNESCO (2007) EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008. Education For All by 2015: Will we make it? Paris: UNESCO).

25 The term of 'achievement syndrome' is frequently used in the debate on education in Vietnam in recent years. Achievement syndrome can be understood as consisting of two factors. First is the desire of the schools, teachers and the organisations in the education system to achieve high standards. Second is the lenience in the evaluation of the performance of the students, teachers and the authorities, often allowing big gaps between the formal evaluations/promotions and the actual results in learning, teaching and management.

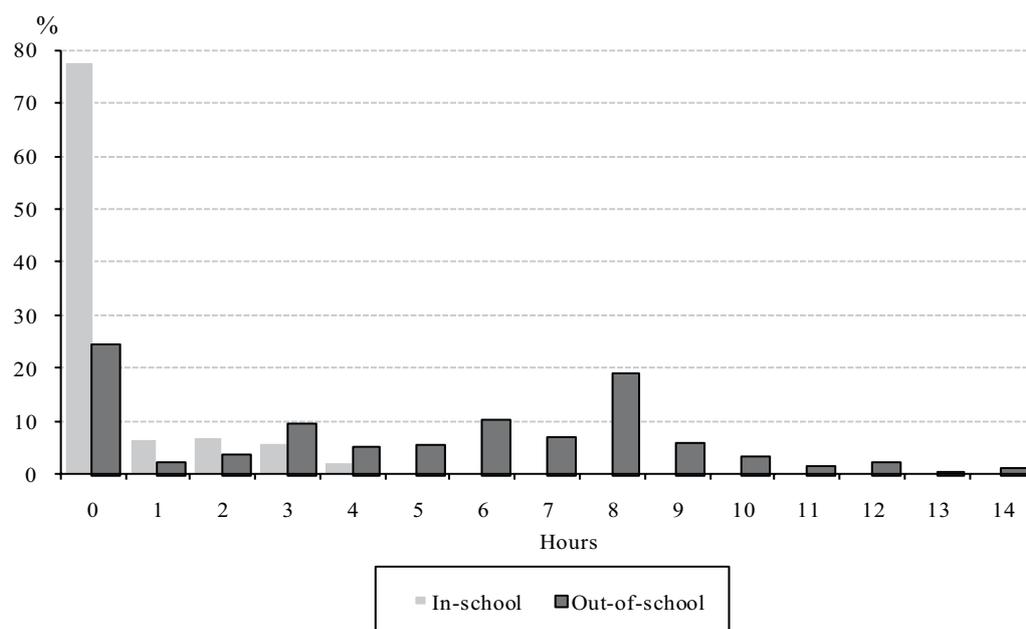
Table 4.7.1. Left school between Round 2 and Round 3, Older Cohort (%)

Child characteristics	Left school	
	Girls	17.1
	Boys	24.5
	Urban	12.2
	Rural	23.0
	Poor	35.6
	Non-poor	19.6
Region	Northern Uplands	28.2
	Red River Delta	19.3
	Central Coast urban	10.2
	Central Coast rural	28.3
	Mekong Delta	15.7
Ethnicity	Majority	18.4
	Minority	37.0
Schooling of caregiver	None	40.6
	Incomplete primary	35.1
	Complete primary or above	14.6
Older Cohort	20.8	

The school drop-out rate is reported to be high even in the relatively well-to-do region of Mekong Delta. According to the Department of Education and Training in the Mekong Delta province of Ben Tre, in the academic year 2009/10, including summer, 5,084 students in Ben Tre dropped out of school, which is 2.5 per cent of the general education students in the province (Nguyen Van Huan 2010). Lower secondary school students make up 57 per cent of all the students dropping out and upper secondary school students are the second largest proportion. The Young Lives district of Binh Dai is among the districts with a high drop-out rate in Ben Tre.

When investigating this issue, we assumed that the out-of-school 15-year-olds used their time for work, but found that this was not the case for a significant proportion of them. We define work hours as the total time a child or young person uses for farm/herding work for households and for paid work. Figure 4.7.1 shows that the out-of-school adolescents are more likely to work than those who are in full-time education. Of the 733 15-year-olds still enrolled in school, less than 1 per cent work for more than four hours a day. More specifically, only five of them are doing paid work and four of those only work between 1 and 3 hours a day. Of the 243 out-of-school 15-year-olds, we find that as many as 24 per cent spend time neither on farm/herding work for their households, nor on paid work. It is important to investigate the question of how the out-of-school Older Cohort adolescents, who do not engage in any economic activity, use their time.

Figure 4.7.1. Hours spent working by 15-year-olds attending school and not attending school\*



**Note:** Working hours are defined as the total time a child or young person uses for farm/herding work for their household and for paid work. Percentages are based on 733 15-year-olds in school and 243 out of school.

It can be seen from Table 4.7.2 that of the 15-year olds who are not in school, 24 per cent report not doing any form of work, but all others (76 per cent) are working either for pay or doing unpaid work within the household. Fifty per cent work for 6 hours or more per day (paid or unpaid), and 20.5 per cent are working 8 hours or more per day in paid employment with a few working more than 12 hours a day.

Table 4.7.2. Hours spent working by out-of-school 15-year-olds (%)

Hours	Paid work alone	Any farm/herding or paid work within household
0	76.1	24
1	0.4	2.1
2	0.0	3.7
3	0.4	9.5
4	0.0	4.9
5	1.2	5.3
6	0.8	10.3
7	0.4	7.0
8	11.1	18.9
9	2.5	5.8
10	3.3	3.3
11	0.8	1.2
12	1.6	2.1
13	0.4	0.4
14	0.0	0.0
15	0.4	0.8
16	0.4	0.4

Out-of-school children have recently become a problem for Vietnam, and data from Young Lives reflect this. Most of the Older Cohort adolescents who have left school do some work

for their households, but less than a quarter do paid work. We find that more research is necessary, to look at two issues in particular: the reasons behind the recent trend of increasing numbers of out-of-school children; and the way the out-of-school children who do neither farm/herding work for their households nor paid work spend their time.

### *School aid: exemption from and reduction of tuition fees*

Traditionally, people in Vietnam place a high value on education. More than 600 years before we had heard of the knowledge economy, a Vietnamese scholar wrote: ‘The morality and talent of people are the prime factors for the nation’s prosperity.’<sup>26</sup> In some sense, today’s government follows this tradition by emphasising the importance of education. According to Vu Hoang Linh (2010: 30), in 2008, education spending was about 5.6 per cent of GDP, which is higher than in most developing countries. For example, world average education spending was 4.3 per cent of GDP and the average spending on education in East Asia and the Pacific was only 2.8 per cent of GDP.

Over the years, the government and educational organisations have provided children and their households with financial support for their education. Generally, this has been provided through tuition fee exemption or reduction, as well as in kind (a few children from very poor mountain districts are provided with rice and/or textbooks). Table 4.7.3 shows that most of the support received by Young Lives children comes in the form of tuition fee exemption, which is especially true for the Younger Cohort children.<sup>27</sup> For a dozen of the Older Cohort children, the support consists of half of their tuition fees. As the table shows, nearly 100 per cent of the Younger Cohort children receive financial support. By law, all primary school children who go to public schools are eligible for tuition fee exemption.

Less than half of the Older Cohort received financial support for their schooling. For education levels higher than primary, the criteria for government support include coming from a poor household or one with many school-age children, being from an ethnic minority, and residence in communities with particularly difficult conditions. If we group households by wealth index quartiles,<sup>28</sup> we can observe that the rate of tuition fee exemption can be as high as 46 per cent for the poorest quartile, but as low as 9 per cent for either quartile in the wealthier half of the cohort. The difference in the rate of tuition fee exemption between the two wealthier and the two poorer groups is large, and that between exemption rates for ethnic majority and minority groups is particularly large (see Table 4.7.3). This pattern is clearly progressive, but still means that 54 per cent of the poorest quartile do not receive any financial support for their schooling at 15 years old.

In all the regions, the regulations on tuition fee exemption at secondary level benefit only a minority of children, except in some very poor communes in mountain areas. For example, in one of our sites in the Northern Uplands which is among the poorest districts in Vietnam, the rate of tuition fee exemption for the Older Cohort students is as high as 92 per cent.

26 On the Stele of the Doctors (1442) at the Temple of Literature in Hanoi, the inscription reads: ‘Hien tai la nguyen khi quoc gia.’

27 In fact, tuition fee exemption is the only kind of support most of these children receive.

28 In section 4.1 above, we disaggregate the sample by wealth quintile. Here, the sub-samples under consideration are within each cohort. To protect the numbers in each group, we have broken the sample into quartiles.

Table 4.7.3. School aid by categories of student recipients (%)

	Younger Cohort		Older Cohort	
	Any school aid	Tuition fee exemption	Any school aid	Tuition fee exemption
Round 3 wealth index				
Quartile 1 (poorest)	98.1	97.7	46.1	40.0
Quartile 2	99.6	99.4	20.2	18.0
Quartile 3	100	100	9.0	8.5
Quartile 4	98.8	98.8	9.2	6.6
Regions				
Northern Uplands	97.8	97.3	52.6	43.9
Red River Delta	100	100	3.9	3.9
Central Coast urban	97.4	97.9	15.4	13.1
Central Coast rural	100	99.7	11.7	11.7
Mekong Delta	99.7	99.7	13.7	11.3
Schooling of caregiver				
Grades 0–4	98.2	97.5	43.7	40.3
Grades 5–8	99.6	99.6	14.5	10.6
Grade 9 or higher	99.4	99.4	10.9	9.5
Ethnicity				
Majority	99.5	99.4	12.9	10.8
Minority	96.9	96.1	77.3	70.8
Whole sample	99.1	99	18.6	16.0

When giving the reasons for receiving school aid, 64 per cent of aid recipients mention either their 'household's remote location', or their 'household's difficult situation'. Furthermore, among the ones giving the answer 'other', 11 students specify additionally that their households live in a Programme 135 commune, which means the communities they live in are both poor and remote.<sup>29</sup> Finally data show that over three-quarters of the ethnic minority students got some school aid, of whom 71 per cent are exempted from paying tuition fees. At the same time, slightly over 10 per cent of 15-year-olds from the ethnic majority reported having been exempted from tuition fees.

### *Extra classes*

Despite the relatively high percentage of GDP spent on education, there remain reasons for concern about the quality of education in Vietnam. It is widely reported that teaching methods are ineffective since they do not encourage creative thinking in students. Debates bring to public attention the fact that the curriculum contains out-of-date content and may not be the best way to teach today's young people. Furthermore, in many schools, the school day is as short as four and a half hours at primary level and five and a half hours at upper secondary level (see Tables 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 in Section 4.4). Teachers' salaries are low and they have to use time for income-generating activities that may or may not be related to their official jobs. Hoang Tuy, one of the recipients of the 2011 Phan Chu Trinh Culture Award, identifies some of the deficiencies in the education system:

Nowhere are the four virtues of diligence, efficiency, honesty, and integrity more needed

<sup>29</sup> See country context section above for a description of Programme 135.

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than in education and science [of Vietnam]... [T]he only way to rescue the system from crisis is to find and fix the system errors. So what are the errors that make our science and education system lack diligence, efficiency, honesty, and integrity? ... The key lies in the salary/income paradox: official salaries [including those for teachers] are only a fraction of non-salary income. When this happens, science and education workers have of course to dedicate all their intellect and talent to the pursuit of non-salary income which is distributed chaotically and unfairly, and cannot be strictly audited, and which is the root of many evils that are well known to us all. (Hoang Tuy, quoted by Vallely and Wilkinson 2008)

Teaching extra classes is one of the ways teachers supplement their incomes. The public have raised negative issues related to extra classes, and this has led MOET to step in to regulate the practice (see Ko and Xing 2009). Working with household data from the 1990s, Dang (2007) finds that around one-third of the households with children at school sent their children to extra classes, and the majority of them (90 per cent) allocated between 1 and 5 per cent of their total household expenditure to the extra classes. Dang finds that for both primary and lower secondary students, families regard private tutoring as a necessity. For instance, if the per capita expenditure of households with children attending primary school decreases by 1 per cent, the expenditure on private tutoring decreases by less than 0.5 per cent.

Young Lives evidence indicates that even the disadvantaged sections of the population pay for a significant amount of extra classes. For instance, even within our study site that is among the poorest districts in the country, 41 per cent of the Younger Cohort and 17 per cent of the Older Cohort children take extra classes. Overall, of the children and young people who attend school, 75 per cent of the Older Cohort and 65 per cent of the Younger Cohort attend extra classes. However, the rate varies widely between the regions, wealth index quartiles, levels of caregiver's education, and ethnic groups.

Table 4.7.4. Extra classes for the Younger Cohort\*

	Participation (%)	Time (hours per week)	Costs (VND, '000s, in the 6 months prior to R3)
Boys	66	6.6	320.3
Girls	64	6.5	298.2
Round 3 wealth index			
Quartile 1 (poorest)	53	4.9	85.8
Quartile 2	58	6.0	128.4
Quartile 3	74	7.5	268.8
Quartile 4	74	7.8	730.8
Regions			
Northern Uplands	71	6.6	120.6
Red River Delta	99	11.3	291.5
Central Coast urban	70	7.5	916.2
Central Coast rural	38	3.2	59.2
Mekong Delta	47	4.2	160.0
Schooling of caregiver			
Grades 0–4	46	4.3	93.1
Grades 5–8	64	6.2	212.5
Grade 9 or higher	78	8.2	531.4
Ethnicity			
Majority	67	6.9	347.2
Minority	49	4.2	52.8
Whole Younger Cohort	65	6.6	309.5

Note: \* The average values apply only to the children who are currently enrolled in school.

Table 4.7.4 shows that the percentages of the different categories of the primary school students attending extra classes, the time they spend on them, and the costs. For this cohort, we find no significant gender gap. However, the participation rate, time spent, and expenditure all increase with wealth index. In the poorest quartile, only slightly over half of the pupils attend these classes. The rate for the wealthier half of the sample is about three-quarters. Even though the rate of participation and time spent in extra classes are about the same for the two wealthier quartiles, the expenditure for the wealthiest quartile is nearly three times of that for quartile 3. The rate of attendance varies widely between regions. In fact, while almost 100 per cent of primary school students in Red River Delta took extra classes in Round 3, only less than 40 per cent of the primary school students in the rural Central Coastal region took them. The rate of primary school students taking extra classes in the poorest region of Northern Uplands is about the same as that of the urban Central Coast, which is substantially wealthier. While the students in Red River Delta take more extra classes than any other region, the students in Urban Central Coast spent more than any other region in the six months prior to the Round 3 of survey. This is because the extra classes in cities are more expensive than those in rural areas. The lowest average expenditure for extra classes is of the rural Central Coast, for which the average expenditure is half of that for the poorest region of Northern Uplands.

Another important factor in the decision to take extra classes is the education of the caregivers. Less than half of the children whose caregivers have not completed primary

school take the extra classes. As the level of caregivers' education increases, we observe increases in rates of attending extra classes, time spent on this and expenditure on it. The children whose caregivers completed lower secondary school spent over eight hours per week on extra classes, which is nearly double that for the children whose caregivers have not completed primary school.

Finally, two-thirds of the ethnic majority children take extra classes, while less than half of the ethnic minority children do so. The ethnic majority children spent nearly seven hours per week on extra classes compared to four hours for the ethnic minority children. The ethnic minority children spent much less time than other groups on the extra classes over the six months prior the survey.

As far as the Older Cohort are concerned, if they are still at school, they have either started upper secondary school or are in the final grades (8 to 9) of lower secondary school.<sup>30</sup> Their rate of participation in extra classes and the time spent on them are slightly higher than for the Younger Cohort. As Table 4.7.5 shows, girls are more likely to attend, spend more time on and pay more for extra classes than boys. Furthermore, we find that the rate of attendance, the time used, and the expenditure for the extra classes all increase with each level of the wealth index more clearly than was the case for the Younger Cohort. For the poorest quartile of the households of the 15-year olds, the rate of taking extra classes is lower than that of the 8-year old children. In the wealthiest quartiles, on the other hand, the rate for the Older Cohort is higher than for the Younger Cohort (92 versus 74 per cent). Extra classes are more expensive for the secondary school students than for the primary school students, and that may be one of the reasons for wealth playing a more important role in the decision for Older Cohort children to take extra classes than for Younger Cohort children to do so.

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<sup>30</sup> Less than 2 per cent of the Older Cohort still enrolled in school in Round 3 were in grades 4 to 7.

Table 4.7.5. Extra classes for the Older Cohort\*

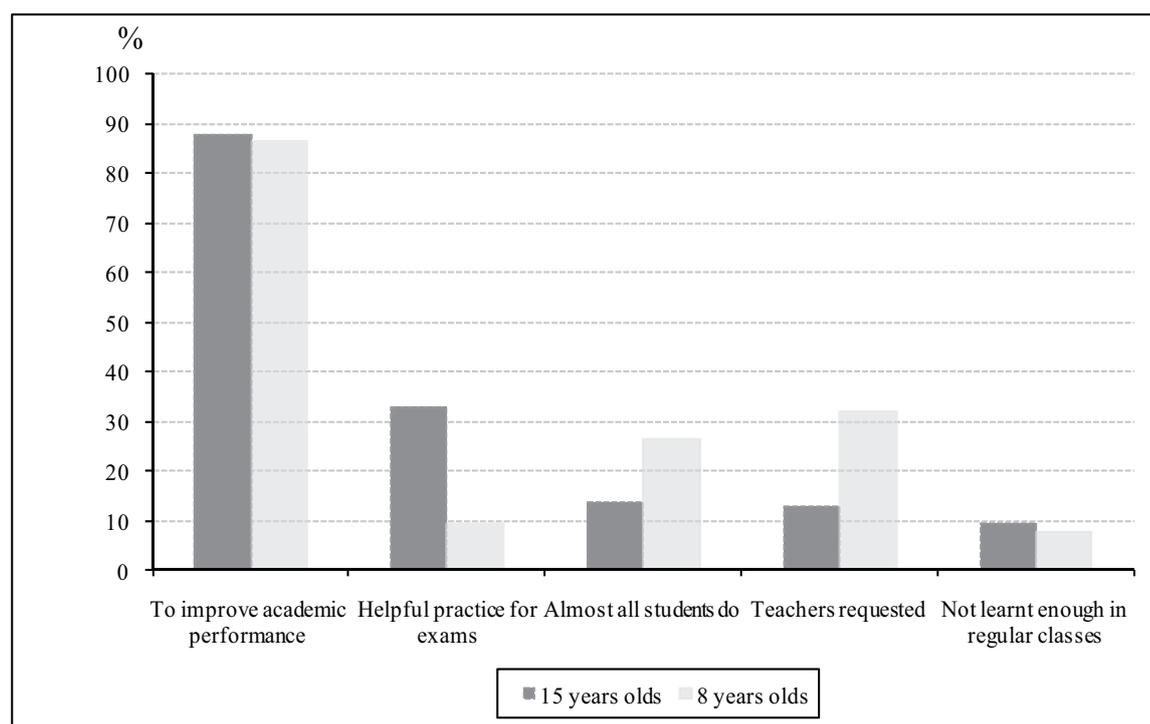
		Participation (%)	Time (hours per week)	Costs (VND, '000s, in the 6 months prior to R3)
	Boys	70	6.7	780.3
	Girls	80	8.3	887.0
Round 3 wealth index				
	Quartile 1	47	4.1	242.7
	Quartile 2	69	6.6	344.0
	Quartile 3	82	8.2	575.1
	Quartile 4	92	9.8	1,798.6
Regions				
	Northern Uplands	52	5.2	146.2
	Red River Delta	99	11.3	578.8
	Central Coast urban	89	10.2	2,035.3
	Central Coast rural	67	5.4	364.0
	Mekong Delta	65	4.9	747.2
Schooling of caregiver				
	Grades 0–4	50	4.3	336.2
	Grades 5–8	69	6.7	680.0
	Grade 9 or higher	89	9.4	1,133.8
Ethnicity				
	Majority	79	7.9	905.6
	Minority	36	3.5	98.9
Whole Older Cohort		75	7.6	836.5

Note: \* The average values apply only to the children who are currently enrolled in school.

Regarding regional variations, the differences are not exactly in accordance with the average level of the regions' wealth. For instance, the rate of attendance at extra classes is highest in Red River Delta, which has a lower wealth index than the urban Central Coast. If taking extra classes, the children (in both cohorts) in Red River Delta spend on average more than two hours per weekday on them. Even with a lower rate of attendance and fewer hours for the extra classes, the children in urban Central Coast paid on average three and a half times as much as their counterparts in Red River Delta. The expenditure in the Northern Uplands is lower than that for the other regions, even though the time the children in the Northern Uplands spend slightly more hours on extra classes than those in the Mekong Delta.

As with the Younger Cohort children, the rate of participation, time used for and expenditure on the extra classes increases with the level of education of caregivers. The adolescents taking extra classes are concentrated among the group with caregivers educated to Grade 9 or higher. Finally, there is a big gap between the ethnic groups. The rate of participation of the ethnic majority adolescents is more than double that of those from the ethnic minorities. The same is true for the hours the 15-year-olds spend on extra classes. In terms of the expenditure, the inequality is even greater – Vietnamese ethnic majority households of the 15-year-olds paid on average nine times as much for extra classes over the six months prior to the survey as the corresponding ethnic minority households.

Figure 4.7.2. Reasons for taking extra classes



\*Note: The percentages apply to the individuals who gave at least one reason

The reasons students give for taking extra classes are presented in Figure 9.3.1. Most students are motivated by the belief that taking extra classes will help to improve their performance in regular school. The figure shows that as many as one-third of the 15-year-olds think that extra classes are helpful practice either for routine grade exams or for entrance examinations for the next stage of education. We have seen that the rate of primary enrolment is very high in Vietnam. However, as young people progress through the education system, opportunities become more limited. The entrance examination to upper secondary school is competitive and the one to tertiary education even more so.

It is interesting that as many as 27 per cent of the primary school children report that one of the top three reasons for taking extra classes is that 'almost all of the other students do so'. The corresponding figure for the Older Cohort is 14 per cent. That suggests that the fact some students take extra classes has an external impact. The econometric analyses, presented in the Tables A.1 and A.2 in the appendix, indicate that for both cohorts, wealth is positively correlated with the rate of participation of the children in extra classes. That is consistent with the fact that, among the three most important reasons for not taking extra classes, 17 per cent of the primary school students, gave the answer that, 'fees are too high'. The corresponding figure for upper secondary school students is 18 per cent.

The results of econometric regressions in the Appendix also confirm what the Tables 4.7.4 and 4.7.5 demonstrate with respect to the importance of caregivers' schooling. For both cohorts, the effect of each level of caregiver's schooling (as compared to the case of no-schooling, see Table A.1 and A.2) on the children's participation in extra classes is statistically significant. The most important difference between the cohorts with respect to participation in extra classes, however, is in gender gap. The results of regressions in Table A.2 in Appendix, which apply to the Older Cohort, strengthen the observation from Table 4.7.5 that the 15-year-old girls still

in school are more likely to attend extra classes and spend more time on the classes than their male counterparts. That is not the case for the Younger Cohort, as the coefficient for the variable on “Girls” in the results of regressions in Table A.1 is not statistically significant, either for the likelihood of participation, or the time spent on the extra classes.

## 5. Summary and conclusion

Between Round 2 and Round 3 of Young Lives survey, despite some slowing down in conjunction with the global financial crisis, economic growth in Vietnam continued to be positive. The country’s progress of poverty reduction continued in all the sections of population, in spite of some loss of momentum. Poverty reduction was most significant for ethnic minorities and children whose caregivers had no schooling, but we see ongoing causes for a focus on these groups.

The progress in poverty reduction is accompanied by favourable dynamics, as the rate of upward mobility is four times as high as that of downward mobility. Moreover, the poverty dynamics for the ethnic minority group is more significant than those of the ethnic majority group. Among the ethnic minority households, a greater percentage escaped poverty, and a greater percentage become poor (from non-poor in Round 2) than those for the ethnic majority families.

The unfavourable economic conditions in the two years prior to Round 3 of the survey, however, led to a situation in which more people felt economic/livelihood shocks than in previous rounds of the survey. The change was in large part because of the increase in food prices. The shocks hit the poor and the non-poor in all the regions (particularly disadvantaged groups), but the biggest increases happened in both rural and urban areas of the Central Coast, where there is more foreign investment and generally more economic activity linked to the global economy than in other study regions. There is also a general trend of increasing environmental shocks.

Young Lives evidence further confirms the trend of improvement in height-for-age of children in Vietnam. The Younger Cohort (born in 2001–02) have better measures of weight-for-age and height-for-age than the children born in the middle of 1990s. The improvement in stunting can be seen in all the categories under consideration, but there are some exceptions in the improvement in the rate of underweight. That is, there is no progress made in reduction of the rate of underweight over the period for the children whose caregivers had no schooling, and progress was insignificant for ethnic minority children. This signals that some disadvantaged sections of population are being left further behind.

Primary school education is nearly universal in Vietnam. The overall rate of enrolment of Young Lives 8-year-olds is as high as 98 per cent, although for some disadvantaged groups the enrolment rate was only about 90 per cent. Most children started schooling at the age of 6. With the late starters concentrated among children whose caregivers had low levels of education. Vietnam’s favourable record on enrolment in primary school is being undermined by the fact that the number of out-of-school children has been growing and presents a serious problem. By Round 3 of Young Lives survey, more than one-fifth of the 15-year-olds had left school. The number of out-of-school children in Vietnam is the largest among the ASEAN countries and the country features in the world’s top ten in this respect.

The time spent at school for most of the Younger Cohort children is about five hours a day. The time spent studying at home and on extra classes, however, differed between groups of the population. Very few of the Younger Cohort children report doing any paid work. For those who do, some work on the farm or herding for the household, and the average time spent on this is about two and a half hours per day. The average time spent on leisure is about two hours and this varies slightly between regions and between groups of population.

A small fraction of the Older Cohort does paid work. The rate of child labour is higher, however, for some groups, such as children from poorer households and those whose caregivers have low levels of education. For many of the children who work for pay, the working day is longer than eight hours. The average length of the working day for children in the Northern Uplands and those from the ethnic minorities is nearly ten hours.

Every Younger Cohort child who goes to school gets the benefit of tuition fee exemption. But within the Older Cohort only 18.6 per cent are exempt from tuition fees. The main criteria for exemption for upper secondary school students are either household poverty or residence in mountainous communities with difficult socio-economic conditions. Nearly half of the Older Cohort adolescents from the lowest wealth index quartile are exempted from tuition fees. Similarly, slightly over half of the adolescents in the Northern Uplands and 77 per cent of the ethnic minorities receive the exemption.

Extra classes in Vietnam can be regarded as a private supplement to the regular state education services. The extra classes exist in every section of the population, but popularity of extra classes varies widely between communities. In the Red River Delta and some districts of the urban Central Coast, nearly every student takes extra classes, but in some communities in the Northern Uplands or rural Central Coast, only a minority of students do so. Nearly 90 per cent of students say that they take extra classes to improve their academic performance in their regular classes. The next most important motivation is the perception that the extra classes help students practise for exams. Only a few students say that they attend extra classes because they do not learn enough in their regular school classes. For both cohorts, household wealth is significant, both for the likelihood of children taking extra classes and for the amount of time they spend on them, and so this is likely to be a source of inequality in the education process. Moreover, having controlled for the effects of wealth index and community characteristics, we find that the higher the level of caregiver's schooling, the more likely it is that a child takes extra classes, and spends more time on them. Finally, we observe a gender gap (with respect to the Older Cohort only). That is that the 15-year-old girls who are still in school are more likely to take, and spend more time on, extra classes than their male counterparts.

Young Lives evidence demonstrates that improvements in the health and education of children, although considerable, are unequal between the regions, sectors and ethnic groups. Given the fact that the shortage of skilled labour already represents a bottleneck for in the sustainable growth of the economy with due quality, Vietnam needs to step up measures to ensure that its human resources will meet the demands of a modern industrialised economy. This requires a strategic approach, and in order for the government interventions to be effective, they have to reach very young children in the disadvantaged groups mentioned in this report.

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# Appendix 1. Tables of the results of regressions on extra classes

Table A1: Result of regressions: Younger Cohort

	Logistic of extra classes (1 if taken, 0 if not)	OLS of time used for extra classes
Girls	-0.028	0.033
Mother ethnic majority	0.657**	1.521***
Number of older half/siblings	-0.113*	-0.226*
Household size	-0.049	0.014
Wealth index Round 3	1.511***	2.213**
By levels of caregiver's schooling		
None	Baseline	
Grades 1–4	0.777***	1.511***
Grades 5–8	0.949***	1.737***
Grade 9 or higher	1.205***	2.302***
Regions		
Northern Uplands	2.482***	4.800***
Red River Delta	4.510***	7.245***
Central Coast urban	0.794***	3.038***
Central Coast rural	Baseline	
Mekong Delta	0.337**	0.657*
Number of obs.		
	1875	1871
R-square		
	0.24 (Pseudo R2)	0.26

**Note:** \*\*\* Indicates a coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero at the 1% level, \*\* at the 5% level and \* at the 10% level.

Table A2: Result of regressions: Older Cohort

	Logistic of extra classes (1 if taken, 0 if not)	OLS of time used for extra classes
Girls	0.848***	1.641***
Mother ethnic majority	0.028	-0.288
Number of older half/siblings	-0.124	-0.166
Household size	-0.165*	-0.111
Wealth index Round 3	2.504***	4.269***
By levels of caregiver's schooling		
None	Baseline	
Grades 1-4	1.153**	2.924***
Grades 5-8	1.205**	3.535***
Grade 9 or higher	1.741***	4.055***
Regions		
Northern Uplands	-0.262	0.703
Red River Delta	3.784***	5.027***
Central Coast urban	0.856**	3.745***
Central Coast rural	Baseline	
Mekong Delta	-0.063	-0.351
Number of obs.		
	730	725
R-square		
	0.26 (Pseudo R2)	0.28

Note: \*\*\* Indicates a coefficient is statistically significantly different from zero at the 1% level, \*\* at the 5% level and \* at the 10% level.

## Appendix 2. Definitions of key outcome variables

Outcome variable	Description	Calculation	Component description	Detailed estimation - for all rounds
Wealth Index (WI)	Composite index that reflects the welfare of household members in terms of the quality of the dwelling, use of durable goods, and access to basic services	HQ=Housing quality index  CD=Consumer durables index	Simple average of scaled number of rooms per person (capping at 1.5), material of walls, material of roof, material of floor	HQ1 = (Number of Rooms/ Household size)/1.5 HQ2 = 1 if Wall's material = Brick or concrete HQ3 = 1 if Roof's material = Concrete, corrugated/ galvanised iron, asbestos sheets, or tiles/ slates HQ4 = 1 if Floor's material = Cement, tiles, stone/ brick, granite/ marble/polished stone
			Scaled sum of 9 consumer durable dummies, all of which are consistent across rounds	CD1= 1 if household owns a radio CD2= 1 if household owns a refrigerator CD3= 1 if household owns a bicycle CD4= 1 if household owns a motorcycle CD5= 1 if household owns a car CD6= 1 if household owns a mobile phone CD7= 1 if household owns a land line phone CD8= 1 if household owns a fan CD9= 1 if household owns a television
		SV=Services quality index	Simple average of drinking water, electricity, toilet and fuel; all of which are 0-1 variables	SV1= 1 if household has electricity SV2 = 1 if water is piped into dwelling, yard, or plot SV3 = 1 if household has own toilet facility (flush toilet, septic tank, pit latrine in household) SV4 = 1 if cooking fuel is gas, electricity, kerosene or paraffin

Outcome variable	Description	Calculation	Component description	Detailed estimation - for all rounds
Real monthly consumption per capita	Sum of estimated value of food and non-food consumption, deflated by the Consumer Price Index (CPI base 2006) - of the month of the interview-, divided by the household size. The consumption aggregate is only constructed for R2 and R3	FCons= Food consumption	Sum of estimated value of consumption of food items	FCons1=Sum(food bought and consumed in the past two weeks)*2 [excluding oil seeds]  FCons2 = Sum (food consumed from own harvest or stock)*2 [excluding prepared food, packaged sweets, coffee, tea, soft drinks, alcohol]  FCons3 = Sum (food consumed from gifts, transfers, aid)*2
		NFCons= Non-Food consumption	Sum of estimated value of non-food items	EduCons= Sum (expenditure in education items in the last 12 months)/12 [excludes schooling fees or donations to school for adults]  MedCons = Sum (expenditure in medical treatment in the last 12 months)/12 [excludes expenditure on prescriptions]  ClothCons= Sum (expenditure on adults and children's clothing and footwear in the last year) /12  OthCons1 = Sum (expenditure in personal care items, internet, public transport, cigarettes & tobacco, kerosene, firewood, gas, etc in the last 30 days)  OthCons2= Sum (expenditure in rent, cleaning materials, water rates, electricity rates, telephone rates, vehicle maintenance, fees and paper work, legal advice, festivals and celebrations, and family events in the last 12 months) /12  OthCons3= Sum (expenditure in cinema, entertainment, presents for children, and any other transport cost in the last 12 months) /12
		CPI	Monthly regional CPI (base 2006)	

Outcome variable	Description	Calculation	Component description	Detailed estimation - for all rounds
Absolute poverty	Percentage of households/ YL children living with a consumption level below the national poverty line	Proportion of households with a total real monthly per capita consumption below the national poverty line (estimated at 2006 prices). The poverty line varies according to region and urban/ rural characteristics		
Relative poverty	Percentage of households/ YL children living with a consumption level below the relative poverty line	Proportion of households with a total real monthly per capita consumption level below 50% of the median consumption for all households		
Subjective poverty	Percentage of households that perceived themselves as poor	Proportion of households reporting to be among the poorest or the poorest compared to other households in their community/ suburb		

Outcome variable	Description	Calculation	Component description	Detailed estimation - for all rounds
Shocks		Percentage of households that have suffered negative changes in their livelihoods due to crime, regulation, economy, environment or family-related shocks.		
		Crime-related shocks	Percentage of people who experienced crime-related shocks since last interview	Crime related shocks include destruction or theft of tools or inputs of production, theft of cash, crops, livestock, theft or destruction of housing or consumer goods, and crime resulting in death or disablement of working adult household member
		Regulation-related shocks	Percentage of households that experienced shocks related to government regulations	Regulation related shocks include land redistribution, resettlement or forced migration, restrictions on migration, forced contributions or arbitrary taxation, and eviction
	Percentage of household experiencing any shocks in the past 4 years (last interview).	Household economy-related shocks	Percentage of households that experienced shocks that affected negatively the household economy	Household economy-related shocks include large increases (decreases) in input (output) prices, death of livestock, destruction of place of employment, job-loss, industrial actions, contract disputes, credit source disbanded, confiscation of assets, disputes with family members of neighbours regarding land or assets. R3 also includes increases in food prices
		Environment-related shocks	Percentage of households that have experience shocks related to sudden changes in the environment	Environment-related shocks include droughts, too much rain or flood, erosion, frosts or hailstorms, pests or diseases affecting crops or livestock, crops failure, and pests and diseases that led to storage losses. R3 also includes storm
		Dwelling-related shocks	Percentage of households that experienced a shock that has affected the dwelling	Dwelling-related shocks include fire and building collapse
		Family health-related shocks	Percentage of households that have experienced deaths or illnesses in the past 4 years	Family health-related shocks include death or episodes of illness of child's parents or other household member
		Family circumstances-related shocks	Percentage of households that have experienced changes within the family in the past 4 years	Family circumstances-related shocks include divorce or separation or abandonment, birth of new household member, child's school enrolment, imprisonment of a household member, conscription, abduction or draft of any working adult household member

Outcome variable	Description	Calculation	Component description	Detailed estimation - for all rounds
Access to electricity	Percentage of households with access to electricity			
Sanitation facilities	Percentage of households with adequate toilet facilities	Proportion of households with flush toilet, septic tank, or pit latrine in household		
Access to safe drinking water	Percentage of households with access to safe drinking water	Proportion of households with water piped into the dwelling, bottled, bought from private or public services, coming from tube well, public pipes or protected well, or clean rain water		
Enrolment	Percentage of children currently enrolled in school	Proportion of children who are currently enrolled in formal education. For 5 year-olds (R2) the question 'has child begun formal school' is used this is the age in which children transit from pre-primary to primary education		
Stunting	Percentage of children with low height for age (or shortness)	Proportion of children with a z-score of height for age of more than two standard deviations (<-2SD)		
Literacy	Percentage of children able to read and write	Proportion of children who reported being able to read and write without any difficulties		

Outcome variable	Description	Calculation	Component description	Detailed estimation - for all rounds
Underweight	Percentage of children with low weight for age	Proportion of children with a z-score of weight for age of more than two standard deviations (<-2SD)		
Wasting	Percentage of children with low BMI	Proportion of children with a z-score of BMI of more than two standard deviations (<-2SD)		
Child paid work	Percentage of children performing paid activities	Proportion of children who use a positive amount of time per day working for payment outside household, or for someone not in the household		
Time use	Time spent in different activities on a typical day	Average number of hours that YL children spend in running household chores, taking care of family members, performing domestic tasks, at school, studying outside school, performing paid activities and in leisure activities on a typical day. The denominator is the total number of children performing the activity		

## Appendix 3. Young Lives publications from Vietnam (most recent first)

Le Thuc Duc (2011, in press) 'Height and Cognitive Achievement of Vietnamese Children', *World Development* 39(12)

Truong, Chi Huyen (2011, in press) *Between Speech and Deeds: Negotiating Children's Ethnic Identity in the Highlands of Vietnam*, Young Lives Working Paper 68

Doran, Paul (2011, in press) *Growth, Wealth and Inequality: Evidence from Young Lives*, Young Lives Policy Paper 5

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Paul Glewwe (2011, in press) 'Pro-Poor' Growth and Children in Developing Countries: The Case of Vietnam' in *Childhood Poverty: Multidisciplinary Approaches*, edited by Jo Boyden and Michael Bourdillon, London: Palgrave Macmillan

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Barnett, Inka (2011) *Is the Dual Burden of Over- and Under-nutrition a Concern for Poor Households in Ethiopia, India, Peru and Vietnam?*, Young Lives Working Paper 67

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- Le Thuc Duc (2009) *The Effect of Early Age Stunting on Cognitive Achievement among Children in Vietnam*, Young Lives Working Paper 45
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- Dercon, Stefan and Alan Sanchez (2008) *Children and the Food Price Crisis*, Young Lives Policy Brief 5
- Le Thuc Duc, Nguyen Phuong Ngoc, Nguyen Van Tien, Tranh Minh Chau and Vo Thanh Son (2008) *Vietnam Round 2 Survey Report*, Young Lives Country Report
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- Watson, Annabel (2008) 'The Impact of Child Labour on the Educational Achievement of Children in Vietnam', Young Lives Student Paper (thesis for MSc in Economics for Development, University of Oxford)
- Nguyen, Ngoc P. (2008) *An Assessment of the Young Lives Sampling Approach in Vietnam*, Young Lives Technical Note 4
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**Young Lives is a long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty in four developing countries – Ethiopia, India (in Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam – over 15 years, the timeframe set by the UN to assess progress towards the UN Millennium Development Goals.**

Through interviews, group work and case studies with the children, their parents, teachers and community representatives, we are collecting a wealth of information, not only about their material and social circumstances, but also their perspectives on their lives and aspirations for the future, set against the environmental and social realities of their communities.

This report presents initial findings from the third round of data collection by Young Lives in Vietnam, carried out from late 2009 to early 2010. It gives a broad outline of some of the key indicators of childhood poverty and changes that have taken place in the children's lives between the earlier rounds of data collection in 2002 and 2006 and this third round. In particular, we are able to make comparisons between the older children at age 8 in 2002 (in Round 1), and the younger cohort at age 8 in 2009 (Round 3) – to highlight changes that have happened in the children's lives and their communities over that time.

The Young Lives team in Vietnam works with the Centre for Analysis and Forecast, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (CAF-VASS) and the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO).

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