Executive Summary

# Child labour, gender inequality and rural/urban disparities: how can Ethiopia's national development strategies best address negative spill-over impacts on child education and well-being?

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Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

# Child Labour, Gender Inequality and Rural/Urban Disparities: how can Ethiopia's national development strategies best address negative spill-over impacts on child education and well-being?

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## I. Placing Child Labour in the Context of National Poverty Reduction Strategies

This paper analyzes the extent to which the policy prescriptions and implementation of the Ethiopian Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP)[2] (2002-2005) are impacting poor children's time usage—namely how their time is divided between education, work activities and play. It is particularly concerned with the impact of one key SDPRP pillar—the Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) policy—on child enrolment and child work (paid and unpaid), and how these changes are further mediated through gender and rural-urban differences. Through this Program, the Ethiopian government, together with donor organizations, is placing a particular emphasis on intensifying agricultural activities to increase livelihood options and provide better safety nets for the poor (e.g. through food/or cash for work programs). This approach is based on the underlying assumption that because labour is abundant and capital scarce, new livelihood opportunities should be labour-intensive and agriculture-based. However, although labour-intensive agricultural activities may augment aggregate economic development, we are concerned that given imperfect labour and credit markets, without precautionary social risk management measures, the strategy could be detrimental to child well-being. This may be because children's labour is directly employed to contribute to household labour activities (paid or unpaid) or because caregivers' labour is needed in paid work or agricultural activities, thereby reducing the time they have for childcare and domestic sphere responsibilities. In order to create a win-win situation where both national economic development and children's rights (socio-economic, civic and cultural) are realized within the SDPRP framework, a careful understanding of the individual, family, community and policy-level factors affecting child labour and children's education is required.

## II. Research Methodology and Sample

The paper follows Becker's theory of household production (1981), but is modified to include constraints—time (of parents and children), household wealth, credit and labour market constraints—on a household's utility maximization capacity. Within this framework, we develop a multinomial logit econometrics model that looks at different choices involving combinations of work and schooling:

1 This summary is based on a longer Young Lives paper by the same title written by: Tassew Woldehanna (Department of Economics, University of Addis Ababa), Bekele Tefera (Save the Children UK, Ethiopia), Nicola Jones (Save the Children UK, London), and Alebel Bayrau (Ethiopian Development Research Institute). The research was generously funded by Canada's International Development Research Centre and the UK Department for International Development.

2 Ethiopia's PRSP is known as the SDPRP.

"school only"; "work and school"; "work only" (defined as 2 hours plus work per day as per the ILO definition) and "minimal work" (less than 2 hours work per day). The main objective of this paper is to empirically investigate the factors that influence how children divide their time between labour activities and education in order to understand the possible impacts of public policy interventions formulated within the SDPRP to tackle poverty and to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In this regard, the paper is concerned with child labour and its possible impact on both **school enrolment and school completion** or drop-out rates.

The empirical data is based on a sample of 3115 children aged 7 to 17 years old derived from household surveys in 20 *woredas* (sub-districts) carried out as part of the *Young Lives* international longitudinal survey in 2002. It is complemented by follow-up qualitative fieldwork on child schooling and labour in five *woredas* in early 2005 involving focus group and key informant discussions with local officials, community leaders, teachers, parents and children. Together these sites capture the experiences of poor children in five regional states (which cover over 90% of the Ethiopian population), encompassing diverse livelihood patterns, cultural and religious traditions, human development levels and demographics. This coverage provides us with valuable information about the impact of macro-level poverty eradication and development policies in varied sub-national contexts.

## III. Key Findings and Policy Implications on the Linkages between Child Labour and Education

Results from the Young Lives research complement the Ethiopian Central Statistical Authority's (CSA) national labour survey by providing a more detailed perspective on the factors that shape decision-making about children's balance of time between school and labour activities. Our data shows that even using a strict definition of "child labour" i.e. including only children working more than 2 hours per day and excluding questions about children's involvement in household chores, **almost 1 quarter of all children are involved in labour activities, averaging almost six hours of work per day**. As a result of this work burden, many are not only unable to spend sufficient time on homework, which seriously impacts their ability to keep up in class, but they are also frequently late or absent from school. When this situation persists over time, it can result in repetition of grades, frustration and children eventually dropping out. Indeed, our findings show that children who combine school with work are considerably more likely to drop out of school than those who can attend school without having to combine it with work. This indicates that a child's work is partly (if not wholly) responsible for school non-completion.

Overall the paper emphasizes the need for policymakers and donors to give due consideration to out-of-school variables, particularly factors that shape children's involvement in work activities, when developing policy strategies to achieve universal and relevant education for all children. In order to meet the **MDG target of universal education for all by 2015**, there is an urgent need to focus not only on education sector policies but also to introduce a child-sensitive perspective into broader poverty reduction strategies. The extent to which development approaches are relying on the largely invisible labour of women and children and the potentially negative spill-over impacts on child schooling and general well-being must be confronted.

| Table 1: Children's School Attendance and Drop-out Rates | |
|---|---|
| **Young Lives Children's Main Activities** | |
| Attend school | 75 %* |
| Combine work with school | 20 % |
| Attend school only – rural | 64 % |
| Attend school only – urban | 93 % |
| **Drop-Out Rate** | |
| School drop-out rate | 35 % |
| Urban drop-out rate | 19% |
| Rural drop-out rate | 81% |
| Girls' drop-out rate | 36 % |
| Boys' drop-out rate | 34 % |

* All figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole number.

Considerations of child labour were not explicitly mentioned in the first Ethiopian Sustainable Development Poverty Reduction Program (2002-05). In order to address this lacuna, the discussion below attempts to link the quantitative and qualitative research findings to policy implications for Ethiopia's phase two Poverty Reduction Strategy Program (2006-10).

These include:

- a continued and strengthened policy focus on female education;
- modernizing domestic and farm technologies to reduce their labour intensity;
- rationalizing livestock raising patterns;
- introducing cash transfers and credit provisions for poor families to offset school costs especially for older and rural children, and cushion the adverse impact of household shocks;
- improving women's productive work opportunities while simultaneously ensuring that their care work burden is reduced; and
- improving community infra-structure, especially energy and water sources and affordable transportation.

### Child characteristics

Gender: While the quantitative findings found that boys are marginally more likely than girls to have to combine school and work than study full-time, our qualitative findings revealed that although there are differences in the type and spatial distribution of work activities undertaken, work pressures are a widespread reality for boys and girls alike. Moreover, the tasks commonly assigned to girls are often as hazardous and/or time-consuming as those for which boys are traditionally responsible as highlighted in the table below. In this regard it is important that policy practitioners adopt a broad definition of child labour and focus not only on addressing particularly "harmful or disabling" forms of labour but also labour activities which compromise children's ability to attend school, do homework as well as play.

Age: Given that older children are more likely to face pressures to be involved in labour activities and simultaneously need to cope with greater scholastic demands it seems imperative that incentives are provided to families to continue children's education and minimize their labour demands. In this regard, cash transfers to promote child schooling in higher grades rather than food-for-work programs, which typically involve children as well as parents, would be one possible solution. Developing employment training programs for secondary school students that would enhance future job and income prospects would also likely provide a positive incentive to households to continue to invest in their children's education. Similarly, the affirmative action programs for girls who complete grade 8 to have preferential access to employment opportunities in local government offices in some YL sites constitutes another good practice that should be scaled up.

Urban/rural divide: School attendance is significantly lower in rural compared to urban Young Lives sites, and drop-out rates dramatically higher in rural areas as highlighted in the table above. This indicates that child education and labour have different characteristics in rural and urban areas, suggesting the need for differential policy strategies. Part of the solution clearly necessitates improving school availability in rural areas. Although the quantitative findings were ambiguous, the qualitative findings showed that distance to school was an important factor in parental decisions to send their children to school, especially daughters. Steps should also be taken to develop more flexible school timetables and curricula to allow rural children to be absent during peak times in the agriculture calendar, which is when many children, especially boys, drop out either temporally or permanently.

In addition, given that for many impoverished families, children's involvement in labour activities will remain a reality in at least the short- to medium-term, it is important that child labour guidelines are developed to raise awareness about the potentially negative effects on child well-being. These include excessive working hours, dangerous conditions and poor payment for the different types of work in which children are commonly involved. Rather than outlining the conditions under which child work is "acceptable", the focus of these guidelines should be on gradually phasing out child work. Moreover, great care needs to be taken that the guidelines do not indirectly result in employers no longer offering employment to children and young people so that they are compelled to enter into less regulated and more exploitative forms of work. Instead the focus of such an initiative should be on raising local authorities' awareness of problems often associated with child work (inadequate time for study, adequate protection from abuse and injury, stigmatisation etc.). These guidelines would then need to be disseminated to local authorities, communities, households and children, and in the case of non-compliance, mechanisms established whereby children and sympathetic adults could report concerns.

**Maternal education**

Both our quantitative and qualitative findings found that maternal education levels significantly decrease child work whereas the impact of paternal education was insignificant. This finding held true for children in both male and female-headed households, and higher maternal education was also linked with fewer children having to combine school and work in female-headed households. This not only implies that children of educated mothers are more likely to attend school, but that maternal education has a more pronounced positive effect on child schooling when women can decide freely without male intervention. This suggests that women's empowerment has a significant positive relationship with human capital development. Educating girls today means more educated mothers, and in turn girls, tomorrow. In this regard, the Ethiopian Education Sector Development Plan (2002-05) has had a visible impact in promoting girls' education and such efforts should be continued and strengthened. However, given the strong links between female adult education and commitment to child schooling, investment in adult

literacy programs is also likely to have a far-reaching impact and create a virtuous circle of more educated mothers and girls over time.

| **Table 2: Gender Differences in Child Work by Type of Activity** | |
|---|---|
| **1. On-farm activities** | |
| Ploughing / Digging | Commonly boys |
| Weeding | Both boys and girls, especially older children (12 + years) |
| Harvesting | Both boys and girls, but more typically boys |
| Planting / Transplanting | Both boys and girls |
| Irrigation | Both boys and girls |
| Herding | Boys and girls but more boys as age increases |
| Folder collection | Boys |
| **2. Off-farm activities** | |
| Terracing | Both boys and girls |
| **3. Non-farm activities** | |
| Construction workers | Boys and sometimes girls |
| Mini-bus conductors | Commonly boys |
| Household maids | Commonly girls |
| Waiters, kitchen hands | Both girls and boys |
| Apprentices in garages/ workshops | Only boys |
| Brokering / Shoe shining / portering | More commonly boys |
| **4. Non-farm/ market-related** | |
| Loading goods on pack animals | Both boys and girls but commonly boys |
| Crushing stones for sale | Only boys |
| Collecting rock salt | Only boys |
| Collecting firewood/ dry cow dung | Both boys and girls, but more commonly girls |
| Street vending | Both sexes but commonly girls |
| Sex-related work | Both boys and girls, but more often girls |
| **5. Domestic work** | |
| Collecting fuelwood | Both boys and girls |
| Fetching water | Both boys and girls, but girls as boys grow older |
| House cleaning | Only girls |
| Cooking food | Only girls |
| Caring for siblings | Both boys and girls, but more often girls |

### Family composition

Our results also show that children are more likely to be involved in school only when there is adequate labour in the household: more children aged 7-17 years as well as more male adults generally decrease children's work burden. In other words, both the birth order effect and the labour substitution hypothesis were confirmed. This indicates that for many rural households engaged in labour-intensive agricultural

and petty trading activities, children are often needed to fill labour gaps. This has a particularly significant impact on child enrolment in female-headed households where children are less likely to attend school than in male-headed households (especially boys who need to compensate for the dearth of adult male agricultural labour power) and drop out rates in male-headed households. By promoting labour-intensive income-generating activities, the core pillar of Ethiopia's PRSP—Agricultural Development Led Industrialization (ADLI)—is reinforcing the traditional pattern of reliance on a large number of offspring. Moreover, given that young children of four or five years are already engaged in economic activities, it would seem that ADLI's assumption about a surplus of labour may not be realistic in all areas and that there is in fact inadequate adult labour to meet household demands. As discussed further below, if sufficient precautionary social risk management measures are not taken, the present policy of reducing poverty by intensifying agriculture and diversification through labour-using technologies will increase child labour.

**Wealth/ assets/ credit**

An inverted-U relationship between wealth and child work was found implying that only at high levels of wealth is child labour reduced in rural areas. Increased land ownership also reduces child labour and increases school enrolment, indicating that the wealth effect dominates the labour demand effect. However, ownership of livestock leads to an increase in child labour particularly in rural areas as children are needed to shepherd the animals. Similarly, although access to credit was generally positively correlated with child enrolment, our qualitative findings found that credit is often linked to the purchase of additional livestock, thereby exacerbating child labour demands. This suggests that poverty reduction premised on labour-intensive agriculture is more likely to increase child labour if conditions in the labour and credit markets are not improved. However, the negative income effects of reducing child labour and increasing child schooling could be offset if credit measures to facilitate labour transactions were taken. More specifically, significant progress towards achieving the MDG goal of universal education for all could be realized if long-term credit programs targeted specifically at covering educational expenses were introduced. In addition, credit for labour (as part of working capital) rather than start-up capital (e.g. livestock or machinery), would enable the poor to substitute hired labour for child labour. It will be important that these types of considerations are explicitly integrated into the implementation guidelines for the Household-level Food Security Programme recently introduced in Tigray and Amhara.

**Livelihood diversification**

While there is much to be said for promoting livelihood diversification in order to cushion the impact of economic shocks on the household and increase income-generating opportunities, the involvement of households in more diversified activities increases the demand for labour which is frequently met by involving children, particularly boys, in work. In order to address this negative spillover effect, labour-saving policy improvements should focus on modernizing farming and household technologies. This could include, for example, initiatives to improve access to water, increased usage of herbicides to reduce demand for weeding labour, introducing modern stoves that save energy and reduce the need for time-consuming fuel wood collection, and the introduction of simple farm technology such as better ploughs. Equally importantly, livestock-raising patterns need to be rationalized in order to reduce the demand for child involvement. Options include introducing indoor livestock farming, community-shared livestock herding where households pool resources to either care for livestock on a rotational basis or pay for hired adult labour to take care of animals, as well as community rather than household-level fodder production.

### Caregivers' work burden and social capital levels

Caregivers' productive and care work burden also has serious implications for children's involvement in school and work. As mothers' work burden increases, girls are commonly used to help with the roles that mothers typically take on, indicating that increased involvement of women in productive work activities is more detrimental to girls' than boys' use of time. While women's access to independent income may be positive in that they are more likely to invest that additional money in their children's education and general well-being than fathers, girls' time is still needed to help shoulder reproductive sphere responsibilities. Accordingly, a key policy concern should be how best to introduce new technologies that reduce women's domestic burden in order in turn to reduce girls' substitution in such work and facilitate their education. Moreover, if it is imperative for household survival and community development that all adults (male and females) are involved in income-generating schemes, it will be important for the government to consider subsidized community child-care arrangements or pre-school services to relieve older children of substituting for their mothers' care work. In addition, particularly in the case of female-headed households, the introduction of safety nets so that these women will not be compelled to rely on their sons to substitute for the labour of an adult male partner should be considered.

Young Lives findings do however indicate that caregivers' "social capital" levels may mitigate these impacts to some extent. That is, caregiver cognitive social capital[3] reduces child work and increases child schooling, and active citizenship[4] increases schooling relative to combined child work and schooling. This suggests that recent governmental efforts to mobilize communities to tackle low school enrolment and drop-out rates may be having a positive influence on community attitudes towards education. If this is the case, it should be continued, as long as related pressures to contribute financially or in kind to school expansion are not overly burdensome.

### Infrastructural development

Our qualitative research found that children are commonly involved in fetching water, firewood and dung both for household usage and for sale to supplement family income. Because of the dangers involved in children walking unaccompanied far from the house (potential exposure to violence and sexual abuse, wild animal attacks etc.), it is important for the government to focus resources on the development of fuel-saving mechanisms and/or the development of alternative energy sources. This would not only alleviate such pressures on children but would also be in the best interests of environmental protection, particularly as the country is facing rapid and widespread deforestation and soil erosion. Similarly, children's involvement in fuelwood and dung collection to earn money to supplement their education costs could be minimized by providing families with credit for education purposes as well as developing safer, alternative income-generating means for children in impoverished families who have no choice but to rely on child labour.

Other infrastructural improvements that would significantly reduce work burdens on children would be reducing the distance to water sources by constructing wells and piped water sources in all villages and developing better public transport systems to reduce children's involvement in preparing and taking pack animals on market trips. That is, while rapid road construction is being carried out, poor communities are unable to take full advantage of this development as affordable transport is still scarce. Better transport would also reduce the amount of time caregivers involved in petty trade would also need to be absent from home.

3 Cognitive social capital reflects the caregiver's perception of the local community in terms of trust, self-esteem, sense of belonging and perception of people's co-operation.

4 Citizenship refers to whether the caregiver has worked with others in the community to address a common issue.