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# **Key Transitions and Well-being of Children in Ethiopia: Country Context Literature Review**



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# 1. Introduction

The Ethiopian population, based on the national census of 2007, was 73,913,505, of which 50.46 per cent was male and 49.54 per cent was female. The number of children aged 5 to 9 was 12,004,737, of which nearly 51 per cent were boys; about 82.2 per cent of them lived in rural areas. There were 10,458,181 children aged 10 to 14, with almost the same gender ratio, but as many as 86.7 per cent lived in rural areas (CSA 2008).

This literature review aims to revisit some research materials and relevant documents regarding children in Ethiopia. As the purpose is to provide context for the ongoing qualitative research component of the Young Lives project, this review will focus on the themes of children's key transitions (in education and work) and well-being (in terms of the physical, psychological, social and economic aspects of children's lives). There is currently very little data on these themes, and research in which children are the main source of data is almost nonexistent. For this reason our search strategy is not recorded here, as it essentially involved reviewing every written document we were able to obtain about children in Ethiopia. Some studies were fragmented, the use of adults as respondents overshadowed children's voices, and quantitative survey methods outnumbered in-depth qualitative studies, although Woodhead (2001) and Poluha (2007a) are notable exceptions to these trends.

The rest of the literature review is organised as follows: part two focuses on the key transitions in education and work; part three briefly reviews literature on ill/well-being, focusing on health risks and harmful traditional practices; part four sets out the implications of the literature review for the Young Lives qualitative research in Ethiopia; part five provides some brief concluding remarks.

## 2. Key transitions

In this part of the paper, we will discuss key transitions in children's lives, with special emphasis on significant events and changes in their education and work. Of course, events and changes in their families, social networks and communities, as well as alterations to the overall political and economic structures in society, directly or indirectly impact on the lives of children. Therefore, the factors that hinder or promote children's work and educational transitions are also discussed. Although the data available are limited, an attempt will be made to examine different international and national legal documents, and official and academic literature. The purpose is to give a clear picture of access to, and equity and quality of, education, as well as the situation regarding child work in the country, and to understand the challenges and opportunities that Ethiopian children face from early childhood.

### 2.1. Education: Access, equity and quality

#### 2.1.1. Education legislation

Ethiopia has ratified major international and human rights agreements adopted by the United Nations and other international organisations. It endorsed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991. In 2002, it also approved the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), adopted by the Assembly of Heads of States of the Organisation of African Unity, which accepted the need to act decisively to encourage and

defend the rights and welfare of the African child. The main principles of these documents are included in the current Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs considers the right of the child to education as a basic right because education is an important instrument for human development (MOLSA 2006). This is consistent with Article 28 of the CRC which says that 'State parties recognize the right of the child to education', outlining aims to achieve 'this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity'. MOLSA (2006) also considers primary education compulsory, and states that all children should get free access to education. The ACRWC fully accepts the CRC's main principles on the rights of a child to education: Article 11 states clearly that 'every child shall have the right to education'. It urges the member countries of the African Union to show a practical commitment to the full realisation of this right. Article 11 (3) (a) of this document makes basic education compulsory and free to all children without any discrimination. It says that states should show commitment to achieving access to education for all children without any gender, ethnic or socioeconomic bias in order to be accountable and abide by the principles of equal opportunities.

MOLSA (2006) reiterates that treaties and covenants that set out this basic human right of education encourage nations to implement a comprehensive framework of policy and programmes for realising this.

In Ethiopia, there are laws and policy documents regarding the right to education. Some of these policy instruments are included in the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia: the Proclamation to Define the Powers and Duties of the Central and Regional Executive Organs of the Transitional Government (Proc. No. 41) in February 1993; the Education and Training Policy/ETP of 1994; the Education Sector Strategy/ESS of 1994; and the Education Sector Development Programme ESDP/I and II of 1997 and 2002.

Article 41 (4) of the Constitution obliges the government to allocate ever-increasing resources to, among other things, education. This seems to conform to the 'maximum available resource' standard of the Convention. Also, Article 41 (3) of this Constitution recognises the right of every Ethiopian to equal access to publicly-funded social services, including education. Therefore, it follows that the CRC principle of equal educational opportunity to all is embodied in the Ethiopian Constitution. Article 36 of the Constitution further recognises the right of the child not to be subjected to activities that compromise his/her education. This is consistent with Article 28 (1) (e) of the Convention, which obliges states to act to increase regular attendance at school and to reduce dropout rates.

The government has a responsibility to approve laws and policies on education that emanate from the Constitution. Certainly, Article 52 of the Constitution permits the federal government to arrange and carry out basic policy principles for education and other matters of social development. Article 52 (1) interprets 'the practice established by proc. 41/1993, which defines the powers and duties of the central and regional executive organs of government'. It states that each region in Ethiopia is responsible for the provision of primary education (Grades 1 to 8).

Accordingly, the Government of Ethiopia introduced a series of educational policies and strategies between 1994 and 2006. Most of them were focused on increasing access to education at all levels but with a special focus on the expansion of primary education. Most of the policy documents also speak about ensuring both access to and the quality of education throughout the country, although in practice the quality issue has remained a challenge.

A new Education and Training Policy (ETP), along with the Education Sector Strategy (ESS), was introduced in 1994; the ESS came with the objective of providing good quality primary

education with the ultimate aim of achieving universal primary education over a period of 20 years. An Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) was then launched in 1997/98 with the aim of translating the policies and its strategy into action. The second part of the programme, ESDP–II, covering the period 2002/2003–2004/2005, was launched in July 2002. This programme seeks to expand access to education in rural areas, to increase primary school enrolment, to improve equity, and to reduce dropout and repetition rates (MOE 2005a: 7).

The Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MOE) prepared another five-year (2005/2006–2010/2011) Programme of Educational Action Plan in 2005 with the vision that ‘all school-age children get access to quality primary education’:

The main aim of the Education Sector Development Programme is to extend quality, relevance, equity, efficiency and to increase access with special emphasis on primary education in rural areas and to enhancing education for girls. (MOE 2005a: 6).

### 2.1.2. *Pre-school education*

When preparing the five-year Programme of Educational Action Plan in 2005, MOE realised the importance of pre-school education in preparing younger children for primary education. It stated that there had been an increasing demand for pre-school education throughout the country. It added that there were promising conditions for the active involvement of community (public sector) and private sector organisations in the establishment of pre-schools, both in Addis Ababa and in other regions. Efforts to involve the public and private sectors in the expansion of pre-schools throughout the country had been made since 1994, with some success. The active participation of the public and private sectors in pre-school education played an important part in the increase in enrolments. Between 1997 and 2005, the number of pre-school schools grew from 744 to 1408. However, this was mainly limited to the main urban centres. The gross enrolment rate at country level was as low as 2.3 per cent. This shows that only a few children had access to pre-school education (MOE 2005a: 7), although pre-school education plays a positive role in children’s learning potential, their future academic survival (success), and the development of integrated self-identity (MOLSA 2006: 52).

Of course, MOE does not mention why pre-school education is only available in urban areas; nor does it indicate how the absence of pre-schools in rural areas limits access to, and the quality and equity, of primary education. So, in order to understand how the absence of pre-school schools impacts on children’s readiness for primary education, it is important to seek reasons why pre-school schools have failed to expand in rural areas.

As we mentioned earlier, the government is aware of the importance of pre-school education in both urban and rural areas. The main problem is that the strategy of expanding pre-school education in rural communities was designed without taking into account the realities of rural settings. The government’s strategy of leaving the expansion of pre-school education to private sector organisations, NGOs and community-based institutions was unsuccessful. On the one hand, the development of private sector organisations in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon, so they could not easily expand pre-schools throughout the country. In addition, since the private organisations are generally profit-seeking institutions, it is difficult to compel them to open pre-schools in very poor rural communities. Environmental hazards – such as the very hot climate in lowlands, the rugged and mountainous terrain in some areas, etc. – and poor infrastructure in most rural areas also discourage private investors from opening pre-schools. It is true that private institutions have played pivotal roles in expanding pre-schools in urban areas, but the fees for most of these institutions are too high for most

households. In addition to the problem of allocating adequate resources to pre-school education, other aspects of provision have been neglected, such as teacher training and supervision of pre-schools. The lack of these things has greatly contributed to the low participation rate of children (4 to 6 years old) in pre-school education even in urban areas (Wondimu 1996: 104). Of course, the number of trained pre-school teachers reached 73.9% in 2004/05 (UNESCO 2006).

On the other hand, it is known that the number of NGOs in the country is very small by international standards. Even among NGOs working on humanitarian services in the country, only a few have been engaged in educational activities. This is another factor that has challenged government policy on pre-school education. The Young Lives survey report for Ethiopia also shows a very low enrolment rate of children in pre-school education in rural communities (4 per cent). Almost all the households enrolling their children are from urban areas. This clearly indicates the scarcity of pre-school education in rural areas. The study further indicates that even in urban areas only about 52 per cent of children have joined pre-school. The main factors affecting enrolments in urban areas are parents' educational level, the health of the child and the size of the family (Woldehanna et al. 2008: vii).

### 2.1.3. *Alternative pre-school education*

Here we will look at two kinds of informal pre-school education: Alternative Basic Education (ABE) and religious schools. The former is a recent development in the Ethiopian education system, while the latter represents the oldest practice.

In the absence of pre-school schools in rural areas, the expansion of other kinds of non-formal education became critical. Because of this, the government introduced what is referred to as ABE, especially in rural communities, for both adults and children (World Bank 2005: 33). ABE is a kind of informal pre-school which focuses mainly on the core subjects of languages (typically, the local language and English) and mathematics. The programmes are staffed by teachers or volunteers living in the community who might be paid or might not. Classrooms are built by the villagers or donated by local benefactors, and the school calendar and hours of instruction are deliberately arranged so that they don't clash with children's work commitments on the family farm or at home (MOE: 7). ABE faces similar policy and strategy problems to the pre-schools, with its funding largely left to NGOs or local agencies (World Bank 2005: 33).

MOE seems very optimistic about the expansion and achievement of ABE in rural areas. It states that to realise the goal of universal primary education by 2015, several ABE centres were established in these regions (MOE 2005b: 9). However, performance is not uniformly good because of funding and other constraints (World Bank 2005: 33). MOE also confirms that implementation in most regions is very low. The gross enrolment rate in the ABE programme is 5.2 per cent for both sexes and 6.9 per cent for females. Most regions did not respond to the ABE programme (MOE 2005b: 7). Like pre-school education, the involvement of the government in ABE is very minimal (World Bank 2005: 33). The government still maintains that ABE must be financed by NGOs or local agencies, but the implementation of this strategy has become challenging. As a result, the achievement of ABE in most regions is below satisfactory.

The other form of pre-school education is through religious schools. This is non-formal, traditional religious education, which has never been discussed in government documents. Poluha (2004: 31) discusses how this religious education contributes to the preparation of children for primary school. She states that in the past, education in Christian Ethiopia was conducted by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and the major focus was on the reading and

recitation of religious texts. Education was limited to boys. In the Muslim communities of Ethiopia, Koranic education was given in mosques mainly for boys, although girls also had the right to learn. Today, these religious schools work as important pre-school institutions where many Christian and Muslim children learn to read and write, mainly as a preparation to enter the first grade in formal school.

#### 2.1.4. *Primary education*

In this section, we will attempt to explore the situation of primary education in Ethiopia by focusing on achievements and challenges in terms of access to and quality of education.

Though literacy and school enrolments remain a challenge, there have been great advances in primary education in recent years (Woldehanna et al. 2008: 11). However, the World Bank claims that the country's primary cycle currently lasts eight years, divided into two sub-cycles of equal duration (Grades 1–4 and 5–8), and it would appear that completion of the first cycle may be insufficient to ensure that most children achieve permanent literacy. However, completion of eight years may go beyond what is minimally required. Assessing the fiscal implications of the current eight-year cycle compared with, say, a five- or six-year cycle, will therefore be important for future policy development (World Bank 2005: 42).

As the World Bank indicates, the entrants to Grade 1 over the past few years consist of a large number of older children who were responding to newly available schooling opportunities (World Bank 2005: 42–44). The majority (85 per cent) of the new primary schools were constructed in rural areas (MOE 2005a: 7–8). As the backlog of such children is cleared, this multiple cohort effect will inevitably dissipate. Consistent with this expectation, the proportion of children who enter Grade 1 by age 7 – the official and desired age of entry – has been rising steadily; it nonetheless remains modest, at just over 20 per cent (World Bank 2005: 42–44). Normally, the ages of students in Grades 1–8 have to be in the range of 7–14 and the starting age at Grade 1 is 7 (MOE 2005b: 2–3). The gross enrolment rate at primary school level in 1996 was 42.9 per cent (Admassie and Singh 2001). This showed fast growth and reached 79.2 per cent in 2005 (MOE 2005: 7–8).

The provision of basic primary education (Grades 1–4) using local/mother languages is a recent development which enables young children to learn in their first language (Poluha 2007). Despite the increasing enrolment rate, with only 60 per cent of each cohort ever joining the first grade, 25 per cent of the students dropping out by Grade 1, and nearly 50 per cent by Grade 5, Ethiopia appears unlikely to meet the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary completion by 2015 if the present conditions continue. The challenges for educational development are therefore critical (World Bank 2005: 59–60). Of course, children who get some support for their education, or children of well-to-do families, are more likely complete their education to a higher level. Rural children and children from large families are more likely to remain at a lower grade at school (Woldehanna et al. 2008).

The urban–rural gap in Ethiopia is particularly wide compared to other countries. Ethiopia will have to work hard to keep up with the worldwide improvement in primary school completion rates. There is a particular challenge in rural areas, even as efforts to make possible the participation of girls, orphans and other vulnerable populations are sustained (World Bank 2005). The government document (MOE 2005b) also accepts the presence of wider disparities in the enrolment rate between regions. For example, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) for Addis Ababa was 125 per cent, reflecting the number of children who have enrolled late or failed to progress at the expected speed; while it ranges from 75.9 per cent to 80.3 per cent for the Amhara region and Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's



Region respectively (MOE 2005b). The difference is even greater for predominantly pastoralist regions like the Afar and Somali, which had 17.1 per cent and 20 per cent GER respectively. Therefore, despite efforts made to reduce urban–rural disparity in GER, the gap remains wide (MOE 2005b: 4). The Young Lives report, however, states that the growth rate of enrolments appears higher in the rural areas than in the urban areas simply because the rural areas start from a lower baseline. Of course, there is still a wider gap with regard to regional distribution, in which Addis Ababa is the highest. Some of the major factors affecting school performance and school completion level include family income, location (urban or rural), parents' educational level, educational support and family size (Woldehanna et al. 2008: vii–viii).

There is also a disparity between poor and wealthy households as regards enrolments and grade completion. The World Bank (2005) identifies that only 71 per cent of children from the poorest quintile of Ethiopian households, compared to the wealthiest quintile, are likely to enter Grade 1, and their completion rates are only 65 per cent as high in Grade 4, and 42 per cent as high in Grade 8. These figures mean that the gap in the rates of survival between the two groups is likely to be insignificant in the first years of primary schooling but will increase considerably in the later grades.

The Young Lives research report, however, gives us a different picture concerning the entrants to first grade. It shows that primary school enrolment for Older Cohort children increased from 66 per cent to 94 per cent between 2002 (when the children were aged 7.5–8.5) and 2006. The main change was shown among the poorest households. The study shows that in 2002, when the first round survey was conducted, only 56 per cent of the poorest households were able to send their children to school. The figure increased significantly to 91 per cent in the second round survey of 2006. Children of parents with a higher level of education show universal enrolments (Woldehanna et al. 2008: vii–viii).

MOE also recognises that, despite a swift increase, the enrolment rate of students in primary school (Grades 1–8) is still low (MOE 2005b: 4). Lack of teachers, low quality of education and lack of funding to finance the schools are the main factors contributing to this (Poluha 2004: 31).

MOE (2005b) states that to assess how efficiently the education system works in terms of the use of resources and time, one has to know about repetition and dropout rates. There are three paths for students within a particular academic year: promotion, repetition or dropout.

Repetition rate indicator measures the proportion of students who have remained in the same grade over one year, and have used additional resources for the same grade. The resources are in the form of teacher's salary, school materials, facilities, etc. This reduces internal efficiency of the system. The policy allows promotion with continuous assessment for the first three grades of primary. The 6.7 per cent repetition rate in 2002/03 was reduced to 3.7 per cent in 2003/04 which was the lowest repetition rate at Grade 3 and the highest in Grade 7. In grades, above Grade 4, girls' repetition rates were higher than those of boys. (MOE 2005b: 16)

The report also states that the dropout rate fell from 19.2 per cent in 2002/03 to 14.4 per cent in 2003/04, with the highest dropout rate being at Grade 1 and the lowest at Grade 6 (MOE 2005b: 17–18). MOE (2005b) also states that the continuance rate to Grade 5 usually means the percentage of students who will finish the first cycle of primary education, as the achievement of a minimum four years of schooling in Ethiopia is usually regarded as a precondition for a sustainable level of literacy. A survival rate close to 100 per cent showed a high level of preservation and low occurrence of dropout.

The World Bank (2005) further highlights the contrast between urban and rural children. Rural children are only half as likely to enrol in Grade 1 as their urban peers; they are also less likely to reach subsequent grades – they are only 72 per cent as likely to continue to Grade 4 and only 25 per cent as likely to continue to Grade 8. In light of these comparisons, it is no wonder that Grade 4 completion rates among rural children are, on average, only 35 per cent as high as those of urban children, and Grade 8 completion rates are a mere 13 per cent as high as those of urban. The data also imply that the lower completion rates at both points are attributable more to the lower entry rates to Grade 1 among rural children than to their lower rates of continuance to subsequent grades. It is now also clear that the very small rural representation among eighth-graders explains why there are so few rural young people among secondary and higher education students. A result of this finding is that if the participation of rural children in post-primary education is to improve, there is no alternative but to begin by rectifying the shortfalls in primary education in rural areas (World Bank 2005: 119–120).

One study indicates that over half the children in the rural areas in the Amhara regional state had never been to school. The main reasons for this are poverty, workload and early marriage for girls. For those who had attended school, entry was late (one-third after the age of ten) and educational attainment was low (an average of three years in school, half being illiterate). Some of the rural children had worked for cash while most of them were likely to be involved in unpaid family work for an average of over 30 hours a week (Erulkar et al. 2005b).

Ethiopia faces many challenges in managing the delivery of good quality education services. Teacher recruitment and training standards are important. There is a severe shortage of teachers and classrooms throughout the system, leading to both very high pupil–teacher ratios (among the highest in the world) and large class size. There are large numbers of teachers in Grades 5–8 who do not meet the certification standard (the first cycle of primary education requires teachers with a minimum qualification of a certificate from a certified Teacher Training Institute; a diploma from a Teacher Training College is required for teachers in the second cycle of primary school (MOE 2005b: 12)). Many schools have large rolls, a limited budget for school administration and no budget for pedagogical resources. This shows that the school system has suffered a persistent deterioration in pedagogical conditions since 1994 (World Bank 2005: 172).<sup>1</sup>

A shortage of primary school places prevents over 30 per cent of school-age children from attending school (JICA 2007). There are sometimes 80 to 100 students in a classroom. Other problems include shortages of teaching resources such as textbooks and laboratory equipment in the school. These things create challenges to learning. Moreover, there are still regional and gender inequalities in school attendance and girls in rural areas tend to be most deprived of opportunities to obtain primary education.

Moreover, Woldehanna's report details other factors that limit the educational attainment status of children. These include child-related factors such as age, gender, IQ, peer relations, academic achievement, nutritional and health status; household related factors like assets, family structure and parental education; and policy issues such as starting age, funding, curriculum, schooling time, grade promotion policies and teacher training (Woldehanna 2005).

Another study conducted by the World Bank (2006) worldwide with more focus on developing countries emphasises the importance of school attendance and of schools being suitable for

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1 In 1994, the New Educational and Training Policy was launched which undermined the pedagogical component of quality of education.

students. Community, schools, family and peers play a protective or hazardous role in the life of children. While risk-taking behaviours or other dangers (like not attending school, having unsafe sex or suffering sexual and labour exploitation and abuse) play negative roles in children's personal development and school achievement, protective factors (like school attendance and being well-informed about school, the presence of parents, etc.) are very important for the better development of children and for potentially counteracting these hazards. The academic standard of the teachers is also an important factor for school attendance and connectedness (World Bank 2006).

Gender and regional variation are also important factors for the educational status of the child. As Save the Children, UNESCO and UNICEF (2005) mention, the reasons for gender disparity in education are varied and at the same time interrelated. Often they are connected to other forms of variation, such as disparity between regions or between urban and rural areas.

One major barrier, especially for girls, is based on social and cultural factors. As Ethiopia is a country with varied populations, cultures and traditions, factors like early marriage, abduction and rape are the foremost reasons for girls not going to school or for dropout. Parental and societal attitudes towards education for girls, and traditional practices are amongst the other reasons. As an example of the latter, girls who undergo female genital cutting need to stay at home for weeks for healing, which usually affects their school attendance. Gender role expectation is also a significant cultural factor. Women's social status is low, and a lot of women accept their inferior status (Save the Children, UNESCO and UNICEF 2005; UNGEI [no date]; MOLSA 2006; and Tamene 2007).

Another major factor is the schools themselves. A scarcity of schools, qualified teachers and conducive learning environments are all contributory factors. Schools often have shortages of girl-friendly facilities, such as clean latrines and clean water. Besides, long distances to schools and insecure roads mean that parents keep their daughters at home to defend them from sexual abuse and other violence (Save the Children, UNESCO and UNICEF 2005; MOLSA 2006). Tamene (2007) also tries to investigate the participation of students in the classroom, especially that of girls, and finds that girls have lower rates of participation than boys, owing to the dissuasion of teachers. Most teachers seem to prefer a girl who completes homework and performs well academically, but if she is 'silent' she is considered to be more respectful to teachers.

The economic factor is also a major consideration. For girls, this is doubly true, since their parents expect them to spend a lot of time helping in the household, and at the same time they generate income by doing paid work after school. In addition, parents may give their daughters for early marriage in order to get bride wealth (Save the Children, UNESCO and UNICEF 2005; MOLSA 2006).

Some researchers suggest that educational problems in Ethiopia are the result of inconsistencies between the traditional socialisation system (which focuses on practical skills, local norms, values, cultures, histories, etc.) and modern schooling. This is particularly true in rural communities where children have acquired skills from their local environment, within their families and from community settings. They are taught to perform agricultural and domestic work and to use local resources in a totally different way to how they are taught at formal schools. School, however, raises children's expectations of having modern jobs and living in modernised urban areas. However, because of poor economic conditions and the high unemployment rate, the chances of getting employment in the formal labour market is very low for children living in rural areas. Moreover, most rural children are highly overloaded with farm and domestic work which is in conflict with school attendance and school

performance. Low attendance and performance mean that the chances of their achieving good livelihoods as adults are very low. In other words, the increasing discontinuity between what children learn in school and the chances they will have as adults, along with the erosion of their traditional livelihood and socialisation mechanisms, means increasing exclusion from participating in national development endeavours as citizens (Abebe 2008).

Despite the fact that children's participation in school is determined by the above-mentioned factors, poverty is commonly referred to as a major determinant in inhibiting children's right to education (Kifle 2002). Poor families remain preoccupied by the necessities for daily survival rather than by the need to send their children to school.

To conclude, as JICA (2007) describes, one of the Millennium Development Goals is to make sure that all school-age boys and girls have access to primary education by 2015. To achieve this goal, the Ethiopian government is working together with other countries to develop and improve primary education. It has prepared an education sector development programme in which low-cost, non-formal education based on flexible teaching hours and a flexible curriculum is recognised as a vital tool that can be used along with formal school education to meet the goal. This approach has been a priority measure to ensure that a large number of children are able to access primary education.

## **2.2. Child work**

The high incidence of poverty and the agriculture-based economy of Ethiopia make child work a 'necessity'. However, poor labour market regulations have continued to obscure the reality and made the lives of working children difficult. Distinguishing child work from child labour has remained a challenge. Some researchers have tried to define 'child labour' in terms of time spent on work (Admassie and Singh 2001), others by whether it generates income or not (Woldehanna et al. 2008), or by the type of work. The ILO definition of the Worst Forms of Child Labour is work which by its nature is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children (ILO 1999). Ersado (2002) argues that measures identifying work undertaken as child labour depend on the way it is defined and by the ethics and values of the society in which the child lives. For him, all non-school and non-leisure activities in which a child participates are ingredients of child labour. However, others suggest that the involvement of children in work activities that do not interfere with their education and development and potentially help them to assist their parents and acquire skills for future life should not be considered child labour (Aberra et al. 2003: 47).

As we mentioned in the introduction, more than 85 per cent of Ethiopian children live in rural areas and their activities could not be described as 'labour' in the context of the formal labour market. Here we will briefly discuss the prevalence of child work and its effect on child education and health.

Our review of the literature has brought up two different perspectives on child work in Ethiopia. One states that child work is a valuable aspect of children's lives because it aids their education and overall development. The second states that child work is in most cases harmful in terms of children's education, health, and physical, emotional and economic development. This notion emphasises the concomitant effect of child work on the education of the child.

Concerning the first conception, it is important to mention the findings of qualitative research carried out in southern Ethiopia by Alebachew (2007). It states that there is a symbiotic relationship between child work and education. It attempts to challenge the notion that child work and 'being a child are mutually exclusive' (ibid: 1). It states that child work is an

essential part of the child's way of life. In other words, it criticises the widely accepted notion that child work is detrimental to children's education, and unhealthy for the physical, social, cognitive, emotional and economic development of children. Its central argument is that child work is a necessary asset for the survival and development of the child, so it is very difficult to distinguish between a working child and a working adult in the Ethiopian context. He further argues that child work promotes child schooling (by generating income to support the continuation of their education) and expands the child's livelihood options (Alebachew 2007). Aberra and colleagues also argue that activities that help children develop life skills, without interfering with their education, should not be considered as 'child labour' (Aberra et al. 2003: 47).

Woodhead's research on schooling and child work in Ethiopia, Peru, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Central America seems to accept the importance of work in encouraging enrolling and staying in school. Based on both qualitative and quantitative research, he produces strong evidence that most of the children viewed helping their families, at home and in the field, as having a positive impact on their education. He states that poverty and parents' expectations compel children to accept work as a necessity for their education and livelihoods. He suggests that children should be protected from work that is hazardous and harmful to their education and personal development, although children included in the study did not view work as harmful to their education. He concludes that it is not only crucial to identify any threatening effects of work, it is also important to focus on the 'value children place on their work, their personal investment in their occupation as a long-term future as well as childhood necessity... how children view their work, its place in their self-esteem and personal identity' (Woodhead 2001: 94–106).

The second conception considers child work as abusive and exploitative. Despite the legislative provision of work-age limits, most Ethiopian children remain engaged in different forms of work that negatively affect their lives (Abebe 2008a). Child work legislation has much to do with protecting children from activities that affect their development, mainly in terms of health and education. Ethiopia, which ratified the CRC in 1991 and ACRWC in 2002, committed more to the realisation of child rights by incorporating the articles in its official documents. Article 36 of the Federal Constitution of 1995 states that 'every child has the right not to be subject to exploitative practices, neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to his or her education, health or well-being'. The Ethiopian Labour Proclamation No. 377/2003 prohibits the employment of persons under the age of 14 and regulates the working conditions of young persons between the ages of 14 and 18.

In reality, children below this age are highly involved in child work. This is a common problem in developing countries, most of which are therefore unlikely to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Child work is one of the major problems for African policy-makers in their attempt to reduce poverty. For example, one study showed that more than 40 per cent of African children of under the age of 14 are in the labour market (Admassie 2002).

A survey carried out among 3,043 children aged between 4 and 15 in Ethiopia indicated that about 75 per cent of them were engaged in different forms of work (Admassie and Singh 2001). Most of the domestic workers in urban areas are highly exploited. While about 60 per cent of them are paid, about 41 per cent do not have fixed payment. Most children working in this sector enter the domestic labour market at the age of 6 or younger; the majority start work as early as 6.00 am and go to bed after midnight. They may work up to seven days a week, and 80 hours a week. As a result, they have little time for study, doing homework and play; some of them drop out of school because of the workload in the home of their

employers (Kifle 2002). A heavy workload is also common in rural areas. Children are involved in multiple activities (both domestic and non-domestic work) which seriously impact on their physical, moral and educational development (Admassie 2000). The conflict between child work and school attendance leaves children overloaded and exhausted, with little recourse to time and resources (Abebe 2008a).

Child labour is exploitative and abusive because it is marked by low wages, long hours of work, sometimes under serious threat of violence and abuse, and unhealthy work conditions, together with an absence of physical and social security. Any child work should not affect education. But the study by Admassie and Singh (2001) suggests that 75 per cent of children who participate in work spend four hours a day on average in work activities. The time spent on work obviously competes with their time for education and play.

The 2001 Ethiopian Child Labour Survey shows that over half of the economically active children in rural and urban parts of the country were involved in some kind of work and were not able to afford school materials, and also that over one-third of the children combined work with schooling (MOLSA 2006: 53). The involvement of children in both paid work and household chores has a considerable effect both on their school attendance and their educational achievements (MOLSA 2006: 57).

From her children's diary research in Ethiopia, Poluha comes up with important findings that show students in primary school engaged in different activities at home and in the field after schooling. They were highly overloaded every day, and had little time to do homework or to study their lessons. She further investigated some of the children in her research site who were engaged in paid work. This was mainly the responsibility of older siblings, aged 14 and above. Almost all the children who undertook paid work belonged to the poorest households in the community. Students involved in work for cash were more vulnerable to school dropout and repetition (Poluha 2005: 45–65).

Status, location and family economic conditions tend to affect child work. Poluha (2007) writes that children from economically well-to-do families, mainly those living in towns, are not engaged in heavy work. This is because rich families can employ housemaids in order to support their daughters in attending school instead of involving them in household chores. Usually girls from poor families, in both rural and urban areas, are involved in heavy activities like cooking, cleaning and looking after siblings. Tamene (2007), Alemayehu (2007) and Chuta (2007) further indicate that girls from rural areas have heavier workloads than girls from urban ones. They did work like cleaning up animal dung, fetching water from rivers, herding, farm work, etc. These were their routine activities. According to Tamene (2007), there is a broad difference between activities performed by rural and urban boys, but both are expected to do activities outside the home. In rural areas, boys are engaged in farm activities like ploughing, herding, harvesting, threshing, carrying wood, etc. On the other hand, boys in urban areas do easier activities like shopping, running errands, etc, though this does not mean that they have no heavy work.

Work is socialised among children in a highly gender-specific manner. Parents' expectations are structured around gender and children who follow in the role of their same-sex parent are considered 'good' children. Poluha (2007), in her study on the rural areas of Amhara and Oromo societies, found out that children begin learning gender-specific work at the age of 5. Girls are expected at the age of 7 to know how to do household chores like fetching water, cleaning, grinding crops, spinning and weeding. Boys start doing work such as chores or looking after small cattle, and when they become older they start looking after big cattle. At the age of 14, they start ploughing.

Another study of 1,500 rural Ethiopian households suggested that 92 per cent of 4 to 15 year olds have at least one household work responsibility and close to half have two or more (Aberra et al. 2003). Herding and fetching wood and water were reported to be the most common activities performed by children; however, older boys specialise in farm works whereas older girls specialise in domestic works.

The Young Lives research report, however, indicates that child labour (which is defined as paid work in this case) in its 20 research sites in Ethiopia shows a substantial decline between Round 1 and Round 2 of the survey. It states that many children (between ages 5 and 14) are involved in both paid and unpaid work. The number of children involved in paid work decreased from 9 per cent in Round 1 to only 5 per cent in Round 2 (of course, involvement in family work increased sharply with age (Woldehanna et al. 2008: viii)). The figure looks too small and one can argue that defining child labour only as 'paid work' undermines the huge contribution of child work in the informal economy.

In general, poverty tends to 'legitimise' child work, despite extensive legislative protection. Aberra and colleagues indicated that in a country where a vast proportion of families have problems relating to famine, disease, poverty, family displacement and social instability, some of the laws appear too good to be true. Hence, many children living in very difficult circumstances generate income to fulfill at least their own basic needs and those of their families. Referring to a study in the informal sectors of three selected urban areas in southwest Ethiopia, they found that household poverty was a major cause of children's employment. Twelve per cent of the children had no education at all and worked an average of eight hours a day through self-employment. Fifty per cent work during weekends and holidays (Aberra et al. 2003: 46).

As already discussed, despite the fact that child labour is a major challenge to governments and policy-makers, no significant measures have yet been taken to reduce the problem. In his critical analysis of the problem of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa, Admassie tries to propose some important alternative ways of combating child labour. These include advocacy, raising public awareness, community mobilisation and participation, and balanced and sustainable economic growth. According to him, the most effective and sustainable way of reducing child labour is to reduce poverty. Thus, if we think of reducing the problem of child labour, it is vital to combine it with anti-poverty strategies. It is important to design interventions that promote income-generating schemes, as these are vital to curb the problem of child labour in Africa (Admassie 2002: 272). A study by the World Bank, however, advocates other ways of reducing child labour. It states that education can be taken as the most important means of achieving this. Providing more and better schools, and making them attractive to parents and children, creates a favourable environment for the children and helps facilitate their continued attendance. Measures such as significant investment in education, compulsory primary education, special steps to ensure equal participation of boys and girls, a subsidy for enrolment, etc., would have a strong impact on school attendance and thereby combat child labour (World Bank 2005: 17).

This brief section on child work has tried to indicate the magnitude of the issue. However, it is difficult to provide a proper definition of child work primarily because many young people are engaged in family work which may be invisible. Secondly, the documents rarely provide empirical evidence on the consequences of child labour for health and education. Thirdly, the literature has failed to reveal the ambivalence of child labour in the context of poverty. Many researchers do not see the importance of child work in terms of its utility for the survival of poor children and even its assistance in pursuing their education. These require an in-depth investigation which the Young Lives qualitative study would complement.

## 3. Child well-being

This section will attempt to review briefly the available legal documents and research results which relate directly or indirectly to 'child well-being'. It will focus on legislative provision, health risks and so-called harmful traditional practices (HTPs).

### 3.1. Legislative context

The Revised Family Law of Ethiopia is an important instrument through which to consider children's well-being and other welfare issues. The Revised Family Code Proclamation No. 213/2000 purports to give 'priority to the well-being, upbringing and protection of children in accordance with the Constitution and International Instruments which Ethiopia has ratified' (MOLSA 2006: 71). According to Article 215 of the Revised Family Code, '[a] minor is a person of either sex who has not attained the full age of eighteen years'. The law presumes that the minor is incapable of performing a broad range of legally binding acts and in such circumstances places him or her under the care and protection of specified organisations (ibid: 71–72). It emphasises the protection of the child from performing work which is harmful to his or her physical health or mental, spiritual, moral or social development. In this respect, the Revised Family Code appears to be in harmony with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, there is no evidence suggesting that appropriate measures for the enforcement of these provisions has been taken so far (ibid: 72).

A survey conducted by the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) in collaboration with UNICEF in eastern and southern Africa (including Ethiopia) stresses that one of the top innovative and radical ideas in both the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child is the importance given to child participation, specifically, the right of the child to freedom of thought and expression. Only by allowing children a voice to express their thoughts, feelings and concerns, and to articulate their anxieties, hopes and aspirations, can we deal with their desires and guarantee their rights. The survey has given African children the opportunity to reflect on the particular problems they face, and to present their own perspectives. It emphasises children's well-being, emotions and environment; their relationships with family and friends; their relationships with their communities, their countries and their leaders; and of course their views about the issues concerning them (ACPF 2006).

### 3.2. Child health

There are various international, regional and national instruments aimed at ensuring the right of children to health. Article 24 of CRC urges states to protect rights to a high standard of health and health services. It emphasises that state parties shall recognise the right of the child to a high standard of health, so that every child can get treatment for illness and access to health facilities. It also urges state parties to act effectively and appropriately to prevent harmful traditional practices that affect the health of the child. It highlights the prevalence of healthcare discrimination against disadvantaged groups including children from poor families, children with disabilities, children in rural areas, girls and ethnic minorities.

Article 14 of African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also advocates the highest standard of health services for the child's physical, mental and spiritual health. It urges state parties to act appropriately to ensure the provision of necessary primary healthcare to children. It encourages state parties to protect children from harmful traditional practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of the child. The



states parties have a responsibility to provide the highest attainable standard of healthcare services to children. All children should have equal access to healthcare services.

Pertaining to the convention, the Ethiopian Ministry of Health (MoH) has drawn up policies that focus on the issue of health services for children. The health policy of 1993, which is based on primary healthcare, is a critical document. The first five-year plan (1998–2002) stated that the execution of policies by healthcare services should be non-discriminatory, as stipulated by the CRC. This is specified in Article 41(3) of the FDRE constitution, which gives the right to every Ethiopian 'equal access to publicly funded social services', including healthcare.

However, in reality things are different. Some studies have suggested that children rarely have access to healthcare (Hailemariam and Asrat 1996:13). Rural children do not have access to the same quantity and quality of services as children in urban settings (Gelan 2003: 8). The Demographic and Health Survey (CSA 2005) indicates that the health system in Ethiopia is underdeveloped, and insufficient transportation systems are further impeding its delivery. The majority of the population living in rural communities has little access to any type of formal health institution. For instance, the findings of the 2005 Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey indicate that more than half (58 per cent) of children with diarrhoeal illnesses did not receive any kind of medical treatment, with significant variations between rural (61.5 per cent) and urban (25.2 per cent) areas. Of those who received some kind of treatment, 6 per cent were given Oral Rehydration Salt (clinical), and about 13 per cent homemade herbal/hot drinks or other fluids. Only 13 per cent of the children were taken to a health facility (12 per cent rural and 24 per cent urban), and about 7 per cent were treated by traditional healers (CSA 2006). Another survey indicates that as many 'as 81 per cent of children in Ethiopia suffering from pneumonia did not have access to health facilities' (ACPF 2008: 22).

The current health policy is based on the principle that health comprises physical, mental and social well-being. The government has recognised the Health Sector Development Programme (HSDP), which proposes a 20-year health development plan. Its focus is on poverty-related health problems, transmissible diseases such as malaria and diarrhoea, and other health problems that affect mothers and children. Efforts will be focused on extending services to reach villages and households in rural areas. Currently, there is not enough information on how the system is working, and the quality of services, particularly in rural areas, is irregular. At the level of the government's five-year national strategy, the health sector is to carry on focusing on primary healthcare and preventive services, with a big concentration on expanding these services to those areas which have no access and making services more efficient, in particular addressing the shortages of medicines and qualified health workers.

The assessment of national programmes designed to reduce mortality caused by childhood illnesses, as DHS (2005) acknowledges, is based on treatment practices and contact with health services among children with the three most significant childhood illnesses (acute respiratory infection, fever and diarrhoea). Fever is the main symptom of malaria and other severe illnesses in children. Malaria and fever are the most common causes of malnutrition and in turn of infant and child mortality.

Other studies (for example, Gelan 2003) suggest that the environment plays a negative role in the health of children in the country. He states that environmental and socioeconomic factors in Ethiopia have a negative effect on the health of children. Children in deprived rural households are affected by poor sanitation and unhygienic living conditions. A lack of resources has prevented people, especially children, from accessing environmental health services. These services are mainly safe water supplies and improvements in sanitation (mainly latrines). There are no child-specific health services in most parts of the country.

### 3.2.1. *Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs)*

The FDRE Constitution, Proc. No. 1/1995 disapproves all Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) that result in bodily injury or mental harm. In Ethiopia, women usually experience harmful practices like female genital cutting (FGC) and early marriage. These practices are prohibited by the Constitution. In addition, the modified Penal Code of Ethiopia punishes these HTPs in order to protect the mental and physical health of children. The 1998 Baseline Survey (BLS) of Ethiopia, which collected data from 65 ethnic groups in all parts of the country, is perhaps the most important study on HTPs. Out of 88 practices, 20 HTPs were selected and considered to cause harm to the body and mind of the children, including FGC and the early marriage of girls.

### 3.2.2. *Female Genital Cutting (FGC)*

Female genital cutting or circumcision is one of the main traditional practices that affects the health and well-being of girls, and is the most extensively documented HTP in Ethiopia (Dagne et al. 2004; Poluha 2007). The Demographic and Health Survey (CSA 2005) states that overall, 74.3 per cent of women have been circumcised in Ethiopia, with the percentage being approximately equal in urban and rural areas. This figure showed a decline of 6 per cent from the 80 per cent study result by the same institute in 2000 and nearly 10 per cent from the survey result of 1989, which indicated an 85 per cent prevalence.

As FGC has its roots in culture, there is a huge disparity among different ethnic and religious groups in Ethiopia. The high prevalence of FGC was found in Afar at over 90 per cent; Harari, Amhara and Oromia regions at about 80 per cent; and Addis Ababa and Somalia regions at about 70 per cent. There was also a high occurrence of FGC in other ethnic groups from the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region, with 79 per cent among the Wolaita (Dagne et al. 2004).

Focus group discussion participants had their own perceptions as to why FGC is practiced. They suggested that there are different socio-cultural reasons, such as avoidance of stigma, respect for custom, religious requirements, prevention of trouble to husbands, the perception that the external genitalia of women are unclean and ugly, to decrease female sexual feeling and to increase male sexual feeling. All of these reasons are directly and indirectly related to giving precedence to the rights and interests of husbands (Dagne et al. 2004). Societal values and customs play an important role in this regard. The concern is that uncircumcised girls will turn out to be impolite, badly behaved towards their husbands, inclined to break utensils in the house and likely to stay unmarried (Chuta 2007).

Research suggests that FGC exposes girls to severe health problems which can be obstacles to their growth (Ethiopian Woman Lawyers' Association 2005: 4). The direct health risks are pain and fear at the time of cutting, extreme loss of blood, exposure to infection, and injury to adjacent organs which may create fistulae. In addition there are:

Long-term complications including the loss of functions performed by excised genitalia may lead to longer-term consequences like gynaecological complications (obstruction of urine and menstrual flow, excessive formation of scar tissues making intercourse painful), obstetric or childbirth complications like tissue tear around the anus, damage to the foetus or even death and psychological complications involving reduced sexual desire, absence of orgasm, depression and sometimes leading to divorce. (Dagne et al. 2004: 10)

Females are exposed to different forms of FGC from their own birth up to the time of giving birth themselves. Boys, meanwhile, are circumcised seven days after birth, when they are 7

to 8 years old, or according to the wishes of their parents. Girls can be circumcised after a month or two months or years after birth. Poluha (2007) affirms that for both Amhara and Oromo ethnic groups, girls are usually circumcised shortly after birth.

The survey results suggest that FGC in Ethiopia is decreasing because of an extensive awareness programme and some legal interventions. In some cultures, it is almost disappearing; in others, people continue to practise it in accordance with their traditional values. Surveys rarely pick these up as they are 'outlawed' and rarely talk publicly. However, qualitative research could be revealing and this would be an area where the Young Lives longitudinal research would have a role to play. A longitudinal qualitative study would help develop a rapport with girls who have gone through FGC across their life courses.

### 3.2.3. *Early marriage of girls*

Article 21 of the ACRWC limits the minimum age for marriage for both girls and boys to 18 years and makes marriage registration compulsory. The FDRE Constitution also has many basic principles on the rights of girls and women in relation to marriage. Among these, it stipulates that girls should not marry before they have attained the age prescribed by law, which is 18. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

Early marriage is an age-old traditional practice predominant among rural communities of the Christian-dominated and crop-producing highlands of central, northern, south and south-west Ethiopia (Dagne et al. 2004). The 1998 Baseline Survey, which surveyed respondents aged 18 and over, also found that 54.6 per cent married under 18 years of age, which is a huge prevalence. The survey also investigated the causes of early marriage. Among them, material advantages and fear of abduction are the immediate causes. Underlying these, economic reasons, expanding kinship relations, protecting virginity and the urge to conform to tradition are the root causes of early marriage.

Hailemariam and Asrat (1996) point out that marriage is likely to be early and universal in Ethiopia because of traditional and social factors. In some parts of the country, females get married at age 12 or 13. They have no choice as to their marital partners and are forced to marry at a very early age (EWLA 2005). In the rural communities of the Amhara region, early marriage is applicable to both boys and girls, but the rates of marriage before the age of 18 are considerably higher for girls than for boys. One study indicated that about 39 per cent of girls married at age 15, whereas only about 4 per cent of boys did. As girls marry early, the possibility of divorce or separation before the age of 20 is high. Early marriage coincides with early sexual intercourse in most cases, which can easily expose girls to early pregnancy and HIV/AIDS. About 37 per cent of married girls gave birth, and some had as many as three children before the age of 20 (Erulkar et al. 2005b).

Early marriages exacerbate urban migration. A study in Addis Ababa indicates that early marriage is one of the main causes of the migration of rural girls to urban areas (Erulkar et al. 2005a). Most boys and girls migrate during their early adolescence looking for educational and work opportunities, but large numbers of girls have migrated to Addis Ababa and other towns to escape early marriages. Even after they reach town, life is very tough for most of them. A considerable number engage in unpaid domestic work, hindering their education and involvement in social and cultural activities (Erulkar et al. 2005a). Most of these migrant girls are exposed to different kinds of abuse; some are exposed to sexual exploitation, including rape by the male members of the employer's family (Erulkar et al. 2006).

This may confirm the widely accepted view that Ethiopia has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world (Erulkar et al 2007:1), especially in rural areas. Early marriage is practiced in rural areas for different reasons, of which social and cultural norms are the most important (Mekonnen and Aspen 2007). Maintaining the family status in the community is considered important. Marriage is a symbol of success for girls. There is also a concern on the part of the family and other community members that as girls get older, their opportunity to get married decreases, which represents great failure and shame for the parents. Early marriage has complicated and interrelated effects, including instability of the marriage, poor health, fistulae and related problems which may arise from early sexual experience or giving birth at a young age, too many children, school dropout and lower educational attainment, all of which have a negative impact on the well-being of the children.

Recently, however, the age of people getting married has shown a gradual increase both in urban and rural areas due to the influence of urbanisation and the modernisation of the lives of women. Females' access to education and job opportunities may be specific reasons. The figures for urban areas are considerably higher than those for rural areas. A study conducted among 25 ethnic groups, including those from Amhara, Oromo, Tigray and Gurage, suggests prevalence of early marriage ranges from 50 to 80 per cent, while the national average remained 54 per cent (EWLA 2005: 15)

As with FGC, legal provisions obscure the reality of early marriage; it is difficult to ask girls if they are married before the age of 18. At a later age, it is easier for them to say at what age they were married (and of course some could also give an honest response at an early age), but this requires a longer follow-up time and a strong rapport between the respondents and the researchers. This is another area where Young Lives qualitative study could contribute. The next section sets out the implications of the literature review for the Young Lives research.

## 4. Implications for Young Lives research

In the introduction, we referred to the limitations of the literature on the study of children in Ethiopia. Only fragmented governmental legislation and limited survey results are available, and these contain little evidence of the lives of children in Ethiopia. This is both a challenge and an opportunity for the Young Lives research. Limited knowledge of children's lives in Ethiopia makes it difficult to focus research and to fill any specific gap, but at the same time it provides opportunities for new research to provide primary evidence over a broad area. For these reasons, we identify the following gaps that Young Lives could address.

### 4.1. Thematic

*Childhood poverty* – the literature rarely discusses the impact of poverty on children's key transitions and well-being.

*Key transitions* – child work and education have been surveyed separately and inadequately. Researchers have failed to address the real causes and meanings of child work, mainly because they have failed to understand the local context and children's perception of what they do. The real damage or benefit of children's work within the family has been obscured because in-depth investigation has been replaced by surveys which define child work

inappropriately. The impact of child work on schooling and health can only be assessed by closer and longer follow-ups of the children involved. Research on child education has focused largely on countable figures of enrolment rates and number of schools rather than on the quality of education. Assessment of quality needs to take into account the experience of the children themselves. The qualitative approach of Young Lives research could be very useful here.

*Ill/well-being* – the literature indicated only the ‘well-known’ indicators of ill-being in children. Traditional harmful practices including FGC and early marriage have been at the centre of these studies, which have been based primarily on surveys and do not take into account the perceptions of children. Survey results can be revealing but tend to fail to understand the real socio-cultural bases of practices such as these, and of course children’s perceptions of them. While survey results suggest they are on the decrease, we suspect this has much to do with underreporting for different reasons. Understanding the local context, developing a rapport through continued interaction, and involving children as sources of information would help reveal new evidence that would help to further knowledge and inform better interventions. Moreover, failing to involve children in research may reflect an inability or unwillingness to see well-being beyond the scope of harmful traditional practices. Ill/well-being transcends the physical and comprises wider aspects of children’s lives.

## 4.2. Methodological

Much of the literature is based on fragmented survey results where mainly adults were the sources for the data. They lack in-depth qualitative investigation of children’s own perspectives on their lives. The few available qualitative studies are sketchy and unable to draw on the real lives of children. The Young Lives qualitative longitudinal study which takes the voices of children as a main source of information is in a better position to overcome these limitations. Any attempt to understand the ill/well-being of children would be meaningless out of the context of the perceptions of children themselves. Trying to investigate the impact of work and health on children’s education or other aspects of their lives would be difficult without employing a longitudinal approach which gives the opportunity to examine the linkage of different life trajectories of children. Different child participatory methods would ensure better data on issues not covered in any of the literature reviewed. We feel Young Lives is strongly positioned to fill this gap.

# 5. Concluding remarks

This review has brought the legal contexts of children’s key transitions and well-being forward, but empirical evidence is scanty and fragmented. Qualitative panel data are almost nonexistent. This makes it difficult to talk clearly of the lives of children in Ethiopia. We have reviewed as much literature as possible but had to prioritise that relating to the themes of key transitions and well-being. We feel we have established a good background and identified a huge gap that Young Lives could fill. The longitudinal and qualitative participatory approach would help us understand children’s lives and bring out the factors that really affect them.

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