

Child poverty, no one left behind, and the Global Goals

June 2018



- **The Millennium Development Goal period saw fewer children dying, fewer in extreme poverty, and more in school – but hundreds of millions of children worldwide still have their life chances severely restricted by poverty. International estimates now suggest half of poor people are children.**
- **Young Lives research confirms the multidimensional nature of child poverty and the many ways in which it limits children's potential.**
- **Child poverty requires research, programming and policy action. Young Lives has played an active part in the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty since its inception, and this has resulted in significant influence at an international level, including helping to get child poverty overtly recognised in the Sustainable Development Goals.**

Setting the scene

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have run their course, and their successes are clear: fewer children are dying, more are in school and fewer are in extreme poverty. But the fundamental reason for concern about children has not changed: poverty limits individual life chances and the collective human capital on which societies rely. Statistics indicate that, in 2013, 385 million children were still living in extreme monetary poverty; in fact, children comprise half of all extremely poor people and are at twice the risk of being poor as adults. Recent estimates made in May 2017 show a total of 689 million children as experiencing multidimensional poverty, meaning that their experience of deprivation is made up of many factors. 300 million of these children live in South Asia and 300 million in sub-Saharan Africa. The bottom line is clear: poverty has grave, long-term consequences for children and children are at greater risk of being poor.

With the ending of the MDGs, the challenge has shifted rather than been addressed. Extreme poverty has fallen but inequality has not; child mortality has fallen but stunted growth persists and child obesity is on the rise; and while school enrolment is at an all-time high, learning is often limited. Countries with expanding social policy systems

need evidence on how best to deal with these continuing problems, since these are the challenges that will determine achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the 15 years from 2015-2030. The age disaggregation built into the SDGs signals recognition of the extent and severity of child poverty and a concern that the problem is set to rise.

What does Young Lives research show?

Young Lives' stated aim in relation to child poverty is to create 'a strong evidence-base showing when and why differences emerge through the early life-course; with a framework of how policy can respond to inequality and poverty to equip policymakers and advocates looking for how to improve policies for poor children' (Theory of Change, 2015).

The Young Lives study is designed to oversample poor households and children. During the 15 years of the study they have, on the whole, seen rising living standards, despite ongoing risks, including the global financial crisis. There has been a pattern of generally rising living standards, with many families noticing improvements in their homes and

communities such as in access to sanitation, water and electricity. However, progress for Young Lives families has been uneven. Disadvantage still remains concentrated among the most marginalised children and inequalities are becoming entrenched. Our research reveals the multidimensional aspect of child poverty, and the way that multiple factors combine to reinforce the deprivation of poor children. Many of these strands are covered in specific case studies, each of which deal with issues closely related with child poverty: nutrition, access to good quality school education and access to early education provision, and the experience of violence, and gender issues (including factors such as child marriage).

The impact of Young Lives research

Understanding children's perspectives is essential in shaping policies, particularly for those seeking to deliver on the post-2015 agenda (the realisation of the SDGs). Young Lives has worked to promote the multi-dimensional nature of poverty, in particular through its active participation in the [Global Coalition to End Child Poverty](#), through which Young Lives is able to disseminate key messages about child poverty. Young Lives' role in the Coalition is to strengthen it as a platform and to contribute strong evidence on the drivers of poverty and the ways in which policy change can address this. Partnership in the Coalition has also resulted in ongoing work with Save the Children, the Overseas Development Institute and World Vision International on the impact of poverty on youth transitions.

The Global Coalition to End Child Poverty raises awareness about children living in poverty across the world. Its initial aim was to engage with debates about the SDGs as they developed; the Coalition particularly played a role in terms of the decision to include child poverty overtly in the SDGs (through arguing for the age disaggregation of poverty measures). This measure within the Goals will generate the first ever recognised child-poverty measure for application across countries, addressing a significant policy gap. Young Lives has been involved since the Coalition's inception, and this builds on previous engagement with SDG processes.

In 2012 Young Lives was commissioned by the World Bank to produce a background paper for the [World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development](#); the report drew on the paper to illustrate gendered effects of nutrition, income reversals and family aspirations. This and much other Young Lives research was summarised in a 2013 report, [What Inequality Means for Children](#), which was submitted to the UNICEF/UN Women consultation on inequalities, and used extensively in their report to the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Agenda. Aiming to simulate debate about children and inequalities in the run up to the 2015 discussions, Young Lives organised two expert round tables to debate these issues, organised with Save the Children and hosted by UNICEF UK in 2013. Young Lives analysis of inequalities was developed in a paper based on children's accounts of living in poverty, [Growing Up with the Promise of the MDGs: Children's Hopes for the Future of Development](#). This was published with Save the Children in 2013 and launched at the UN High-level Panel meeting in Bali. Young Lives

research was used by UNICEF for their contribution to the UN Secretary-General's Report on the Girl Child (2013) and contributed more broadly to consultations on the post-2015 agenda.

“The Young Lives publication on inequalities and children was one of the top five submissions to UNICEF's global thematic consultations on the SDGs. It meant that we were able to offer some solid evidence of the damage done to children by inequalities. It is a significant part of the process that helped the goal on inequalities come into being.”

Richard Morgan, Director, Child Poverty Global Initiative, Save the Children and former Head of Policy at UNICEF & Special Advisor on the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Young Lives is one of over 20 partners of the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty including UNICEF and Save the Children. The Coalition is now entering a new phase of providing regional and national tools that will support global and national action to alleviate poverty. Young Lives led for the Coalition on a policy positioning paper called 'Putting Children First', which outlines key building blocks for how countries can address child poverty and offers evidence and experience to support national discussion on the best policy options for children. This paper was published by the Coalition and is being used to encourage policy change to help overcome child poverty. Young Lives was part of the organising group for an international conference on child poverty in Ethiopia in October 2017, which brought together research on child poverty and policy makers in sub-Saharan Africa, and played an important part at the conference itself. Alongside numerous contributions to panel sessions, Jo Boyden gave a keynote on child poverty and longitudinal evidence, Alula Pankhurst gave a keynote on evidence into action and Paul Dornan chaired a keynote on marginalisation.

Young Lives has continued to engage with the Coalition, including through co-hosting a webinar on research findings in May 2018 and collaborating with Save the Children, as one of the organisations chairing the Coalition, in the production of a summative film of Young Lives findings.

“Young Lives carried out a piece of work on the impact of poverty on youth transitions. Part of Young Lives' analysis was published by Save the Children as a chapter entitled 'Building strong foundations for later livelihoods by addressing child poverty: evidence from Young Lives' in a book 'The Global Child Poverty challenge: In search of solutions' (published by Practical Action). Young Lives also presented to Save the Children's steering group for its Global Initiative on child poverty, and took part in a Save the Children/ Practical Action webinar following the publication of the book. Looking forward, Young Lives is agreed further collaboration, including film and webinars, with the Save the Children global initiative on child poverty which will aid dissemination of key messages. I co-convened with Young Lives the Adolescent Transitions policy briefing paper working group for the Global Coalition to End Child Poverty. Young Lives brought a depth of subject matter knowledge backed up by evidence from their research which greatly enhanced the quality of the paper. The collegial spirit and constructive collaboration between the agencies was in a large part down to the openness and professionalism of the Young Lives team.

They also have contributed to other significant papers and policy direction for the coalition, often taking on the lead drafting role. For World Vision, collaboration with Young Lives has helped to shape our own understanding and approach to working with adolescents. ”

Paul Stephenson, Senior Director Child Development and Rights Technical Cluster, Child Development and Programme Effectiveness, World Vision International