

## Young Lives and the dynamics of child poverty

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An International Study of Childhood Poverty

## Who are we...?

- Young Lives is a collaborative partnership
  - between research and government institutes in the 4 study countries
  - University of Oxford, Open University and other UK universities
  - Save the Children (in the study countries and the UK)
- Young Lives has the long-term support of an influential group of donor organisations
  - UK Department for International Development (DFID) is the major funder, with sub-studies funded by:
  - Bernard van Leer Foundation in India, Ethiopia and Peru
  - International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Ethiopia
  - UNICEF in India.

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## What do we do...?



Follow the same 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru, and Vietnam over 15 years

Two age groups in each country:  
– 2,000 children born in 2001-2  
– 1,000 children born in 1994-5

From early infancy to parenthood

Sentinel site sampling – 20 sites in each country

Pro-poor sample, selected by location, ethnicity, etc. with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls

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## How do we do it...?

- We are collecting quantitative and qualitative data at the individual, household and community level approximately every 3 years
- We are generating a rich mosaic of information on household circumstances and children's lives
- We undertake site and community level analysis of basic services and specific programmes as well as respondent perceptions of coverage, quality and effectiveness of these
- We are also planning a school survey



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## And why...?

- Globally, more children than adults by far live in poverty and they are generally much more susceptible to its effects
- Poverty in childhood can have lasting effects throughout life
- The children of poor children are more likely to be poor themselves
- So, prioritising children and childhood poverty means more than relieving suffering in the young, it is also about breaking poverty cycles that trap whole families over the long term.

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## What makes children susceptible?

- Their social dependence
- Children have developmental pathways (later competencies build on earlier ones)
- 'Sensitive periods' for some developmental processes - stimulation a child receives during these has lasting effect on development
- Children who experience deprivations: unlikely to realise their full developmental potential
- Damage in one domain of development may detrimentally affect other domains

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## And yet.....



- Huge individual variations in children's responses to environmental hazards
- 'Steeling' effects: successful coping with adversity can lead to *improved* functioning and *increased* resistance to adversity

### Resilience:

- Relative resistance to environmental risk
- A relatively good outcome despite risk experiences

(Rutter)

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## Research context



- Millennium cohort – political will
- Largest youth cohort the world will ever see – implications?
- Recent economic growth
- Current crisis in food and fuel prices

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## Initial findings: some positive developments in poverty trends



- Until last year, all of our research countries had been experiencing significant macro growth
- In each case this has been translated into overall reduction in poverty, even in Ethiopia
- This has also meant increase in infrastructure and service access

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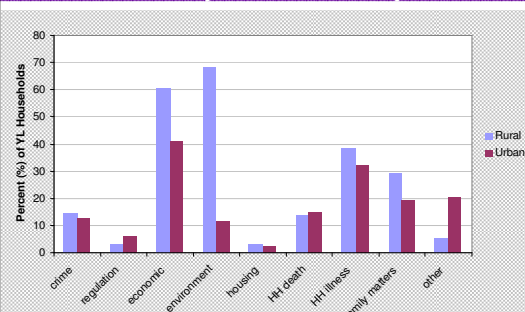
## But...gains are fragile...



- There is real potential that households climbing the ladder can fall back into poverty through exposure to adversities, of which there are many
- This is most evident in rural areas of Ethiopia

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## Ethiopia: household exposure to different forms of adversity 2002 - 2006, by location



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## The consequences

- One in five children in our Ethiopia sample have experienced the death of one or both parents
- Mother's death increases the likelihood that a child will not be able to write at all by around 21% and cannot read at all, or can read only letters, by around 27% compared with those whose mothers are alive
- These adverse educational outcomes are not evident for children who lost their fathers when compared to those whose fathers are alive
- But the father dying does seem to negatively impact a child's sense of optimism



(Himaz 2009)

## ...children play an important role

### Teferi Birru (rural Ethiopia):

"I earn money... it makes me happy to have a job rather than staying the whole day in the village.... I use it to buy... the necessary educational materials. I buy my shoes, bag and my clothes."

### Teferi's grandmother:

"He's always thinking about ways through which he can rescue himself from such a miserable life and through which he can stand above his brothers in terms of educational status and living status.

[...]...he does not spend the money he gains on candies or chewing gum like other children often do. He immediately spends it for the cause of his family, as much as possible."

## ...tension between tradition and modernity

**Seife Senbetta (rural Ethiopia):** "They [community officials] told me to go to school because I'm old enough.... They insisted me to go to school so I did."

**Interviewer: But you didn't want to?**

**Seife:** "No, I didn't want to go."

**Interviewer: Why not?**

**Seife:** "Both my father and mother are getting old – nobody helps them with their work except me."

## ...do targeted programmes help?



Unintended negative impacts of social protection measures:

Under the Employment Guarantee Scheme in Ethiopia children are spending more time working and less time at school than their peers.

(Woldehanna 2008)

## ...inequality is rising...

- Consumption levels have been rising faster in urban than rural areas, with much higher absolute poverty in the countryside
- Caste and ethnic differences are particularly marked (more so than gender)
  - e.g. in AP among children from Scheduled Tribes 29.2% of the younger cohort and 18% of the older cohort live in absolute poverty (compared the State average of 11.2%).



## The Challenge: An Inter-generational Imperative



• Vietnam: poverty persists in families with poorly educated parents. In 2006, two-thirds of families with maternal education below primary school were in the bottom 20%, compared to only 47% in 2002.

• Further strong links between child nutrition and maternal and paternal education, regardless of family wealth.

• Learning outcomes strongly associated with poverty, malnutrition in early childhood and parental education, for both age groups

• Thus, it is vital to break poverty cycles

## Conclusions

- We cannot rely on macro-level economic growth to reduce poverty and inequality
- MDGs may have improved volume and quality of aid in some cases, but are they enough? And how sustainable are they?
- The importance of evidence in:
  - developing appropriate policy responses
  - and helping identify how to break poverty cycles

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