

RECIPES FOR IMPACT

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THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research



**Photo:** Tororo, Uganda: A boy giggles during a presentation on menstrual hygiene management at Agwait Primary School.  
**Credit:** Nyani Quarmyne/Panos.

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# FOREWORD

The language and the art of 'impact' is highly complex and shaped by widely differing contexts. Subsequently, capturing and communicating can be allusive and often hard to visualise or articulate.

Efforts to simplify 'impact' to make it easier to plan for, can miss the point entirely. In the context of social science, and its ability to influence meaningful social change, it is essential to embrace the diverse 'ingredients' that contribute to shaping the bigger picture.

The Impact Initiative programme recognises the complexities of the policy development process, and the multifaceted nature of social science impact. Indeed, it may be several years before the relevance of some work is fully recognised, or for changes to take place in bureaucratic, social, and economic systems.

In an attempt to highlight the overall impact of projects funded within the ESRC-FCDO Strategic Partnership, the Impact Initiative regularly publishes a series of impact stories. The series illustrates the breadth of the partnership, showcasing a rich source of development research evidence and impact.

The stories document a range of challenges that occurred during the research process, different approaches taken, and how barriers in achieving impact were overcome. Ultimately, they demonstrate how research is improving the lives of people around the world.

They provide 'easy access' to the impact of the project and insights to contributions to wider development issues. Despite their brevity, the relationship between the research activity and subsequent impact is not simplified nor exaggerated. The stories highlight context and key moments of change and understanding. They all provide links to further studies and background reading to add to their depth.

When it comes to writing an impact story, the following criteria should be met:

- The research has contributed to a deeper understanding of the issue in hand
- The research has contributed to a change in the knowledge, attitudes and/or practice of particular actors at local, national or international level
- The impact story can be supported with images, quotes and information from researcher.

Particular types of evidence include:

- Reference to the research in policy documents
- Reference to research by policymakers, e.g. Letters from Ministers or officials supporting the story being told
- Reference to research in practitioner guides
- National statistics that give indicative evidence to support the story
- Survey evidence from individuals who have benefited.

This 'recipe book' demonstrates a variety of unique and surprising ingredients for impact. We fully acknowledge that evidence comes in many forms, and impact can appear in so many ways. While this selection of stories only shows a snapshot of the impact of the research funded by the ESRC-FCDO Strategic Partnership, they all highlight the different 'recipes' for impact.

- Kelly Shephard

Head of Knowledge, Impact and Policy,  
Institute of Development Studies

The **ESRC-FCDO Strategic Partnership** is at the forefront of commissioning research with the specific aim of tying research with pathways to achieving impact. Through the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, the partnership aims to provide a robust conceptual and empirical basis for development, delivering economic and societal impact in developing countries.

ESRC define impact as "the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, of benefit to individuals, organisations and nations."

The Impact Initiative for international development research aims to increase the uptake and impact of research from these two research programmes.



Research jointly supported by the ESRC and FCDO



# KEY INGREDIENTS

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We think it is important to showcase how researchers and donors can create greater research awareness and impact. We have made impact storytelling easier by gathering observations and experiences and in doing so have identified some key ingredients.

Impact happens in many ways, and all the stories in the book demonstrate impact through at least one mode, as defined by the ESRC-FCDO guiding principles on uptake, impact and communication of research:

## CAPACITY BUILDING

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Building capacity of researchers and intermediaries to strengthen research uptake approaches



## CONCEPTUAL

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Changing ways of thinking, raising awareness and contributions to knowledge

## INSTRUMENTAL

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Impacts on policy and practice – a change in direction attributable to research



## NETWORKS AND CONNECTIVITY

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Building and strengthening networks, connecting up the supply of evidence with the demand for it.

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# BUILDING PEACE IN THE NEW OIL FRONTIERS OF NORTHERN KENYA



Since the discovery of oil five years ago in Northern Kenya, explorations have spread to more than 30 drilling and testing sites. This has brought foreign investment, and in turn, new work opportunities, corporate social investment in schools and health clinics, and options for personal enrichment through contracts and tenders. In an area long inhabited by pastoralists, this rapid development has created tensions, resistance, and conflict around both access to new opportunities and also the impacts on lives and livelihoods. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK and the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, Kenya, as well as a team of researchers from Turkana County in Kenya have worked closely with big businesses, advocacy organisations, and communities to understand and balance out the interests at play. They have enabled the different parties to navigate a peaceful and sensitive process and this will be key to informing future plans for oil development.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Oil exploration operations by London-based Tullow Oil and the Canadian firm Africa Oil have grown significantly in Turkana County, Northern Kenya since 2010, bringing significant foreign investment

with them – the greatest in Turkana County’s history. These explorations are set to continue, with the full development of the region’s oil fields estimated to require US\$2.9bn (Tullow Oil 2018).



Photo: At a new well pad just north of Lokichar, a rig is positioned to begin drilling. Credit: Sven Torfinn

In recent decades, many Turkana people have been pushed out of livestock-keeping, gravitating to Lokichar and other large towns in search of work and new beginnings. Still, pastoralism has remained the largest part of the area's economy. Inevitably, there were a number of concerns about the oil development, particularly around the environmental health impacts, the blocking of access to pastoralists' key resources, and the potential impacts on culture and heritage. The area itself has long been at the bottom of poverty indices in Kenya (Samoei *et al.* 2015). It has a history of marginalisation by governments, and concerns were raised as to how to ensure Turkana County's oil was developed in equitable and fair ways.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Researchers from IDS, the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, and Turkana communities were funded by the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research in 2014–17. Together they wanted to identify different local opinions and views on oil development and empower those involved to work peacefully with each other. They worked with a range of actors including local businesses, traditional leaders, young people, civil society, and county government to understand the impact of oil development and identify what the future holds in the area.

The researchers carried out interviews, a household survey, and focus groups using a range of participatory exercises with communities. They ran a number of group exercises which helped to map stakeholders, and enabled different groups and individuals to visualise and discuss situations and identify different interests. This approach was particularly useful in this setting as it created a clear picture of the region, the connections between the different actors, and relative levels of influence within the local political economy.

The findings showed that engaging the large and diverse network of local stakeholders opened up and allowed a very important dialogue to take place – contributing to a more meaningful and peaceful process than one where decisions are imposed by external oil companies or by national or local leaders.

## **THE IMPACT**

This research contributed to the understanding of both the different groups at play and their specific interests. Business leaders, advocacy groups, and local communities have used the findings to plan and work with each other for future oil development. Communities are now engaged with from the beginning of the process.

Sean McMurtry, Asset Protection Manager with Tullow Oil in Kenya, explained how the research helped the company consider and plan how to engage in a sensitive way with the community:

As with every complex environment, once you can achieve some clarity on the context, the real challenge comes with designing a robust and reactive strategy that can help navigate: the 'what' is achievable, it's the 'how' that tends to be the more difficult part. This research and associated maps/images can be particularly useful for leaders charged with designing and delivering an engagement strategy. And, with articulating that context and strategy to business leaders who may be more removed from the sharp end and have less insight.

Local and international advocacy groups in Kenya such as Saferworld and Friends of Lake Turkana have also used the findings to inform their advocacy and decision-making processes. In parallel, the research team brought the findings back to communities. This enabled them to clearly see how their voices could make a difference and demonstrated where the influence lies in the future of oil development.

## **FURTHER READING**

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**Large development investment and local peacebuilding in rural Africa: building and sustaining peace at the margins**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's **Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research**, led by Jeremy Lind, Institute of Development Studies (IDS).

# COMMUNITIES IMPROVE WATER MANAGEMENT IN BURKINA FASO



Globally, water scarcity and poor water quality have a major impact on food security and livelihoods. While there has been significant progress in the past decade, and over 90 per cent of the world's population now has access to clean drinking water, there is still a long way to go to reach the most marginalised and ensure that water is protected from degradation. The set-up of 'Innovation Platforms' in Burkina Faso around two small water reservoirs meant that diverse members of rural communities, agricultural agents, and NGOs could reconcile differences and manage their most precious resource in harmony.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Burkina Faso is one of the world's poorest countries, with a high dependence on agriculture for its economy. Natural disasters and adverse weather conditions mean that sustaining a livelihood in rural areas beyond a single season is difficult and often incredibly contentious.

In Boulgou, a province in the Centre-East region of Burkina Faso, 16 villages rely on two water reservoirs for their livelihoods. This is especially true in the dry season when there is little water. But with many people using it for different purposes, including herders, fishers and horticulturalists, conflicts and misunderstandings undermined the governance of the water.

Water Management Committees were set up by the state, including local and state actors such as village chiefs and deputies to oversee the management of the reservoirs. Yet in reality, the elder men farmers representing the local communities could not represent the views and lives of the whole community, including poor women, herders, and fishermen from a different ethnicity.

## **THE RESEARCH**

The ESRC-DFID-funded project 'Pathways out of poverty for Burkina Faso's reservoir-dependent communities' created *Innovation Platforms* (IPs) – spaces for face-to-face learning, exchange, and negotiation.



Cover photo: Youths watch over their cattle at a reservoir, often the last water point during the hottest and driest months of the year, Burkina Faso. Credit: Ollivier Girard/CIFOR/Flickr licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0



The project supported communities, state and non-state actors (NGOs) to participate in several meetings and discussions to enhance management of water and make it more equitable.

Communities came together during 2018 to discuss the problems and prioritise solutions around managing small water reservoirs. Participants worked within peer groups, i.e. elder men, younger men, women, and state and NGO actors, and then came together in plenary. This process showed many of the root causes for the drop in water quality and quantity and for tensions, which included the application of fertilisers by some, overfishing, and herders trampling farmers' crops when bringing their animals to drink.

Together they set out a clear action plan to create an inclusive community governance committee to manage the reservoir, to increase the height of the dykes and rehabilitate the reservoir channels, and to train the communities around a sustainable action plan.

## **THE IMPACT**

Women are now much more involved in the reservoir management process than they had been before. For example, as a mainstay of women's livelihoods, growing vegetables adjacent to the reservoir was very contentious as there was not enough land for everyone and residents were concerned that it caused a drop in the reservoir's water level. Despite the high stake that vegetable growers had in managing the reservoir, women were not included in discussions or in decision-making committees. Through the platforms, the importance of women's participation in reservoir management has been recognised, and they have created a sub-group to advise a new water users' committee.

It has also been recognised that young people have an important role to play to bring about change in the future. As a result of the project, young men have taken up roles as president and vice president in one of the committees. Furthermore, a Fishermen's Association has been created, and 2018 was the first year that the fishermen have respected 'fishing blackouts' and not used small meshed nets that capture immature fish. Herders are now using livestock corridors to avoid damaging farmers' crops.

The communities have also rallied and raised funds to realise some of the solutions that they have identified. For example, they hired professionals to unblock a main channel to improve flow into the reservoir and invited state water technicians to provide guidance throughout the process.

As a regional agricultural extension agent, Kyelem Richard, explained, 'There is a good collaboration with communities. We understand each other better and they are coming to me to involve me in their activities and ask for advice'. This is a change from communities viewing state actors as policing a situation to seeing them as a supportive voice.

In striving to achieve Goal 6 of the Sustainable Development Goals – Ensure access to water and sanitation for all – this project clearly recognises the need to 'support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management'.

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### **Pathways out of poverty for Burkina Faso's reservoir-dependent communities**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and included Bioversity International, SNV World, King's College London, and the University of Ouagadougou.

# ENDING THE FINANCIAL ENTRAPMENT OF STREET VENDORS IN COLOMBIA



In the global South, the informal economy provides over 50 per cent of urban employment. In Cali, Colombia, the absence of government intervention and financial programmes means that illegal moneylenders are used by workers in the informal economy to keep themselves afloat. Consequently, workers such as street vendors remain beholden to extortionate interest rates. Based on research by POLIS (Observatory of Public Policy) of Universidad ICESI and Cardiff University, the Mayor of Cali has incorporated a financial policy which aims to enable street vendors to borrow money quickly and reasonably, protecting them from turning to the *gota-gota* moneylenders and empowering them to build a sustainable livelihood.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Since the 1980s, Cali has been affected by drug trafficking, and a large number of people displaced by the armed conflict have settled in the city, increasing poverty and social tensions. Fifty-five per cent of Cali's population live in the most impoverished neighbourhoods and at least 50 per cent are estimated to work in the informal sector, many as street vendors.

Street vending requires liquidity daily in order to operate and the lack of access to financial institutions is one of the main drivers behind the widespread use of problematic moneylending (locally known as *gota-gota*). However, unlike elsewhere in the world, street vendors

in Cali on average earn a relatively high income (about USD440 per month). Despite this, because money is lent at predatory interest rates of over 240 per cent per annum, street vendors remain trapped in poverty with no viable alternative to finance their livelihoods. Street vendors are also extremely vulnerable as violence is commonly used to enforce payments.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Between 2016 and 2019, a research team led by Cardiff University collaborated with partners on the ESRC-DFID-funded project 'Economic Recovery in Post-Conflict Cities: The Role of the Urban Informal



Cover photo: A street vendor waiting to sell her ready-to-eat food. Credit: Abby Chung

Economy'. The research explored the role of the urban informal economy in poverty reduction and peacebuilding in post-conflict cities, and its scope was to provide livelihoods for the extreme poor and a platform for economic recovery.

In 2018, as part of this project, 527 street vendors operating within and around the mass transit system in Cali answered questionnaires as part of research to understand their financial practices. In addition, 70 semi-structured interviews were conducted with street vendors operating across the city. The findings revealed a lack of formal financial inclusion of street vendors. Ultimately, many of these vendors are caught in financial entrapment and very few of them have either an account or any kind of service with a formal financial institution. Many have had to borrow money from a *gota-gota* moneylender, and the monthly repayments account for around quarter of their monthly earnings.

### **THE IMPACT**

Getting the media involved has been pivotal to secure and retain local government attention. A public event, organised with POLIS (Observatory of Public Policy) of Universidad ICESI, the Chamber of Commerce, the mass transit system (MIO), the urban renovation office (EMRU), and the territorial programmes for social inclusion (TIOS), received front-page coverage in the major national newspaper *El País*. A press release was also circulated about the lack of financial inclusion and pay-day loans (*gota-gota*) in the informal sector. *El País* also published an opinion piece about one of the coercive measures that the government was implementing to regulate street vending in the city and the across country.

In partnership with the urban planning office, informal economy workers and vulnerable populations (e.g. displaced people, women, and minorities) working in the public space were invited to an open forum. This event was an opportunity for the research team to present and discuss their findings and, also, to gain insight to the participants' perspectives on government regulation and its laws relating to public space. Approximately 50 informal economy workers participated.

The city council formally asked the Secretary of Economic Development, Angélica Mayolo, to propose a financial inclusion programme for informal economy workers to be included in the formulation of public policy on economic development in the city. The municipal government Economic Development team adopted a programme called Gota-Ahorro, which was informed by the research findings and promoted by Bank W (formerly the Women's Bank). Bank W agreed

to launch a pilot and POLIS plans to evaluate the impact of the programme.

In September 2019, the city council approved the economic development policy for the next ten years. The policy includes a programme called 'Banco de Oportunidades' (Opportunities Bank), through which financial inclusion will be provided to informal economy workers. The next mayor, due to take office in January 2020, will be responsible for implementing the programme.

One of the most significant impacts of this research has been the promotion of dialogue between vendors and the municipal government. Alongside the data, this provides the basis for future development of inclusive financial services for street vendors in Cali.

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#### **Economic Recovery in Post-Conflict Cities: The Role of the Urban Informal Economy**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Principal Investigator Dr Alison Brown, Cardiff University, together with Dr Peter Mackie, Cardiff University. Dr Lina Maria Martínez Quintero, Universidad ICESI and POLIS, led the research in Colombia.

# ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN REBUILDING POST-TYPHOON YOLANDA IN THE PHILIPPINES



Communities are slowly being rebuilt after Super Typhoon Yolanda (also known as Typhoon Haiyan) struck the Visayas Islands in the Philippines in November 2013. The vulnerable, most affected communities face ongoing challenges to re-establish livelihoods, safe housing, access to water and electricity, and to rebuild roads and drainage. Aid agencies, active on the ground in the immediate aftermath, have since left the region, leaving national and local government, policymakers and affected communities to respond to the long-term legacy.

Researchers at the University of Nottingham, UK and Ningbo, China in partnership with the University of the Philippines, Diliman have worked closely with local communities to articulate the lessons from Typhoon Yolanda. Their recommendations for national and local policymakers and government officials, civil society groups, and foreign aid agencies involved in future disaster work show signs of adoption as agencies take on board the importance of engaging affected communities in recovery and rehabilitation plans.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Typhoon Yolanda brought death and devastation, leaving over four million people displaced and over a million homes destroyed. Progress to rebuild and resettle homeless inhabitants has been made since a new phase of recovery commenced from 2015. Large infrastructure projects have been undertaken, or are ongoing; and an extensive number of public and private relocation shelters have been erected. Many people who lost their homes have new ones. Local buildings – *barangay* halls (the *barangay* is the smallest political unit with elected officials), multipurpose buildings,

and schools – are complete; community areas, such as sports pitches, have been restored or re-established; and roads resurfaced.

However, for many vulnerable communities affected by the typhoon, recovery was so long in coming that people have rebuilt them in dangerous coastal areas. Some communities are resistant to being resettled away from danger zones as resettlement plans failed to engage them in the design or implementation, whilst newly constructed homes remain unoccupied because water and electricity are not yet in place. Some may be ready to promote tourism in Tacloban, presenting successful recovery and ‘resilient’ populations, but life remains difficult for many who have yet to be safely resettled, to establish sustainable livelihoods, or gain access to basic services and sanitation.

## **THE RESEARCH**

This research, which was funded by the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Alleviation Research in 2015–18, set out to explore the challenges that different stakeholders faced during the recovery and rebuilding process in the wake of Typhoon Yolanda, and to create solutions for future strategies responding to disaster.

The researchers carried out 200 interviews with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and government personnel; held 50 focus groups with local people to discuss their concerns about the rebuilding process; and conducted a documents review. The researchers also



**Photo:** Communities attempt to rebuild their lives amidst the debris left behind by Typhoon Yolanda. **Credit:** Dr Pauline Eadie, University of Nottingham 2018.

undertook three household surveys from 800 households in the province of Leyte: from Palo, Tanauan and Tacloban City. The surveys took place annually from 2015 to 2017. The resulting data provided information on aid received, recovery, community support, employment and livelihoods opportunities as well as insights into how different *barangays* are faring post-Yolanda.

A valuable picture has emerged of the challenges faced by different actors. Meanwhile connections have been identified between them, and further levels of influence within the recovery effort have been established. In November 2017, after presenting the research at international conferences, researchers shared the preliminary findings with a group of in-country stakeholders (including academics, civil society, aid agency representatives, and government officials). Recommendations were subsequently refined through feedback and comments.

The findings indicate that community rebuilding is more sustainable where communities are actively involved in schemes such as ‘sweat equity’, where beneficiaries donate their labour to the housing schemes that they will eventually occupy, and in the design and planning stages of their communities. However, the findings also revealed examples of lip service being paid to community involvement without it happening in a sustainable fashion. In order for sustainable rehabilitation to take place, more work needs to be done to engage the most vulnerable people within communities, such as women and own account (or self-employed) workers.

## **THE IMPACT**


Political sensibilities at the local level are important and rehabilitation work post-Yolanda is influenced by the pursuit of political survival at the local level, including at *barangay* level. In recognition of this context in November 2018, the University of the Philippines research team will lead a forum in Tacloban to present the research findings. Data from the household surveys for each *barangay* will be provided to local people who can see for themselves how each *barangay* is faring post-Yolanda. The team are also working with the university’s Center for Integrative and Development Studies to produce discussion papers and policy briefs (online and print) which draw on the project, to be disseminated in time for the fifth anniversary of Typhoon Yolanda.

This research has contributed to an awareness of NGOs – including foreign aid agencies, and some national and local policymakers and government officials – of the need to further engage local

communities in the rebuilding and rehabilitation of their communities. There is recognition that listening to, and involving, communities at the design, planning and implementation stages of post-disaster recovery is likely to result in better outcomes and longer-term sustainability. Furthermore, the programme has contributed to capacity-building impact with junior faculty and senior students of the University of the Philippines Visayas – Tacloban College, who helped in data gathering, being mentored in field work research, and writing research reports.

According to Robert Dazo, Project Manager, Typhoon Haiyan Response, World Vision, the recommendations are set to influence future project programming:



The actionable steps were very helpful to us and the community where we provide our strategic interventions... the needs of the community are highlighted and can guide our project programming. 

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### **Poverty Alleviation in the Wake of Typhoon Yolanda**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO’s **Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research**, led by Principal Investigator Dr Pauline Eadie, University of Nottingham.

# HELPING TO MAKE SAFE ABORTION A REALITY IN ZAMBIA



Zambia has one of the most liberal abortion laws in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in spite of this, unsafe abortion continues to contribute to high rates of maternal mortality. Stigma, poverty, conscientious objectors, and lack of knowledge all contribute to why many adolescent girls and women do not and cannot access safe abortions in Zambia. Through ground-breaking research led by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), political, media, and charitable organisations are now making changes to raise awareness and shape their frameworks to ensure women can take up their right to access safe abortion services.

## THE CHALLENGE

Under the Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1972, Zambian law asserts that women have the right to safe and legal abortion services. But very few people know about the law, or the services available, and there is still an enormous amount of stigma associated with abortion.

Worldwide, approximately 25 million unsafe abortions are carried out each year and death from unsafe abortion disproportionately affects women in Africa (WHO 2018). In Zambia, the government estimates that 30 per cent of maternal deaths are attributable to unsafe abortion.

## THE RESEARCH

The researchers wanted to understand the roles that the health system, poverty, and stigma can play in seeking abortion-related care in Zambia; estimate and compare the implications of safe abortion and post-abortion care for women and their households; and ultimately better understand how and why safe abortion services are not used more fully.

Based at a Zambian Government Health Facility in Lusaka, the researchers interviewed over 100 girls and women coming either for an abortion or for post-abortion care after an unsafe abortion. The research team worked closely with midwives to gain informed and considered consent from all the participants.



Photo: Medical abortion consultation in Zambia. Credit: Dr Ernestina Coast

In addition to the dangerous and often life-threatening impact of unsafe abortion, the research identified a significant public health cost. The first national estimates showed that treating the consequences of unsafe abortion costs the Zambian health system up to US\$0.4 million more than if the pregnancies had been terminated safely and legally.

The study found that younger and poorer women are more likely to have an unsafe abortion, even though the costs of unsafe abortion for individual women are 27 per cent higher than the costs associated with a safe abortion. It also revealed that women often have to make 'unofficial payments' to doctors for services that should be free.

'Luck' or 'chance' plays a primary role in determining whether a woman can have a safe and legal abortion. Quite often, where a woman feels she can disclose to someone that she is pregnant or if she knows someone in the health sector she may get the services she needs. Otherwise, women may not know these services exist, and if they need to hide their pregnancy or abortion they take great risks in order to terminate an unsustainable pregnancy.

Raising awareness of these services – targeting not just the general population, but also health professionals – is vital if the Zambian Government is to reap the rewards of their investment in the provision of safe and legal abortion services.

## **THE IMPACT**

The research team have been – and continue to be – proactive in engaging key people, organisations, and institutes to support progress to successfully implement and deliver safe and legal abortion services. Through working with government, media, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) actors, this research has gone beyond Zambia solely as a country study, and is shining a spotlight on the complex and challenging process of how to provide abortion care.

Media engagement has included the researchers being involved in training Zambian radio producers who work on programmes for young adults. In-country partners also gave interviews on BBC World News, and programmes on the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), commercial radio, and a radio station for young adults.

The Zambian lead for the project presented the findings to the Resident Doctors Association of Zambia (RDAZ) in 2015, during which he found that newly graduated doctors were unaware of the laws around abortion in Zambia. The guest of honour was the Deputy Minister of Health, who subsequently invited the partner to present at the Senior Management meeting of the Ministry of Health. The research has also been incorporated in the latest Standards and Guidelines for Comprehensive Abortion Care in Zambia.

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### **Pregnancy Termination Trajectories in Zambia: The Socio-Economic Costs**

The research was funded by the ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research. The study 'Pregnancy Termination Trajectories in Zambia' was carried out by Dr Ernestina Coast, Dr Tiziana Leone, Dr Emily Freeman, and Dr Eleanor Hukin (London School of Economics); Dr Bellington Vwalika (University Teaching Hospital, Zambia); Dr Bornwell Sikateyo (University of Zambia); Dr Susan Murray (Kings College London); and Dr Divya Parmar (City, University of London).

# IMPROVING ADULT LITERACY IN NIGER THROUGH MOBILE CALLS TO TEACHERS



In Niger, one of the poorest countries in the world, 85 per cent of adults are unable to read or write, even in local languages. Adult education programmes can be a route to improving adult literacy rates, but non-governmental organisation (NGO) and government schemes are characterised with low enrolment, high dropout, and poor teacher attendance. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Catholic Relief Services, the Sahel Group, and Tufts University, regular phone calls and motivational support were given to teachers to encourage and monitor attendance of adult education programmes between 2018 and 2019. The impact of this project directly led to improved reading and maths scores. Based on this evidence, the approach has been tested by the Ministry of Education in primary schools.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Despite significant investments of time and money by donors, governments, adult learners, and teachers, a majority of students who graduate from adult education programmes still struggle to reach a basic reading threshold, which is crucial for sustained learning.

For adults who have never attended school – or went to school but did not become fully literate – adult

education programmes offered by NGOs and the Ministry of Education can be their only chance to learn. But such programmes can be costly. They require a significant time investment – typically three hours per day, five days per week – for the already very busy adult learners.

In addition, in sub-Saharan Africa teacher absenteeism in adult education programmes can be a major problem, particularly in remote rural areas. In prior



Photo: Women of Takalafiya-Lapai village. Credit: World Bank Photo Collection/Flickr under license CC BY-NC-ND 2.0



work in Niger, adult education teachers typically missed one in three classes in a week. This may not be surprising, given that they work long hours, for low pay, in difficult conditions, and with little interaction, feedback, or encouragement from the Ministry or NGOs.

The evidence on the effectiveness of adult education programmes globally is very limited, and there is still considerable debate about how to improve adult learning in a cost-effective way. However, the widespread growth of mobile phone technology in remote rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa offers new opportunities to deliver adult education programmes.

## **THE RESEARCH**

In the ESRC-FCDO-funded project 'Technology, Monitoring and Teacher Support in Niger', researchers used a randomised controlled trial to better understand how mobile phone technology could affect teachers' and adult learners' behaviour in an adult education programme implemented by the Ministry and an international NGO. The Sahel Group, an NGO, was engaged as a research partner.

Across two years, in 134 villages in two regions (Maradi and Zinder), the Sahel Group phoned teachers, students, and the village chief in half of the villages once a week and asked whether and for how long the classes were held. In the other villages, the classes were held as normal.

This simple approach of consistent mobile phone calls to students, teachers, and village leaders corresponded with an improvement across learning, teaching, and student behaviour in the villages that the Sahel Group contacted. Reading and maths scores improved by 12–15 per cent and the students that were phoned were also less likely to drop out of the programme and to sustain their learning. This was coupled with increased teacher attendance. The teachers who were phoned proved to be more likely to pass the Ministry's performance exam. Teachers understood that their work was being supervised, felt more valued, and therefore were more motivated.

As such, not only did the intervention improve learning outcomes for the adults involved in the programme – as measured by reading and maths tests – also it seems to have positively affected teachers' classroom preparation and effort. The cost-effective nature of the intervention means it could be replicated and scaled up in many different contexts.

## **THE IMPACT**

Based on the evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention involving regular phone calls to teachers and adult students, the Nigerien Ministry of Education agreed to test out the approach in its primary schools. As in the adult education study, the Ministry implemented phone calls to teachers, the village chief, and parents. Yahaya Issa Brah, Pedagogical Advisor for the Ministry, said: 'The [Ministry's] pedagogical trainers also had more opportunities to supervise teachers' practices and monitor student learning. In summary, the behaviours and practices of all of the stakeholders changed favourably, thereby contributing to the better functioning of classes and, as a result, improving student learning.'

At an event for the ESRC-FCDO Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research programme, representatives from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) also expressed interest that a similar scheme may work in Sierra Leone. This research has been applauded by the FCDO Chief Economist, Rachel Glennerster: 'What I love about Aker's [the author] work is it provides innovative, practical, scalable solutions to tough probs [sic] while helping us better understand the region. Adult literacy through cell phones, storage bags to prevent rotting cow peas [and] prevent farmers having to sell when prices are low.'

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### **Technology, Monitoring and Teacher Support in Niger**

The research project was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research. It was led by Tufts University in partnership with the Ministry of Education (Niger), Catholic Relief Services, and Sahel Group.

# IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN RURAL BANGLADESH



Only 40 per cent of children in Bangladesh are enrolled in pre-primary education, with this figure estimated to be much lower in rural areas. Research led by Monash University, Australia, and supported by local partner the Global Development and Research Initiative (GDRI) Foundation, has evaluated whether introducing pre-schooling in remote rural communities in Bangladesh can help prepare children for primary school. By developing a set of policy interventions designed to improve children's educational outcomes, the research demonstrates how early childhood programmes could be effectively adapted for implementation at scale, using locally available resources and infrastructure.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Over the last decade, Bangladesh has made significant progress in expanding access to education, achieving near-universal primary school enrolment. However, more than half the children who complete primary education are unable to read, write or count to the expected level.

Although evidence has shown that early childhood education can improve school readiness by supporting children's language, literacy and numeracy skills, there is a notable lack of research on the impacts of investing in

low-cost early childhood and parenting programmes in low-income and lower-middle-income countries.

In Bangladesh, many parents, particularly those from rural areas, are unable either to send their child to pre-school or to support his/her development adequately at home. Innovative research from the ESRC-DFID study '[Investing in our future: the early childhood intervention and parental involvement in Bangladesh](#)' is making a valuable contribution to our understanding of low-cost pre-schooling in remote rural areas.



Photo: A young girl reads with her Early Primary Education (EPE) teacher in Bangladesh. Credit: GMB Akash/Panos Pictures.

## THE RESEARCH

By combining elements from existing early childhood programmes, the researchers designed two low-cost interventions aimed at improving the school readiness of children in remote rural communities in Bangladesh.

The first intervention was a formal pre-school programme that provided early education to children for five days a week. Children were taught in groups of 15 by specially trained, locally recruited staff. The curriculum focused on developing cognitive, social and emotional abilities by developing language, basic numeracy, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The second intervention comprised a weekly home visit by teachers to caregivers to help enhance the learning environment within the home. These visits reflected the curriculum provided in the formal pre-school setting. Through the home visits, it was hoped that parents' attitudes and behaviour towards the development of their children, and their knowledge about it, would be optimised.

With the support of the GDRI Foundation, the interventions were carried out in 223 randomly selected rural villages in two districts (Khulna and Satkhira). Over two years, 7,000 children were assessed at the beginning of the programme, after one year, and at the end. As well as analysing the two separate interventions, the team also assessed the effectiveness of combining the pre-school programme with the home visits.

The results shed light on how effective traditional, formal pre-school settings were compared with a programme which nurtured at-home development. The evidence showed that although the home visits yielded positive results in the short-term, particularly regarding children's reading and verbal communication, traditional pre-school settings were associated with higher cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, including literacy, numeracy, gross and fine motor skills, communication and problem-solving skills. Pre-schools were also more cost-effective.

According to survey results, parents felt more satisfied when their children were in nursery, and the findings indicated that children benefited from interaction with other children. One parent remarked:

“ [In the nursery], my child learns new things every day – how to talk, queue up and respect others. At home, we can't teach these things. ”

The research has made an important contribution to the understanding of low-cost pre-school education in remote rural areas, by demonstrating that interventions that involve helping parents support their children's learning cannot replace the traditional nursery-like set-up of a formal programme.

## THE IMPACT

In Bangladesh, the research team established a national advisory committee consisting of early childhood experts, NGOs, government representatives and local researchers, to discuss how early childhood programmes can be effectively adapted for implementation at-scale in poor, rural areas.

One mother reported on the impact of the early years' provision:

“ Parent-teacher meetings in the early years nursery school were very helpful. We got to know a lot about our child. We have never seen this kind of early years' initiative. ”

Drawing on the tools they used to assess the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities of children, the research team are collaborating with BRAC to help traumatised Rohingya child refugees, to evaluate a play-based early childhood development programme. The team has provided support for curriculum development and helped build capacity by training Bangladeshi planners and researchers in the area of early childhood development, and enhancing their skills in the research methodology and analytical techniques of Random Control Trials used in the original research. As a result of this collaboration, the team are also working with BRAC international in Uganda and Tanzania on pre-school interventions using play-based curriculum.

Looking ahead, the team plan to conduct a follow-up study on the medium to longer-term effects of such interventions by assessing the children to understand what happens to them in primary school and whether the benefits (such as reading and writing ability) last longer than similar skills acquired by children who didn't access any form of pre-schooling.

## FURTHER READING

[Bangladeshi Sangbad Sangstha \(2019\) 'Workshop on early childhood intervention held', \(3 December\) \(accessed July 2020\)](#)



### **Investing in our future: the early childhood intervention and parental involvement in Bangladesh**

The research team was funded by the ESRC-FCDO Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme led by Asadul Islam, Monash University, Australia. The research was carried out in partnership with John List (University of Chicago), Anya Samek (University of Southern California), Steven Stillman (Free University of Bozen-Bolzano), Ummul Ruthbah (University of Dhaka), the Global Development and Research Initiative (GDRI) and BRAC.

# IMPROVING LITERACY THROUGH INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN SOUTH AFRICA



To better understand early grade reading in African languages, a multi-disciplinary team of researchers from Stellenbosch University, the University of Cape Town, the University of South Africa and Funda Wandu, together with the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa, are working towards a deeper understanding of higher reading gains in English and three African languages.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

In South African primary schools, more than three quarters of nine to ten year-olds fail to reach the expected benchmarks in reading. Despite the high proportion of children learning to read in their mother tongue, there is little research on African language reading. This research is contributing to the development of national reading benchmarks in indigenous languages, leading to deeper understanding of how proficiency in African languages can contribute to improved literacy.

## **THE RESEARCH**

The 'Leadership for Literacy' project was a two-year (2016–18) mixed-method study that used a combination of case study research and longitudinal data from 60 schools. It aimed to understand the development of early reading skills and how these

enable comprehension, what factors underpin success, and how it is similar or different across languages.

Specifically, the team looked at the factors associated with higher reading gains in English and three common African languages (isiZulu, Northern Sotho and Xitsonga) of 756 grade 3 students and 656 grade 6 students in outstanding and low-performing township and rural schools in the provinces of Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo.

The team found that many of the children were not reaching basic levels of reading proficiency. Despite poor reading outcomes, the study showed that instruction in the teaching of reading generally received little attention from leadership and managers; was under-prioritised in professional development; and teachers were unaware of how



Photo: South Africa. Children reading in class. Credit: Chris Sattlberger/Panos Pictures.

poorly children could read. Using these results, the team was able to establish tentative benchmarks in the three South African languages.

It was clear that grade 3 children were not reaching well-established norms regarding English: by the end of the academic year, half of the study sample were reading less than 34 words correct per minute (WCPM). By comparison, children in the USA are expected to read 110 WCPM by the end of grade 3. However, these English benchmarks could not be used for African languages because the language structures are very different. Instead, learner scores on the comprehension questions associated with African language texts were used to develop benchmarks for each of the languages. According to the relevant benchmarks, it was found that less than 9 per cent of the Northern Sotho sample and less than 39 per cent of the isiZulu sample were reading at the basic reading level. More work is needed to validate the accuracy of the benchmarks, and to expand to other grades and languages.

## **THE IMPACT**

Together with earlier work undertaken by the team, the research has contributed to an increased focus at a national level on working towards benchmarks and incremental early learning targets for improvement.

On 20 June 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa included reading for meaning in the early grades as one of the five strategic areas for South Africa to focus on in his State of the Nation Address:



Let us agree, as a nation and as a people united in our aspirations, that within the next ten years we will have made progress in tackling poverty, inequality and unemployment, where... our schools will have better educational outcomes and every ten-year-old will be able to read for meaning.

This goal was adopted partly in response to priority policy recommendations submitted by the project team, which profiled the importance of addressing reading in schools. In an earlier study, the team synthesised a large body of evidence on the binding constraints to education improvement, and the findings were presented to President Ramaphosa, highlighting that reading for meaning should become a clear priority goal for South Africa. Furthermore, the team consulted on 'The Early Grade Reading Study', led by the DBE in South Africa and funded by USAID, which further strengthened the call to scale up teacher coaching in African language reading instruction to improve reading outcomes.

Further building on the body of work, the DBE has initiated collaborations across academia, funders, and organisations (such as UNICEF, Zenex Foundation, and USAID) to develop norms and benchmarks in different

African languages using existing data sets while planning for larger data collection processes to further aid this process. This comes at a time when 'reading for meaning' (a strategy to help children understand – and care – about what they read) is being profiled as a national priority for the first time in post-apartheid South Africa.

Nompumelelo Mohohlwane, Deputy Director for Research, Monitoring and Evaluation at the DBE said:



In the absence of established reading benchmarks in the African languages, it is very difficult for the education system to identify learners at risk for reading failure during the foundation phase. It is also very difficult to set clearly articulated, realistic expectations for teachers to know the reading levels learners should attain by the end of each grade. This research is helping the Department of Basic Education initiate efforts to develop reading benchmarks in collaboration with a broad range of partners and funders.

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### **Succeeding Against the Odds: Understanding Resilience and Exceptionalism in High-Functioning Township and Rural Primary Schools in South Africa**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, led by Principal Investigator Professor Servaas Van Der Berg, Stellenbosch University (SU), together with Gabrielle Wills (SU), Nic Spaull (SU, Funda Wandé), Nick Taylor (JET Education Services), Ursula Hoadley and Jaamia Galant (both University of Cape Town), Nompumelelo Mohohlwane (Department of Basic Education), David Carel (SU), Elizabeth Pretorius (University of South Africa), and Francine De Clerq (University of Witwatersrand).

# IMPROVING RURAL LIVES THROUGH THE LIBERIAN MOTORBIKE BOOM



Parallel to the mobile phone revolution in Africa is the lesser talked about motorbike boom. Motorbike taxis have changed the face of transport and provided employment opportunities, particularly in rural parts, in many African countries. In regions previously affected by conflict, such as Liberia, the transport sector has been a lifeline, not only providing jobs for ex-combatants but also providing much needed access to health care, schools, and markets.<sup>1</sup>

Researchers based at Swansea University recognised the benefits of this transport and looked for ways to support it. Following the Ebola crisis of 2014–15, they recognised that transforming footpaths to tracks provided a simple and affordable way to open up rural areas for motorbikes, and potentially change the lives of remote and rural communities in Liberia. Still in its early stages, this ESRC-DFID-funded project has influenced a World Bank Transport Systems consultant to push for the inclusion of this approach in Liberia's draft National Roadmap, and other donors are interested in funding similar initiatives.

## THE CHALLENGE

A study in neighbouring Sierra Leone found that 65–95 per cent of passenger and freight transport takes place by motorbike taxis<sup>2</sup> and in Liberia motorbikes are likely to have a similar share in the public transport market. But because of this taxi revolution, existing research on rural transport has quickly become outdated.

Donors often invest in 'conventional' road construction. Depending on terrain and construction standards the cost to improve 1km of a standard road can vary greatly, ranging from US\$50,000 to US\$200,000. Limited budgets mean standard roads are unlikely to reach marginalised rural communities, denying people motorised access to services they need.

## THE RESEARCH

Dr Krijn Peters from Swansea University and Independent Consultant Jim Clarke were already aware of the taxi boom. They wanted to see whether improvements to the tracks significantly changed the lives of rural communities in three villages in Liberia. The Ebola epidemic in West Africa demonstrated the challenges of providing health-care services to rural communities during a crisis, and appeared to support the theory that upgrading footpaths for motorbikes could significantly improve development outcomes.



Photo: [Motorcycle Taxi](#). Credit: [Erik \(Hash\) Hersman/Flickr](#) [1] licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#)

1. Jenkins, J. and Peters, K. (2016) 'Rural Connectivity in Africa: Motorcycle Track Construction', *Transport* 169: TR6.

2. Mustapha, A.; Peters, K. and Tunis, N. (forthcoming, 2018) *Rural Transport Diagnostic Study in Sierra Leone*, Final Report SLE2108A, Research for Community Access Partnership (ReCAP).

The researchers knew that upgrading the footpaths in this way was relatively cheap, but without hard data on impact, relevant state actors and international donors were reluctant to allocate funds. At the heart of their three-year research project they asked whether track upgrades could be a low-cost intervention to compliment, or even be an alternative to, relatively expensive feeder road construction.

Led by Krijn, with AKA Research in Sierra Leone and Lofa Integrated Development Association (LIDA) in Liberia, the qualitative study took place in 2015, in three Liberian villages. Specifically, the researchers wanted to understand the impact that motorbike-navigable track building has on lifting farmers, and other members of the community, out of poverty. They also wanted to document the process and issues arising from community involvement in the decision-making and construction process.

## THE IMPACT

The impact assessment is due in 2018, but the findings are already looking promising. The researchers have seen that upgrading footpaths has reduced the travelling time to markets and health facilities from a 1–3-hour walk to a short taxi ride. It also makes it easier to transport crops to markets, and secure vital income. The construction and maintenance of these tracks has used local labour and materials – providing much-needed employment to communities.

The potential to expand this idea across Africa demonstrates value for money to funders and major donors and governments, including the Department for International Development (DFID), German Development Agency (GIZ), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and the Sierra Leonean government; many of which have indicated an interest in taking this idea forward in their own plans and processes.

According to World Bank Transport Systems consultant Paul Starkey, this research is set to influence the policies and actions of governments and donors alike:



There is great potential for the emulation of such policies and practices in numerous countries in sub-Saharan Africa so that many more villages can be served for the first time by motorised transport services, thus positively affecting the lives of hundreds of millions of people



Paul Starkey, World Bank Transport Systems

However, this issue isn't so straightforward. Many governments in West Africa are hostile to motorbike road users as drivers are perceived to be rule breakers, making it challenging to regulate and prevent road accidents. Motorbike use was banned across Ghana in 2012, and in the capital city of Liberia, Monrovia, in 2013. However, in 2016, Krijn was invited to be a Technical Advisor to a Research for Community Access Partnership (ReCAP)/DFID-funded rural transport diagnostic study in Ghana. The subsequent recommendations are to change the universal ban on motorbike taxis in Ghana and allow them in rural areas, and this is currently with the legislators. This demonstrates the potential for this project to grow to other communities and countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

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### **At the end of the feeder road: assessing the impact of track construction for motorbike taxis on agrarian development in Liberia**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Dr Krijn Peters, Swansea University.

# INVESTIGATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAW IN CAMBODIA



Legislation seeking to address violence against women has grown in recent years – at least 144 countries now have laws on domestic violence (DV). However, many women are still prevented or deterred from accessing justice. The ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research on DV law in Cambodia not only contributed to greater understanding of the limitations of the legislation but was also used as evidence in a law court. The Principal Investigator (PI) acting as expert witness was a significant factor in preventing a domestic abuse survivor living in the United States from deportation to Cambodia where she feared being harmed. The research provided the grounds for relief from deportation through the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (UNCAT).

## THE CHALLENGE

In Cambodia, the legislative framework includes the 2005 Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Protection of the Victims and the 2nd National Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women (NAPVAW) 2014–2018. NAPVAW aims to

‘advance Cambodia from awareness-raising to a more comprehensive and coordinated approach targeting positive changes.’ Despite high levels of public awareness about the legislation’s existence, the rights it accords are not well known. Women are commonly not in a good position to take up the legislation or may seek legal advice only to change their minds later in the process due to the safety and financial dangers involved.

## THE RESEARCH

From 2012 to 2015, researchers from Royal Holloway, University of London; Western University, Phnom Penh; and Gender and Development for Cambodia (GADC) examined the gap between Cambodia’s DV law and its practice. The study was carried out with rural and urban households in two provinces in Cambodia – Siem Reap and Pursat. The team adopted a mixed method approach to explore experiences of, and attitudes to, domestic violence, DV law, and gender roles and attitudes. As part of the quantitative household survey, 1,177 men and women were surveyed. Some 120 interviews were conducted with women survivors of DV, ‘lay’ men and women, and others involved in implementing the law such as judges, lawyers and police.

The research identified women’s economic dependence on spouses as a primary factor for women choosing not to pursue legal action or for dropping an existing case, since a jail sentence for the perpetrator results in hardship for the whole family.

The findings also highlighted the inadequacy of financial and human resources to support legal training on implementation and enforcement of DV law, together with confusion over women’s rights, as the environment is such that women are actively



Cover photo: Commune poster building awareness about domestic violence in Cambodia. Credit: © Katherine Brickell 2019



discouraged from seeking justice. Since the 2005 legislation lacks clear penalties and definitions of mediation processes, survivors of DV were being offered ad hoc measures or makeshift arrangements to resolve legal cases. Cultural ideals of community and household harmony – written into the 2005 law – work against women’s best interests. In some cases, women were persuaded to ‘reconcile’ with perpetrators, allowing for a continued cycle of DV.

## **THE IMPACT**

The research has strengthened awareness of the barriers that women face in accessing justice in DV cases. The project report recommended systematic policy changes in Cambodia including revisions to the 2005 law, and improvements to DV law training particularly at village level.

National and global take-up of the research has included findings communicated by *Cambodia Daily*, *Phnom Penh Post*, *the Guardian*, *Huffington Post*, *Radio Free Asia*, and *Radio France International*. UN Women commissioned a background paper to inform their flagship report *Progress of the World’s Women* (2014). DFID featured the research in its 2016 Guidance Note and in evidence digests. UK Parliamentary Select Committees published the research in 2013 and 2016. The findings were also raised with the Cambodian National Council for Women and the Cambodian Ministry of Women’s Affairs. A representative of UN Women in Cambodia confirmed the research ‘effectively highlights to UN Women that the challenges of domestic violence reduction are wide-ranging and a plurality of gaps require systematic policy attention’.

The research has also had significant transnational impact. In 2017, the PI acted as an expert witness in deportation proceedings for a female DV survivor living in the US. Born in a refugee camp in Thailand, the woman entered the US as a child refugee and, although a Cambodian citizen, she had never lived in Cambodia. In 2003, in spite of psychologists’ reports providing evidence that she was experiencing battered woman syndrome, and having endured emotional, sexual and physical abuse for some time before the proceedings began, she was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment for her role in a fatal shooting perpetrated by her abuser. On being granted parole in 2017, she then faced deportation by the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency. Even though her abuser was in prison in the US, his family connections in Asia led her to fear for her safety

in the event of deportation to Cambodia since he, and his family, blamed her for his incarceration. Asian Americans Advancing Justice – Asian Law Caucus (hereon referred to as Advancing Justice – ALC), San Francisco, which represented the survivor, prepared a case under UNCAT (the Convention against Torture) to defer the deportation. It called the PI as an expert witness, and eventually the deportation was deferred.

Advancing Justice – ALC later wrote that the ESRC-DFID research ‘provided a significant evidence base for the case we put forward’. When an appeal failed to overturn the judge’s decision, the caucus wrote again confirming that the research ‘had made an enormous difference on what was one of the hardest parts of the claim’.

For the survivor herself, the impact of the research evidence has been life changing.



... I am so grateful... to have gotten you on board and to help make my freedom all the more permanent here... each and every one of you played a vital role in my freedom.

(Extract from survivor’s letter to the PI).

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### **Lay and Institutional Knowledges of Domestic Violence Law: Towards Active Citizenship in Rural and Urban Cambodia**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO’s Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Professor Katherine Brickell, Royal Holloway, University of London.

# KEEPING AFRICAN GIRLS IN SCHOOL WITH BETTER SANITARY CARE



For young girls in developing countries, not knowing how to manage their periods can hinder access to education. Research from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London demonstrates that in rural Uganda, providing free sanitary products and lessons about puberty to girls may increase their attendance at school.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

In many poor communities, menstruation is still often seen as an embarrassing, shameful, and dirty process. Such taboos around the topic mean many adolescent girls are often unprepared for their periods and how to manage them. Less than half of girls in lower- and middle-income countries have access to basics such as sanitary towels or tampons, soap and water, or facilities to change, clean, or dispose of hygiene products.

In Uganda, only 22 per cent of girls are enrolled in secondary schools compared with 91 per cent in primary schools, with those living in rural areas being the least likely group to go to school. Researchers believe that the cost of hygiene products and the difficulties in managing periods play a key role in keeping girls out of school.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Over 24 months, a trial was conducted in partnership with Plan International Uganda across eight schools, involving 1,008 girls, in Uganda's Kamuli District, an area that had been observed as having low learning levels as well as gender disparity in health and education.

The research tested whether school attendance improved when girls were given (a) reusable sanitary pads, (b) adolescent reproductive health education, (c) neither, or (d) a combination of both. Girls were provided with AFRIpads, a washable, reusable cloth pad produced in Uganda, and locally trained community health nurses held sessions that covered changes which occur during puberty, menstruation, and early pregnancy, and on the prevention of HIV.

Researchers found that better sanitary care and reproductive health education for poor schoolgirls, delivered over two years, did appear to improve attendance. On average, girls increased their attendance by 17 per cent, which equates to 3.4 days out of every 20 days.



Many girls don't know about periods before they encounter their first one. They are totally unprepared because they receive no information or training on how to manage them. Simple interventions like these can have major long-term economic implications for women in low- and middle-income countries.

Catherine Dolan, SOAS, University of London



**Photo:** Uganda, Kitengeesa. A worker trims and stacks sanitary pads before they are lined and sewn at the AFRIpads factory. Started by volunteers in 2009, AFRIpads manufactures reusable fibre sanitary pads. **Credit:** Nyani Quarmyne/Panos.

## THE IMPACT

The research project has significantly strengthened awareness that sanitary pad provision and puberty education are both vital in improving attendance. Even in the absence of resources to provide sanitary pads, the research recommends that inclusion of adequate and gender-sensitive puberty education in the school curriculum can improve attendance.

Organisations such as UNICEF and the NGO CARE have used the evidence to identify solutions to barriers to girls' schooling associated with puberty.



These findings will make an important contribution to CARE's efforts to fight poverty by removing the barriers that keep girls out of school. All over civil society, in fact, bigger funding will now be available for large-scale rollouts because of the hard evidence provided by the study in Uganda.

Joan Garvey Lundgren, Executive Director, Strategic Partnerships, CARE USA

The project collaborated with Save the Children, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), WaterAid, and AFRIPads to lobby for menstrual hygiene management to be included as an indicator in post-2015 sustainability goals. Further collaborations building on the evidence have included working with Save the Children on how to link the distribution of sanitary care to their West African programmes, and with UNESCO on effective programming in puberty education and menstrual hygiene management.

Ghana's Deputy Minister of Education referenced the research when defending the decision to allocate part of the country's 2014 World Bank loan to providing sanitary pads for female students in need. Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa stated that when adolescent girls are unable to take proper care of themselves during the menstruation period, it affects their confidence, which eventually keeps them out of school.

The research team continues to use the results as part of a push to promote female hygiene onto the global development agenda. The findings featured in preparatory documents for the World Health Organization (WHO)/ UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme indicators for menstrual hygiene management, and have been cited in the UNESCO *Puberty Education & Menstrual Hygiene Management* report, which aims to promote sexuality education as part of skills-based health education for young people.

The impact of the research has the potential for addressing psychosocial wellbeing, dignity, comfort, and ability to manage menstruation without shame, which are all essential for girls responding to the challenges presented by menstruation in low-income contexts.



Studies such as this are too few and far between. They are critical to give context to the impact of hygiene and sanitation during puberty, which in turn helps us work towards solutions to improve girls' life chances.

Brooke Yamakoshi, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Specialist (Sanitation and Hygiene), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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**Menstruation and the Cycle of Poverty: Does the provision of sanitary pads improve the attendance and educational outcomes of girls in school?**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's **Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research**, led by Catherine Dolan, SOAS, University of London; Paul Montgomery, University of Birmingham; and Linda Scott, Chatham House. The research was carried out in partnership with Plan International Uganda, with the assistance of Julie Hennegan, Johns Hopkins University; Maryalice Wu, University of Illinois; and Laurel Steinfeld, Bentley University.

# MARGINALISED YOUTH INFORMING POLICY AND PRACTICE IN ETHIOPIA AND NEPAL



Across the globe, many young people come of age in circumstances marked by poverty, environmental fragility, and political volatility. Increasingly, NGOs, policymakers, and academics are realising the importance of considering how this level of uncertainty forms the next generation of adults. Research enabled by the [ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research](#) demonstrates how marginalised youth in Ethiopia and Nepal can get their voices heard in policy and practice. In contexts of environmental fragility and political change, ministries and governmental organisations have worked with the YOUR World team to influence community, national, and international discourses on childhood, youth, and uncertainty and to develop more inclusive regional and national youth policies.

## THE CHALLENGE

The research aims to address youth understandings of uncertainty, violence, poverty, and rights in post-conflict and fragile environments, to provide insights into how to support and sustain pathways out of poverty for street-connected and marginalised youth. These young people have been left out or discriminated against because of gender, sexuality, caste, ethnicity, religion, poverty, abusive situations within families, negative school experiences, or due to fragile environments or conflicts amongst communities. They have not been heard in decision-making and policy formulation, and face limited employment opportunities. Many are working in the informal sector, their small businesses and hard labour at best not supported; at worst illegal. Some want to leave the country in search of new, more hopeful futures.



**Cover photo:** Youth analysing how they navigate uncertainty in the earthquake affected hills of Nepal.

**Credit:** Shubhendra Man Shrestha, 2018.

## THE RESEARCH

YOUR World Research is a collaboration between universities and civil society organisations.

The research, conducted from 2016 to early 2019, used qualitative case study interviews and engaging, participatory visual and moving methods: mapping, rivers of life, photo narrative, network and support diagrams. The methodology was co-constructed in Ethiopia and Nepal with marginalised young people.

In each country, YOUR World worked with around 500 youth, conducting detailed, focused case studies with 250 marginalised young people across four research sites. From drought- and earthquake-prone sites, to small towns and capital cities the team collected qualitative comparative data alongside participatory research to illuminate the realities of young lives.

In both countries, the research found marginalised young people to be resilient in the face of difficulties. In Ethiopia, many have dropped-out of school, work in the informal sector, and view successful migrants as their role models. Young people do not see formal education as a pathway to support their families and so often migrate to towns to find work. In smaller urban areas, services are not adequate for the most marginalised, such as access to health services, and decently paid work. This can result in them becoming street-connected or turning to risky and illegal forms of employment as strategies for survival. Many escape poverty by migrating to Gulf countries in search of alternative futures.

In Nepal, despite many challenges, poor and marginalised youth are creative and take initiatives to support their families. While most young people in the study had dropped-out of school to support their families, some balanced education with part time or seasonal work. Nevertheless, a lack of skills-based education is preventing access to decent jobs and livelihoods. Frustration has led some to drug abuse, living on the street, or leaving the country to find work. Rejecting traditional lives, their definitions of marginalisation reach beyond indicators of caste, ethnicity, and poverty.

## **THE IMPACT**

In Nepal, 29 young people in Kathmandu received skills development training from project partner organisation HomeNet. In addition, youth abusing substances in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia have requested training so they can set up small businesses.

In Ethiopia, project partner NGO, CHADET, has committed to developing its policies and designing interventions with marginalised youth based on findings from this research.

In Nepal, based on recommendation from the research team, ActionAid Nepal, along with HomeNet, has developed strategies focusing on marginalised young people, looking at youth definitions of marginalisation that include experiences of poverty and abuse and extend beyond gender, caste, and ethnic group. At the local level, elected local government representatives in Kathmandu, Sindhupalchowk, and Kapilvastu are keen to develop programmes targeting youth based on findings from this research.

In Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, the regional representative from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has requested advice on training for the most marginalised youth.

At national level, in Ethiopia, the former Ministry of Youth and Sports (now the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth) revised the draft *2018 National Youth Status Report and Indicators of Ethiopia* based on findings from this research. Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) asked the team to inform national curriculum development for training marginalised youth. Representatives from the Ethiopian ministries and TVET are also jointly holding a national youth seminar in Addis Ababa to create a space for marginalised youth voices to inform the development of youth policy nationally.

In Nepal, the Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Youth and Sports has pledged to develop programmes targeting youth based on findings from this research. The Child Welfare Board intends to use the research findings to inform its ongoing strategy.

The Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development (CERID), Nepal, has started a forum to discuss the issues of marginalised youth. CERID, based at Tribhuvan University, brings together academics, government officials, development workers, university students, and practitioners, raising interest in marginalised youth amongst university teachers and students.

The research continues to shape discourse, leading Matiya Assefa Chefa, Director-General for Youth Participation at the Ethiopian Ministry of Women, Children and Youth to say, 'This research will change the lives of youth across the country in years to come'.

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**[Insecurity and uncertainty: marginalised youth living rights in fragile and conflict affected situations in Nepal and Ethiopia \(also known as Youth Uncertainty Rights \(YOUR\) World Research\)](#)**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Dr Vicky Johnson (PI), Dr Andy West (Co-I), Signe Gosmann, Professor Andrew Church and Dr Mark Erickson. In Ethiopia: Dr Melese Getu, Milki Getachew and Amid Ahmed. In Nepal: Dr Sumon Tuladhar, Shubhendra Man Shrestha and Sabitra Neupane. NGO partner directors: ChildHope, Jill Healey; CHADET, Anannia Adamassu; and ActionAid Nepal, Sujeeta Mathema.

# MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IMPROVES LITERACY IN UGANDA



Children whose first language is not the language of instruction in school are more likely to drop out or fail in early grades. Research from the Universities of Illinois and their Ugandan partners Mango Tree Educational Enterprises and the Ichuli Institute, Kampala, demonstrates that the provision of teacher support and educational resources produced in local languages can lead to large learning gains in rural, under-resourced and overcrowded classrooms.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

In Uganda, as in many other countries in sub-Saharan Africa, access to primary school has expanded rapidly over recent decades. However, these gains have not been matched by improvements in learning, especially in literacy. In the Lango region of northern Uganda, 80 per cent of children aged 7–8 years are unable to read.

Previous research has shown that a child's first language is preferable for literacy and learning throughout primary school. Children who receive mother tongue-based multilingual education also perform better in their second language. However, in

the Lango region, reading is usually taught in English, and not in the local language, Leblango.

National efforts to promote mother tongue education policies have been largely unsuccessful due to underdeveloped rules for the writing and spelling of local words, a lack of education materials produced in local languages, and the absence of quality training to support teachers to deliver local-language curriculums.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Funded through the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, the aim of the research was to evaluate and measure



Photo: Uganda Kampangi, Rakai. A pupil holds up their hand to ask a question at St. Henry's school where about 410 students between the ages of 6 and 16 are enrolled. **Credit:** Mikkel Ostergaard / Panos.

the effectiveness of the innovative Mango Tree Literacy Programme in Uganda which seeks to emphasise mother tongue literacy education.

The programme engages indigenous writers, artists, designers and technical experts, as well as teachers, to co-develop education materials in local languages. Teacher training has an explicit focus on improving written and spoken language skills, and parents are taught how to interpret their child's literacy report card and use the results to support learning at home.

A randomised control trial of the programme took place in 128 schools in the Lango region over four years (2013–17). The researchers found that Mango Tree's approach succeeded in substantially improving literacy levels in early primary school grades, raising literacy levels equivalent to a whole additional year of schooling – amongst the largest improvements ever achieved for randomised education interventions of this kind.

### **THE IMPACT**

Results from the research have reinforced the benefits of Mango Tree's approach to literacy instruction. Thanks to Mango Tree's role in the research process, a project team member is part of a national literacy technical working group advising the government on successful approaches to improving literacy instruction and teacher training and support.

The research findings have also influenced a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) White Paper on approaches to improving literacy instruction in Uganda. Heidi Soule, USAID Uganda Education, Youth and Child Development Advisor reported that 'Without this research, the

local language development component would not have been included in the White Paper.' The paper will be incorporated into a national reflection and dialogue about the future of literacy programming at an upcoming USAID-sponsored National Reading Symposium where participants, including prominent Ministry of Education officials, parliamentarians, practitioners, and non-governmental organisation leaders will vote on priorities for future national education programming in Uganda.

Not only has the project stimulated a passion for local language literacy and a love for reading in local language in homes, communities, and schools, but the impact of the research has contributed to knowledge about successful approaches to teacher training and effective instructional materials in Uganda, which have the potential to transform learning in all low-income contexts.

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#### **The Literacy Laboratory Project (LLP) under the Northern Uganda Literacy Program**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, led by Rebecca Thornton, Department of Economics, University of Illinois. The research was carried out in partnership with the University of Minnesota, the University of Wisconsin, the Copenhagen Business School, Mango Tree Educational Enterprises, and the Ichuli Institute.

# OUTSOURCING PRIMARY EDUCATION IN LIBERIA LEADS TO MIXED RESULTS



The long-lasting effects of a 14-year civil war, compounded by school closures caused by the 2014 Ebola outbreak, have had a huge impact on Liberia's education system. In early 2016, the Liberian Ministry of Education announced that it would contract the operation of some government primary schools out to private companies. Researchers working with Innovations for Poverty Action examined the effects of these new partnerships and looked at how the schools deliver (or fail to deliver) better outcomes.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Liberia has one of the world's highest amounts of out-of-school children, with an estimated 15 to 20 per cent of 6–14-year-olds not attending school. Only 54 per cent of children complete primary education.

Faced with these statistics, in 2016, the Liberian government outsourced the management of 93 randomly selected state schools, covering 8.6 per cent of all state school students. These schools remain under public ownership, charge no fees, and are staffed by state school teachers, but each school is managed by one of eight private contractors (three for-profit companies and five charities). While originally prompted by the government's desire to improve test scores, the initiative has been dogged by the expulsion of students, an alleged cover-up of sexual abuse, and cost overruns.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Over three years, the project, [Partnership schools for Liberia: impact on accountability mechanisms and education outcomes](#) examined the effect of the new

Liberian Education Advancement Program (originally known as Partnership Schools for Liberia) by comparing the 93 schools whose management has been delegated to private operators to 92 control schools under government management. The randomised field experiment collected data at three points between 2016 and 2019, via student tests and in-depth surveys with teachers.

The research found that after three years, outsourcing the management of state schools to private providers raised test scores by 0.21 standard deviations in maths (equivalent to about 0.7 extra years of schooling) and 0.16 standard deviations in English (equivalent to four words per minute additional reading fluency for the cohort that started in first grade). Beyond learning gains, the programme reduced corporal punishment by 4.6 per cent, but it increased school drop-out rates by 3.3 per cent and failed to reduce self-reported sexual abuse at schools.

Crucially, the results varied by provider: some generated uniformly positive results, while in other cases, there were stark trade-offs between learning



Photo: Pupils in class in Liberia. Credit: Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos Pictures.



gains and extra-curricular outcomes, suggesting that the identity of private contractors matters for the performance of these public-private partnerships.

The research found that when government capacity to monitor performance and enforce contracts is weak – as in the case of Liberia – selecting private providers who are aligned with the public interest, and disinclined to exploit contractual incompleteness, may be important for the success of outsourcing.

## THE IMPACT

After one year, the preliminary results of the impact evaluation were presented to the then Liberian President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and her cabinet. As a result, provider contracts were amended to prevent some of the failures that had been identified early on during the 2016/17 academic year. Changes included setting standard contracts for all providers. However, even providers who had presided over serious failings were rewarded with contracts to manage more schools when the programme expanded in 2017 (e.g., Stella Maris, Bridge International Academies, and More than Me, respectively).

The results were discussed in March 2018 as part of the report on DFID's programme 'Leaving No One Behind in Education' produced by the UK's International Development Committee. The aim of this report was to inform DFID's work on education and, in particular, its work in Liberia and its investment in one of the contracted organisations: Bridge International Academies (a for-profit chain of low-cost private schools which rely on technology and scripted lessons). Lloyd Russell-Moyle MP told the Committee:



Bridge Academies added hundreds of dollars extra to educate each child from external money, meaning that no Government in the developing world would be able to sustain that level of investment if the schools returned to the Government... That study means that the Department for International Development needs to relook at its involvement with Bridge Academies and other providers and consider value for money.

Following the hearing, the Committee suggested DFID re-consider its working relationship with Bridge Academies, stating that the results of the pilot and the sustainability of Bridge's work in Liberia should be taken into consideration by the Department when assessing its support for Bridge elsewhere.

The results have been widely discussed in mainstream media such as Devex, The Economist and Quartz, with findings being used both by proponents of these types of partnerships, and by detractors. For example, Bridge International Academies has proclaimed the Liberia experience to be a complete success, citing the results on learning gains. On the other hand, Action Aid

and Education International contend that the results indicate failure, citing increased drop-out rates and the high cost of some providers.

Despite impressive results demonstrated by non-profit providers like Street Child (that produced positive learning gains similar to the other, better-known chains, but did so at much lower cost, and with no negative effects), for-profits seem to have generated the most interest from philanthropies and impact investors. Andrew G. Tehmeh, Country Director of Street Child of Liberia explained:



It sends a different message that as a local NGO striving to provide quality learning at very low-cost to the most vulnerable children in Liberia, for-profit organisations are being favoured by large philanthropic organisations. One would think the organisation that performs better would triumph in terms of funding support. Philanthropies need to give their unwavering support to institutions like us that are going to highs and lows to strengthen an education system that is already facing grave challenges.

In other countries where similar public-private partnership approaches are being considered (e.g., Sierra Leone), the results are being used to inform policy discussions.

Looking ahead, the research team hope the Ministry of Education will use the results to improve the programme so that providers which perform well in various dimensions – not just test scores, but also access to education, sustainability, and child safety – are rewarded with more contracts, while providers who underperform have their contracts terminated.

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### Partnership schools for Liberia: impact on accountability mechanisms and education outcomes.

The research team was funded by the ESRC-FCDO Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme led by Justin Sandefur (Center for Global Development). The research was carried out in partnership with Mauricio Romero (ITAM), Wayne Sandholtz (Nova SBE), and Innovations for Poverty Action.

# PROVIDING ALTERNATIVES TO FOSSIL FUELS IN NEPAL



Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 is to 'Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all'. However, inadequate energy supply continues to hinder social and economic development in Nepal. Despite a wealth of renewable energy potential – particularly with hydropower but also solar and biomass – sustainability and access remain major challenges. A research project led by the University of Leeds, with partners in Nepal and the UK, identified indigenous oil seed plants as an alternative, more environmentally friendly energy source than fossil fuels. The project has led to the creation of an international [Clean Energy Research Alliance \(CERA\)](#) with partners in Uganda, Congo-Brazzaville, Tanzania, Indonesia and India.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

People need energy for basic needs such as cooking and heating, as well as for improving agricultural productivity and allowing for mechanisation, irrigation and post-harvesting processing, among other critical livelihood activities. In Nepal, firewood is the predominant household energy source, accounting for more than 70 per cent of consumption nationally (and is almost the sole source of fuel in some districts). However, its inefficient use poses a threat to the country's forests as well as to the health of approximately 22 million Nepalese who are regularly exposed to household air pollution. The Clean Cooking Alliance estimates that such pollution contributes to the death of nearly 20,000 people in Nepal each year, nearly a quarter of them children.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Between 2013 and 2015, a research team of geographers, sociologists, economists, botanists and engineers collaborated on the ESRC-DFID project Energy Gardens for Small-Scale Farmers in Nepal: Institutions, Species and Technology. The project aimed to enhance energy access for poor farmers and communities.



Cover photo: Devi prepares a cooking fire at her home in Dhoderi village, Nepal. Credit: © James Morgan/Panos Pictures.

Energy Gardens are an alternative way of creating sustainable community-based bioenergy provision for rural communities. They use previously unused lands, field bunds, and community forests to grow indigenous plant species for energy generation. The concept is based on work by Professor Balakrishna Gowda and his team at the Hassan Biofuel Park in southern India, where indigenous Indian oil seed trees were planted by smallholder farmers. The Nepal team visited the Biofuel Park to share knowledge and build capacity, while Professor Gowda gave presentations at the Energy Garden project and at other meetings in Nepal, which were attended by a wide range of stakeholders from village to ministry levels.

The fieldwork took place in three rural villages – Lakuri Danda (Dolakha), Khudi (Lamjung) and Hamsapur (Gorkha) – in the mid-hills region of central and western Nepal. Research methods included household surveys to obtain information on household and community-based management of biomass and acquisition of energy. The Nepal team used traditional *Dohri Song* duets at village meetings as an innovative way to help explain the technical concepts and rationale for the research.

The findings showed that there are many native oil seed trees in Nepal that smallholder farmers could use to provide energy and other multi-purpose benefits, including maintenance of biodiversity. Planting oil seed trees in field bunds and along paths means that agricultural productivity is not affected, and fuel production does not compete with food crops – an aspect of some biofuel production systems that has attracted criticism. With its focus on inclusive village governance for energy provision, such as cooperative collection and marketing of oil seeds, the Energy Garden is a concept that encourages participation of all community groups, including traditionally excluded groups such as Dalit women. In this way, it can create further opportunities for employment and income.

## THE IMPACT

Securing the participation of multiple stakeholders enabled the project to start discussions to formulate relevant policies and programmes that would help achieve its goals of reducing rural poverty and providing opportunities for diversification of livelihoods.

Through forging a long-term research collaboration with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the project team worked closely with the government of Nepal. In 2014, Dr Bishnu Pariyar, the project post-doctoral researcher, met with the Minister for Agriculture, Hari Prasad Parajuli, and briefed him on the project. He also presented a special edition of the *BGjournal*, which featured an article on the Nepal Energy Gardens project.

His Excellency Andrew Sparkes, the then British Ambassador to Nepal, spoke at the project's launch in March 2014 and shared the UK government's support for renewable energy interventions, emphasising that the 'investment in and promotion of renewable energy is an important key to Nepal's development'.

In April 2015, the devastating Nepal earthquake required the government to change its priorities. In the same year, government attention was also focused on a blockade of fuel imports across the border with India, which resulted in a national fuel shortage. The project team collaborated with the World Agroforestry Centre in a high-level multi-stakeholder meeting in Kathmandu in November 2015 and developed a concept note on Strategies and Options for Nepal's Bioenergy Potential. This work provided the background to the formulation of the Nepal Biomass Energy Strategy 2017.

Following completion of the Nepal project, the team transferred the idea to Africa and received funding of £1.2 million from the Royal Society-DFID Africa Capacity Building Initiative to continue their investigation and build capacity for renewable research and stakeholder engagement in Uganda, Tanzania and Congo-Brazzaville. Further grants – of £1.3 million from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's Global Challenges Research Fund (EPSRC-GCRF) for research on electricity mini-grids, and £1.7 million from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council's Global Challenges Research Fund (BBSRC-GCRF) for research on bioenergy from the invasive water hyacinth plant – have enabled the project team to build South-South links with Indonesia and India. In June 2019, the team held an international conference, at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in the UK on

Plant Power to showcase the ongoing research and demonstrate the potential of bioenergy.

Four years on, there is continued interest in and renewed funding for Energy Gardens as an alternative to fossil fuels. As the global community strives to address the climate crisis, enabling poor rural communities to generate their own energy, close to home, could prove central to efforts to find alternatives to fossil fuels.

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### **Energy Gardens for Small-Scale Farmers in Nepal: Institutions, Species and Technology**

The research project was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research. It was led by the University of Leeds, in collaboration with the Asia Network for Sustainable Agriculture and Bioresources, Ethnobotanical Society of Nepal, Botanic Gardens Conservation International, the Hassan Biofuels Park and the Feminist Dalit Organization.

# RAISING AWARENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE IN THE MALDIVES



Island communities in the Maldives are experiencing environmental change on a daily basis due to coastal erosion, the accumulation of waste at sea and on beaches, and the rapid expansion of the built environment. Researchers from the Universities of Manchester and Reading in the UK, and the Maldivian NGO ENDEVOR, are working with these communities to understand how such changes affect day-to-day life, and to raise awareness of associated issues amongst decision makers in the national capital, Malé. An exhibition of 40 photographs taken by island inhabitants depicting the challenges they face in their daily lives was held at the National Art Gallery in Malé. The exhibition launch, attended by the photographers and policymakers, proved particularly effective in enabling island residents to raise their concerns and put forward their solutions.

## THE CHALLENGE

The Maldives, an archipelago nation located in the Indian Ocean, is well known internationally for the beauty of its beaches, lagoons, and coral reefs, and also because it is especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, particularly sea level rise. Less well understood, however, are the political, economic, social, and environmental challenges that the country faces, such as high levels of inequality and a national economy that is heavily reliant on international tourism.

Of the 1,200 or so islands that make up the Maldives, around 200 are 'inhabited' with a further 130 'uninhabited' and primarily used as locations for holiday resorts. In recent years, the government has permitted the development of hundreds of guesthouses on the inhabited islands. Being a source of employment and income generation, local people generally support this change; but it has also brought new challenges, in particular a high impact on the environment.



Cover photo: Sandbags piled up to slow down coastal erosion. ©Alex Arnall.

Environmental change on the islands, whether caused by pollution, coastline engineering, or overuse of groundwater, has a major impact on the quality of people's daily lives. However, because policymakers, politicians, and the media primarily operate from Malé and tend to focus on 'big stories', such as climate change, there is a policy 'gap' between the capital island and the other islands, which can leave island communities feeling frustrated, vulnerable, and disempowered.

## THE RESEARCH

The ESRC-DFID-funded project, 'Everyday Lives and Environmental Change' in the Maldives, conducted research on three small islands located in the North Malé atoll to elicit the lived experiences of island people with regard to their environments. A range of participatory research methods was employed including participant observation, use of the 'go along' technique, interviews, and participatory photography workshops held with community groups. The photography workshops were instrumental in building people's confidence and skills in taking photos to depict their everyday lives and concerns.

The research findings highlighted three important changes occurring on a daily basis on small islands in the Maldives: (1) the erosion of beaches and coastline due to wave action, tidal currents, and human intervention; (2) the daily accumulation of washed-up waste and rubbish deposited by people; and (3) the rapid expansion of the built environment to support guesthouse development and increasing numbers of tourists. There is great concern amongst local populations about the effects that these processes are having on island life.

## THE IMPACT

The research has raised awareness and contributed to knowledge by better informing policymakers about the effect of environmental change on island communities and raising public awareness in Malé of this issue on the outer islands. The project has also significantly built the capacity of the communities to articulate their concerns and propose locally driven solutions directly to decision makers.

The main project findings were fed back to the island communities where the research was conducted. Findings were also disseminated at a specially organised Research Impact workshop at Cyryx College and at a seminar at the Maldives National University. A [Research Briefing Report](#) has also been distributed to national policymakers, including Malé government officials in the Ministries of Environment and Energy and of Tourism, coastal planners, and representatives of the national tourist board.

Forty of the photographs taken by island residents during the community photography workshops were displayed at the National Art Gallery. The exhibition launch brought together policymakers, including representatives of international organisations such as UNDP, national government departments, and NGOs, and students and island residents to discuss the impacts and management of environmental change taking place on the islands. During the event, the photographers explained the changes that they and their communities are facing. A member of an island council reported that this was a highly effective method to demonstrate challenges and to propose possible solutions. One island council had its planning permission application for the erection of coastal defences to prevent rapid beach erosion approved the day immediately following the launch, and it was felt by the council that the exhibition had directly contributed to this positive outcome.

The four-day photography exhibition raised public awareness in Malé. Two project investigators, Uma Kothari and Mizna Mohamed, were subsequently invited onto the national daytime television programme *Hedhunu Hedhunaa* to discuss the purpose of the exhibition and highlight environmental impacts on outer islands. An island resident appreciated 'the opportunity to participate in the photography exhibition. It has helped us make people in Malé understand the challenges that we face with the development of our island'. The photography workshops were key to building the confidence of community groups by placing value on people's perspectives and focusing on self-expression through visual imagery as a means to put forward a policy message.

The research team now plans to take the photography exhibition to schools in Malé and on to some of the outer islands. The aim is to further raise awareness of environmental changes taking place in other locations and to build understanding of the power of photography to communicate the changes that are occurring in people's day-to-day lives. There are also plans for further policy engagement. Following a change of government, the new administration is looking to develop a series of fresh initiatives focusing on local environmental change, particularly the problems associated with plastic waste. The project team is seeking an appointment with the newly appointed president of the Maldives.

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### **Negotiating conflict: environmental violence, economic development and the everyday practices of islanders**

(also known as 'Everyday Lives and Environmental Change') was funded by the ESRC-FCDO Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research. The project is led by Uma Kothari, University of Manchester in the UK with Alex Arnall from the University of Reading in the UK, and Mizna Mohamed from the Maldivian NGO ENDEVOR.

# REDUCING SCHOOL DROPOUT RATES IN MALAWI AND LESOTHO



'School in a bag', buddy systems and catch-up clubs have paved the way for improved learning and reduced dropout in schools in Malawi and Lesotho. These pioneering techniques have been used by researchers from University College London's Institute of Education and their Southern African partners to help ensure that disadvantaged children, particularly those affected by HIV/AIDS, stay in school.

Between April 2007 and July 2010, the team developed and piloted these distance- and flexible-learning techniques in 20 primary schools in Malawi and 16 secondary schools in Lesotho, all of which were located in areas where HIV/AIDS was highly prevalent and where school dropout rates were high. In both countries, the schools saw reduced dropout rates (up to 45 per cent in Malawi), particularly for older children.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Many developing countries have made good progress in improving enrolment rates since universal primary education became a UN global target over 15 years ago. But for countries in Africa such as Lesotho and Malawi which are deeply affected by the HIV/AIDS crisis, these gains mask a troubling picture of low levels

of achievement and worrisome dropout rates. For orphaned or vulnerable children who struggle to attend class, for example because they care for chronically ill parents or work to support themselves and their families' income, the problem is made worse by school policies which actively discriminate against poor households.

## **THE RESEARCH**

The research team wanted to study whether a flexible approach to learning could improve educational achievement and reduce the risk of dropout for vulnerable children. Key components of their ground-breaking SOFIE model included a 'school in a bag' that held pens, notebooks, textbooks and self-study



Photo: Malawi. Children studying in class. © Giacomo Pirozzi/Panos Pictures.

1. The South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE); the Institute of Education, National University of Lesotho; and the Centre for Education Research and Training (CERT), University of Malawi.
2. Strengthening Open and Flexible Learning for Increased Educational Access in High HIV Prevalence Countries.

guides for English and Maths designed to encourage independent learning for children for whom school attendance was often erratic; a buddy system providing peer-support for learning; and catch-up clubs run by youth volunteers providing additional learning opportunities in friendly, informal environments, and which were arranged after school hours.

## **THE IMPACT**

In both countries, school dropout rates reduced and Maths scores improved. In fact, the positive effects spilled over to a much wider group thanks to improved teacher engagement and changes in exclusionary practices. Children's confidence and self-esteem increased, and the buddy system helped reduce isolation and discrimination, build friendships, and increase motivation to continue with school.

Particular success was attributed to the innovative self-study guides and, critically, the collaborative nature of the project – community members, teachers and youth volunteers were all included in helping to improve the inclusiveness of schools by developing 'circles of support' around vulnerable children at risk of dropping out of school.



Against a context of underlying poverty and disadvantage, having someone who provides emotional support, takes an interest and pays attention to whether they are in school or not, be it a buddy, teacher, community leader, is of great value to pupils who regularly experience isolation.

Malawi lead researcher Catherine Jere

Findings from the project have played an important role in demonstrating how conventional schooling can be adapted for children struggling to attend and remain in education.

In Lesotho, the CEO for Curriculum Assessment has used the findings to raise the profile of open and flexible learning techniques within the Ministry of Education; and a formal qualification for teachers on guidance and counselling has been initiated.

In Malawi, pilot schools put in place plans to change discriminatory school policy, improve their inclusiveness, and support disadvantaged children.

The project also reinforced the Ministry of Education's ongoing re-assessment of the country's distance education strategies. Templates of the self-study guides were shared with district education offices and project outcomes informed the design of non-governmental 'bridging' programmes and clubs to provide learning support for senior primary girls during the transition to secondary education and to reduce the risk of dropout. Several of the youth volunteers involved in the project have since been accepted onto a national distance-learning teacher training programme.

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<http://sofie.ioe.ac.uk/>



**Strengthening ODFL systems to increase education access and attainment for young people in high HIV prevalence SADC countries**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's **Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research**, led by Principal Investigator Professor Pat Pridmore and Chris Yates, University College London's Institute of Education, team statistician Matthew Jukes, Harvard University, Ephraim Mhlanga, South African Institute for Distance Education and in collaboration with the in-country researchers Catherine Jere, the University of Malawi and the National University of Lesotho.

# REDUCING TEENAGE PREGNANCY IN SIERRA LEONE



Research directly involving teenagers and their families in Sierra Leone to reduce teenage pregnancy has helped pave the way for a new community-friendly Child and Family Welfare Policy. The research by the Columbia Group for Children in Adversity and UNICEF Sierra Leone mobilised local people through child- and youth-led education initiatives and through closer connections with district health workers. Thanks to the project, condom use increased, teenage girls reported feeling more confident to say 'no' and boys showed more willingness to act responsibly. The findings directly influenced the Sierra Leone government's development of a new policy on child protection.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Sub-Saharan Africa has the world's highest teenage pregnancy rates, with one in five girls aged 15 to 19 giving birth.<sup>1</sup> Many girls who become pregnant are forced to leave school. Complications during pregnancy are common and many girls undergo unsafe abortions. Babies born to adolescent mothers face a substantially higher risk of dying.<sup>2</sup> In 2013, with Sierra Leone recording a 68 per cent pregnancy rate among adolescent girls (with a mean age of 15),<sup>3</sup> the president declared that the problem demanded urgent action and launched a national strategy to address it.<sup>4</sup>

A global review of community-based child protection mechanisms, such as Child Welfare Committees, found that these often failed to protect vulnerable

children from dangers like teenage pregnancy and early marriage. Problems included a lack of local ownership deterring families from getting involved, committees collapsing once funding had ceased and poor collaboration between community efforts and district-level health workers. This highlighted a need for a more community-led approach to child protection in places like Sierra Leone, to stem the high rates of teenage pregnancy and prevent the harm it causes to girls' health, their futures and to economic and social development.

## **THE RESEARCH**

In 2012 the action research team began working in two districts in Sierra Leone: Moyamba District within the Mende-speaking southern area and Bombali District



Photo: [Girls in a school yard in Sierra Leone](#). Credit: [GPE/Stephan Bacheneheimer](#), licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

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3. UNICEF (2013) *Sierra Leone: An Evaluation of Teenage Pregnancy Pilot Projects in Sierra Leone*, Freetown: UNICEF



within the predominantly Temne-speaking northern area. After extended dialogue, community members chose to address teenage pregnancy through family planning, sexual and reproductive health education and life skills. Communities encouraged families to collaborate with the district government, health services and schools. The team coordinated training by NGOs and the provision of contraceptives and education around puberty, sexuality, pregnancy and pregnancy prevention by the District Ministry of Health. Communities organised role plays among teenage girls and boys while parents and children had candid discussions about puberty, sex and preventing pregnancy. From the outset, the research team worked closely with UNICEF, which played a lead role in child protection. UNICEF engaged with Sierra Leone's national Child Protection Committee and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs, which helped to select the areas for study.

## THE IMPACT

A mid-point project evaluation in July 2014 showed that teenagers reported<sup>5</sup> a greater intent to use condoms while teenage girls reported feeling empowered to refuse unwanted sex more frequently. Both girls and boys said that they had learned how to discuss and negotiate with their partners about sex, and how to plan their sexual activities in light of wider life goals. Boys openly acknowledged their responsibility to prevent teenage pregnancy – contrasting sharply with their previous behaviour.



The insights gave us the evidence we needed to work with the government on a radical shift in child protection policy.

David Lamin, UNICEF

Health workers, teenagers and their families indicated seeing a significant decrease in teenage pregnancies. Prior to the research, in an average school year there were five or six teenage pregnancies per village in both districts. In the 2013/14 school year, half the communities reported no new teenage pregnancies, and the other half reported only one new teenage pregnancy. Some villages had spontaneously begun to discuss the problem of early marriage.

Although the Ebola crisis disrupted the project in August 2014, the action research did significantly influence national policy on supporting vulnerable

children in Sierra Leone – in particular the findings that local people relied on community-owned processes and existing family and community mechanisms. This directly influenced Sierra Leone's government and UNICEF to collaborate on a new policy placing family- and child-led action at the centre of child protection. The new Child and Family Welfare Policy enacted in 2015 embodied insights from the research.

David Lamin<sup>6</sup> of UNICEF Sierra Leone explained the value of the research: 'The insights into teenage pregnancy and the need for communities themselves to drive efforts to protect children provided us with the evidence we needed to work with the government on a radical shift in child protection policy.' He said the findings were being used to develop ways to implement the policy, adding: 'there are now plans to share this evidence and approach with the governments of Ivory Coast, Liberia and Guinea.'

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### Inter-Agency Research On Strengthening Community-Based Child Protection For Vulnerable Children In Sierra Leone

This research was funded by the ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation. It was conceptualised by the Inter-Agency Learning Initiative on Strengthening Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms, which is coordinated by Save the Children. The research team was led by Principal Investigator Michael Wessells, Columbia University, in collaboration with UNICEF, United States.

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# REFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION TEACHING PRACTICES IN AFRICA



Critical thinking – the process of questioning and learning with an open mind – is considered one of the most important outcomes of a contemporary university education, a crucial skill for graduate participation in the global ‘knowledge economy’. Thanks to innovative research from University College London, UK together with researchers from the University of Botswana, the University of Cape Coast in Ghana, and Strathmore University in Kenya, universities across sub-Saharan Africa are now making changes to their teaching practices to support the development of their students’ critical thinking skills.

## THE CHALLENGE

The new development challenges facing countries in sub-Saharan Africa – and elsewhere – call for individuals with demonstrable critical thinking skills. However, despite a large body of literature looking at ways in which academic experiences at university can positively influence the development of student critical thinking skills, current evidence rests largely on research conducted in the USA, UK, and Australia. There is a noticeable lack of research and evidence to inform these debates in the African context.

## THE RESEARCH

The ‘Pedagogies for Critical Thinking: Innovation and Outcomes in African Higher Education’ project examined the impact of teaching reforms in 14 universities across Botswana, Ghana, and Kenya. Using a mixed methods approach (a longitudinal study of student ‘gains’ in critical thinking over a two-year period and a qualitative investigation of the teaching and learning environment), researchers wanted to understand how different teaching styles affected the development of critical thinking skills,



Photo: A group of students sit together outside a University in Botswana. Credit: Marc Shoul/Panos Pictures.

and how universities in Africa respond to processes of pedagogical change.

Measuring critical thinking skills using an adapted version of the 'Collegiate Learning Assessment' (a test undertaken by students at the start of their undergraduate course and then another two years later), the study found that three universities in particular supported significant improvements in the critical thinking skills of their students. They were found to have:

- Enabled a shared teaching culture in which faculty members privileged independent student learning;
- Created a learning environment in which students were exposed to a variety of viewpoints and perspectives;
- Ensured critical thinking was a required skill across the curriculum;
- Created a culture of pedagogical improvement, providing regular ongoing development for teaching staff;
- Restructured assessment formats so as to better align with teaching approaches; and
- Provided teaching staff with sufficient time to discuss and improve their practices, in order to foster pedagogical change.

## THE IMPACT

Following the dissemination of research in all three countries, many of the participating universities are considering ways to reform their teaching practices and processes to better prepare lecturers in the skill of fostering critical thinking.

In Kenya, the Commission for University Education has now incorporated critical thinking into its national work and is supporting universities in adapting their curricula. Mwenda Ntarangwi, CEO, explained:

*This research has supported one of the bold moves taken [by the Government of Kenya] to introduce a competence-based curriculum that aims at producing students with requisite skills and competencies that meet the needs of a changing society propelled by a knowledge economy. [It is] particularly useful for supporting this change where learning is herewith active and interactive as the learner takes on a larger role in the process of learning as the teacher's role increasingly becomes facilitative. These critical thinking skills are a must for all Kenyan students, not just a preserve of a few who may have access to select institutions.*

Some Kenyan universities have also explicitly prioritised critical thinking within institutional structures. For example, one private university in Nairobi has recently adopted critical thinking as a key dimension in its curricular review at an institutional level, while another is incorporating aspects of critical thinking into its staff development programme.

In Botswana, the project inspired one participating university to organise a seminar for faculty and staff that focused on the importance of critical thinking skills for employment. Another institution is preparing to overhaul its process for evaluating teaching quality (a critical component of the academic promotions policy), to better support the kinds of institutional characteristics highlighted by the study.

In Ghana, there is evidence that lecturers at the public universities involved in the study have embedded critical thinking into their teaching approaches since the research took place. However, in some cases the success of these innovations is restricted by large class sizes, indicating that systemic change across the university system is needed.

The 'Pedagogies for Critical Thinking' research has shown the success of infusing critical thinking across the curriculum. It is providing an important evidence-based contribution to a critically overlooked aspect of university quality in the region.

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### Pedagogies for Critical Thinking: Innovation and Outcomes in African Higher Education



The research team was funded by the ESRC-FCDO Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme led by Tristan McCowan (University College London, UK) and Rebecca Schendel (University College London, UK and Boston College, USA). The research was carried out in partnership with Caine Rolleston (University College London, UK); Richard Tabulawa (University of Botswana); Christine Adu-Yeboah (University of Cape Coast, Ghana) and Mary Omingo (Strathmore University, Kenya).

# RESEARCH ON CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES INFLUENCES EDUCATION POLICY IN PAKISTAN



Children who face multiple disadvantages including those related to disability are among those least likely to be learning. Using large-scale household data together with qualitative data from classrooms in rural Pakistan, researchers from the University of Cambridge, UK and the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), Pakistan have gained a picture of how many children with disabilities attend school, and what factors affect their learning. This research is shaping key policy debates on education, inclusion and disability.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

In 2010, the Parliament of Pakistan added Article 25A to the Constitution, which promises 'free and compulsory education' to all 5–16 year-olds. Since then, there has been steady progress in more children attending school. However, little was known about whether children with disabilities have benefited from this expansion, and if those making it into school are learning.

Furthermore, there is an uncoordinated approach to providing support to schools and teachers for children

with disabilities who are in mainstream schools. A separate Department of Special Education responsible for the education of children with disabilities has been insufficiently connected with the School Education Department that supports government schools.

## **THE RESEARCH**

In 2014, the ESRC-DFID-funded Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACh) project assessed around 1,600 children aged 8–12 years in rural Central Punjab on literacy and numeracy skills. The researchers combined the Child Functioning Questions developed



**Cover photo:** Punjab, Pakistan. A pupil practices her English at a government primary school in the remote Panchkasi village.  
© Zackary Canepari/Panos Pictures.

by the [Washington Group for Disability Statistics](#) with data on children's enrolment patterns and assessed their learning. In addition, information was collected from households on other characteristics, such as poverty and gender.

By gathering large-scale data, the researchers were able to gain a fuller picture of the prevalence of disability in Pakistan: around 10 per cent of children had some form of disability, much higher than previous estimates. A large proportion of children with disabilities were in mainstream (both government and private) schools, with around three quarters of those with moderate-to-severe disabilities in school in the sample. More boys than girls with disabilities were in school.

While some children with disabilities were benefiting from access to schooling, the data also showed that their learning outcomes in both literacy and numeracy were, on average, lower compared to children without disabilities. The findings highlight that the conditions of schooling are not enabling children with disabilities to achieve their potential.

## **THE IMPACT**

The TEACH project has shown that it is feasible to use internationally recognised and standardised questions to understand the schooling experiences of children with disabilities. And, by demonstrating that children with disabilities *are* in mainstream schools, the research is providing valuable new evidence on the types of strategies governments must adopt to support them in the classroom.

Recognising that better data is needed to identify children with disabilities in national surveys for more effective planning, Edward Davis, former DFID Pakistan Education Policy Team Leader, said: 'The research has been influential in training Punjab Special Education Departments on how to use the Washington Group child functioning survey tools.'

The research highlighted the need for better data on children with disabilities as well as improved links between different educational departments.

Drawing on TEACH findings, team member Dr Faisal Bari of IDEAS Pakistan provided expertise in 2018 for the Lahore High Court on a case about the rights of children with disabilities. He was also invited to be a member of a Child Care Commission tasked with writing a report on the status of children with disabilities, which included the research evidence and has since been submitted to the High Court.

Furthermore, the research team has been asked by the School Education Department to provide input on a new inclusive education policy and, according to its Special Secretary, Imran Baloch, the research findings are set to influence future education policies: 'Many of those with special needs who are enrolled in government schools don't receive the support they need to participate in appropriate educational activities. These [TEACH] findings are vital in helping to shape and inform Pakistan's new inclusive education policy – including helping to ensure that we can equip teachers to support children with diverse needs.'

Beyond Pakistan, findings from the project informed preparations for the [Global Disability Summit](#) held in London in July 2018. In collaboration with stakeholders from bilateral and multilateral agencies and international non-governmental organisations, the research contributed to a [Statement of Action on Inclusive Education](#), which informed the Summit's messages on the importance of better evidence and data to inform policy and practice on inclusive education.

## **FURTHER READING**

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### **Teaching Effectively All Children (TEACH) in India and Pakistan**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, led by Principal Investigator Professor Pauline Rose, together with Dr Nidhi Singal and Professor Anna Vignoles, Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre, University of Cambridge. In Pakistan, the research was carried out in partnership with the Institute of Development and Economic Alternatives (IDEAS), led by Dr Faisal Bari and Dr Rabea Malik.

# TACKLING EXTREME POVERTY THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT IN BANGLADESH

In the last 20 years, remarkable progress has been made in tackling extreme poverty. Yet, while the number of people living on less than US\$1.90 per day in 2015 was 736 million (10 per cent of the global population, down from 11 per cent in 2013), the rate of poverty reduction has started to decline. Reaching and keeping the most vulnerable and marginalised people out of poverty is harder than ever. A novel initiative in Bangladesh, led by the international non-governmental organisation BRAC, to provide material and psychological support to the poorest individuals and households has proved to be a sustainable and lasting way to prevent them from falling back into poverty.



## **THE CHALLENGE**

Microfinance initiatives (MFIs) are widely used by governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to help the poor to their way out of desperate poverty and to provide a reliable and safe source of income. Yet, in the early 1990s, the global NGO BRAC recognised that MFIs are not always an appropriate way to support the extreme poor as they fail to take into account the psychological, cultural, and physical barriers that prevent people from setting up and maintaining their own small businesses. Women in particular can often be excluded and isolated in a male-dominated society, and lack the networks and connections required for support and to effectively use

## **THE RESEARCH**

Through BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra-Poor (CFPR-TUP) programme, over 650,000 ultra-poor families have graduated from poverty since 2002. This programme worked on the logic that those living in extreme poverty needed some kind of 'asset transfer'. Since most were illiterate they required training to take care of their 'business' assets – i.e. a cow, a flock of chickens, or a small grocery shop. That logic extended to the understanding that in order to benefit from having these assets the families have to be well looked after. Each family was provided with a case worker who gave not only practical guidance but also emotional support.



Photo: Measuring vegetables while selling in the market at Khagrachari, Bangladesh.  
Credit: JFPRI/Farha Khan/Flickr licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/).

The ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research funded the Graduation as Resilience programme through two stages from 2013 to 2018 to understand what aspects of BRAC's already successful CFPR-TUP programme could be replicated. In the first stage, researchers adopted a model of psychological wellbeing and used it on a sample of women from the CFPR-TUP to find out how well they could manage specific tasks, such as looking after their assets, and the level and type of support they had received to enable them to do so.

The second phase of the programme tested the new 'psychosocial' model in three programmes in Bangladesh to see if it worked on a broader scale – it included one BRAC programme (CFPR-TUP) and two government-supported programmes carried out by Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF). The research asked 1,800 households across the programmes about what aspects helped people get out of poverty and showed overwhelmingly that the case-by-case support was pivotal in achieving that.

### **THE IMPACT**

The assessment of the CFPR-TUP and roll-out of the model showed that the success of the CFPR-TUP was not an isolated example. Ninety-five per cent of participants in phase 2 of the research graduated from poverty in Bangladesh. The UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and others continue to fund this programme.

Based on the evidence, DFID encouraged other organisations to take up the approach and funded other major programmes in Bangladesh based on the same model. The model was copied globally with support from the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), the Ford Foundation, and other donors.

A major research study, published in Science Magazine, produced compelling evidence of the success of 'Graduation' pilot projects in Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Pakistan and Peru, and the approach is now being promoted globally by the World Bank and other major international development actors. As the evaluator of the CGAP and Ford Foundation-funded six-country programmes concluded, 'a multifaceted approach to increasing income and wellbeing for the ultra-poor [the BRAC programme] is sustainable and cost-effective'.

The Graduation as Resilience research has shown overwhelmingly the success of incorporating a more holistic approach to addressing extreme poverty. As the global community strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, it is those in extreme poverty who remain the hardest to reach and support. By evaluating the successful BRAC programme, and working closely with the Bangladeshi government, it is evident that there are components that can be replicated elsewhere, within the country and further afield.

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**Graduation as resilience**

**Graduation as resilience stage two**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Mushtaque Chowdhury, BRAC, Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies, UK.

# THE CLIMATE CHANGE- MODERN SLAVERY NEXUS IN CAMBODIA



Cambodia's capital city, Phnom Penh, has experienced an incredibly fast construction boom. Building projects demand bricks in large quantities, and there is a profitable domestic brick production industry supplying them. But the bricks are cheap and the labour is even cheaper; workers are typically paid a piece rate of approximately US\$0.007 per brick. In fact, this industry relies upon a multigenerational workforce of adults and children trapped in debt bondage – the most prevalent form of modern slavery in the world. Research enabled by the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research on 'Blood Bricks' focuses on Cambodian brick kilns to examine how a high vulnerability to climate change can facilitate trafficking into new industries and greater susceptibility to modern slavery.

## THE CHALLENGE

Cambodia has repeatedly been named one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world. As a country heavily reliant on agriculture, a combination of flooding and foreign investment in both the construction and garment industries has seen many workers leave farming to take up jobs in factories or construction sites. Low levels of regulation in these industries has resulted in multigenerational families of adults and children from rural villages working in hazardous factories on the outskirts of the country's

capital city. In many cases, unable to pay back a local money lender, the family's loan was transferred to a brick kiln owner, upon which time they became bonded labourers in the factory in order to pay off the debt. Due to the low rate of pay, families are often unable to earn back the amount 'owed' (LICADHO 2016).

## THE RESEARCH

Mixed methods research was carried out by Royal Holloway, University of London and a Cambodian scholar from the Royal University of Phnom Penh. It combined qualitative interviews with construction industry informants and victims of modern slavery working in brick kilns and construction sites; a quantitative household survey and interviews in brick kiln-sender villages; analysis of longitudinal secondary data (National Institute of Statistics 2016); and geographic information system (GIS) mapping of villages with high levels of out-migration to kilns. Together the evidence identified exploitative labour practices on brick kilns which had been engendered by structural precarity in rural villages.



We have to work here [on the kiln] because of debt; if not we would have decided to leave this place long ago. This is our unsolved problem, but the loan from the kiln owner is interest-free. If the owner permitted, all of us would go back home because of our hard work. People prefer to rent land for growing rice or vegetables. But as for us, we're in debt so we can't do these things. If we had enough money we would repay the kiln owner the loan.

(Kosal, debt-bonded brick worker)



Cover photo: Atith stokes the fire of a kiln at night to minimise the extreme temperatures he faces. Credit: Thomas Cristofolletti/Ruom. © 2018 Royal Holloway, University of London.



Accounts from those involved speak to the multiple and structural factors that facilitate debt bondage, such as the impacts of climate change; absence of state support for agriculture and rural development; lack of social protection or affordable and accessible health services; the largely unregulated microfinance sector; corruption and weak rule of law; and the operations and ethics of global corporate companies working in sectors from construction to fashion.

## **THE IMPACT**

The research has strengthened awareness of the connections between climate change and severe forms of labour exploitation. Specifically, it has contributed to a deepening understanding of how climate change has exacerbated vulnerability in rural areas, in a context where millions of rural farmers across the global South are leaving agriculture and moving to urban work, particularly to more vulnerable forms of urban work (Rigg *et al.* 2018; Bernstein 2010; Bryceson 1996). Furthermore, the research has offered policy recommendations to a number of actors, including the Royal Government of Cambodia, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the UK government with regards to the Modern Slavery Act 2015.

The project research report's findings (Brickell *et al.* 2018) have been communicated by a wide range of national and global media outlets, including BBC World News (TV), ABC News (TV), *the Guardian* (online), *The Independent* (online), the Thomson Reuters Foundation (online), Al Jazeera (online), *the South China Morning Post* (print/online), *The Conversation* (online), *Southeast Asia Globe* (print/online), and *The Phnom Penh Post* (online).

At a national level the findings were raised with Cambodian government officials during a meeting organised by the International Labour Organization in Phnom Penh, and the Minister of Labour has responded to say that he will investigate the claims made in the research report. The *Blood Bricks* project report also features a foreword by Tina Redshaw, Her Majesty's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Cambodia, who states, 'I welcome the valuable contribution this study makes to greater understanding of certain aspects of our diplomatic mission in Cambodia including education, human rights and good governance, climate change, modern slavery and child protection.'

On a global scale, Urmila Bhoola, the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, including its causes and consequences, has commented, 'I congratulate the team on this ground-breaking report and I have no doubt that it will contribute significantly to improvements in the life of the people who are currently working in brick production in slavery-like conditions.' The project report has further attracted interest from organisations working in a range of areas. The project team have been contacted by a Denmark-based responsible energy organisation to contribute to developing a framework for companies undertaking sustainability commitments

in supply chains. The team have also contributed to a report that will be submitted to the UN's review of the UK's compliance with the UN Convention against Torture, led by the anti-torture organisation REDRESS. Finally, the team have secured extra funding from the UK Global Challenges Research Fund to return to Cambodia and undertake further research around the issue of air quality in kilns where garment offcuts from global fashion brands are being burned.

In terms of the UK, the project report's findings speak to the inefficacy of the UK Modern Slavery Act 2015 in tackling instances of modern slavery in UK supply chains overseas. In addition to the recommendations made in the research report around suggested improvements to the legislation, the project team submitted evidence to a Home Affairs Select Committee call in September 2018 which is reviewing the Modern Slavery Act. The team are currently in discussion with a legal firm around taking the project findings further through legal action.

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### **Blood bricks: examining the climate change–modern slavery nexus in the Cambodian construction industry**

The research team was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Professor Katherine Brickell, Royal Holloway, University of London.

# THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN PEACE-BUILDING IN RWANDA AND SOUTH AFRICA



In 1994, both Rwanda and South Africa emerged from a long and protracted history of colonisation, conflict, genocide, and apartheid which left lasting scars on their education systems. Both countries have undertaken educational reforms to try to strengthen social cohesion. Research led by the University of Sussex in collaboration with the University of Rwanda and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town examined how education policy interventions have helped teachers to become active agents of peace-building. It found that more professional development, policy direction, and support are needed.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Education plays a vital role in rebuilding crisis-affected communities and preparing residents for a peaceful future. However, despite progress being made in both South Africa and Rwanda, significant challenges remain in rebuilding education systems that promote and create conditions in which teachers – many of whom were former victims and perpetrators of violence – can play a key role in nation-building, identity construction, and peace and reconciliation.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Data collected from one-to-one interviews with education and peace-building stakeholders, focus groups, lesson observations, and analyses of statistical data and policy documents helped researchers understand the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in post-conflict environments.

In both countries, findings showed an uneven distribution of well-trained, quality teachers as well as a shortage of teachers able to teach effectively in the language of instruction. Trust between teachers and students was found to be low, making teachers less open to developing practices to promote peace and social cohesion. Furthermore, there was a general consensus among teachers that professional development provision failed to equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle historical legacies that continue to fracture society along race, class, gender, and ethnic lines.

The research also highlighted how the two countries' national education policy directives took different approaches to guide how teachers might contribute to their respective policy visions of peace. In Rwanda, for example, the state has incorporated teachers into



Photo: In a South African High School, a trainee teacher helps a pupil with her homework. Credit: Graeme Williams / Panos.

the mission of eradicating ethnic differences with the objective of emphasising a collective 'Rwandanness'. In South Africa, teachers are expected to support the idea of a 'rainbow nation' embracing diversity.

Based on their findings, the researchers made the following policy recommendations:

**Improve teacher distribution:** Equitable distribution of teachers in post-conflict contexts involves getting the right teachers into both rural and urban locations, serving the most disadvantaged and those most impacted by historic conflict.

**Build trust in and accountability of teachers:** Student-teacher trust and accountability are crucial for social cohesion initiatives. Teacher Councils such as South African Council for Educators (SACE) in South Africa and Rwanda Education Board (REB) in Rwanda, which are designed to promote teacher trust and accountability, require more support.

**Develop socially cohesive curricula and textbooks:** A socially cohesive curriculum can help to lay the foundations for a democratic, open, and united society. Textbooks should be free from bias and discrimination, and should actively disrupt assumptions about identity markers such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, region, and language.

**Support teachers to develop inclusive pedagogies:** Teachers need to be provided with the psychosocial support and understanding to overcome their 'woundedness' as a result of the histories of conflict in both countries as well as engage with their own prejudices and biases when it comes to teaching, particularly in relation to genocide in Rwanda and apartheid in South Africa.

## **THE IMPACT**

Several universities across South Africa are revamping their inclusive education programmes to better prepare teachers drawing on insights from the research. A teacher educator from the University of Cape Town said, 'We are looking at this research in terms of inserting key information and analysis into the various modules on teacher practice and teacher-pupil engagement around conflict situations and the generation of greater solidarity.'

In addition, in South Africa, the project's Principal Investigator, Yusuf Sayed, was appointed as a member of the Department for Basic Education's Ministerial Task Team for the review of textbooks. This review focuses on issues of discrimination, equity, and social cohesion.

Workshops were also held to share findings with policymakers. As a result, in Rwanda, ministry officials have agreed to embark on the implementation of

continuing professional development, focusing particularly on social cohesion and peace-building.

An ongoing dialogue between the research team and the South African Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Enver Surty, culminated in the Teachers and Social Cohesion Roundtable in 2016; and in 2017, on the 20-year anniversary of the South African Constitution, Mr Surty assured that the work would inform future social cohesion developments in education. This was echoed by the Executive Director of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, Stanley Henkeman, who said: 'The research project has proved to be an invaluable contribution to the renewal and transformation of the South African education system. It deals with matters of inclusion and social cohesion in a holistic manner and provides useful insights for educators.'

## **FURTHER READING**

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### **Engaging Teachers in Peace-building in Post-Conflict Contexts: Evaluating Education Interventions in Rwanda and South Africa**

The research team was funded by the ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Yusuf Sayed, Professor of International Education and Development Policy, University of Sussex, UK. The research is a collaborative project involving the University of Bristol, UK; the Centre for International Teacher Education (CITE) at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa; and the College of Education, University of Rwanda.

# UNDERSTANDING DISPLACEMENT AND URBANISATION IN SOMALI CITIES



Somalia has one of the largest populations of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world: an estimated 2.6 million in 2018. Yet little is known about the way displaced people experience flight and resettlement, how they learn to navigate their new city lives, and what measures they take to improve their security. The ESRC-DFID-funded ‘Security on the Move’ project captured the experiences of displaced people in four Somali cities and provided spaces for them to raise their concerns with policymakers. The study showed that land, tenure and labour insecurity consistently feature in their lives. Living conditions differed considerably depending on the duration of settlement, individuals’ connection to local power-holders, and their gender. However, in all four cities, displaced people provided services within the expanding urban economies. Physical insecurity remained a threat, as people continued to experience evictions, domestic violence, crime, or threats posed by armed groups.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

Somali cities are growing rapidly. In the context of ongoing conflicts, international intervention and attempts towards state reconstruction, little political attention has been given to the massive challenges of war-induced urbanisation. The numbers of displaced people remain high, and many move to cities where

they erect make-shift shelters in vacant urban spaces, squat in abandoned buildings, or join sprawling camps on the outskirts. These forms of in-migration increase population density and lead to unregulated expansion of cities. This increases pressure on the urban and rural environment, with rising demands for resource input (land, food, energy, water) and



© Durham University (Picture taken by Yasiin, a displaced person in Bosaaso and project participant. A selection of the photos from the project exhibition is available at <https://securityonthemove.co.uk/photo-exhibition/>)

waste output. Although state capacity varies across the politically fragmented Somali territories, there is generally little or no institutional experience of long-term urban planning.

## **THE RESEARCH**

Durham University, together with Noragric and the Somali civil society organisation SOWELPA, used a combination of narrative interviews and photo-voice methods to gain insights into these vulnerabilities, and the strategies people develop to mitigate insecurity and rebuild their lives. The research engaged with 121 displaced people and 24 representatives of local authorities in the cities of Baidoa, Bosaaso, Hargeisa and Mogadishu. Forty internally displaced people were also trained and equipped to take photographs that document their everyday lives in order to present their perspectives on security and urbanisation across these cities. The majority of research participants explained how they had fled from a combination of violence and ecological shocks. Many described how recurrent droughts killed livestock, made farming impossible, deprived them of their means of subsistence, and caused the death of loved ones. A high number also spoke of ongoing violence, whether fighting between government-affiliated forces and al-Shabaab, violent harassment, extortion, or localised clashes between armed groups.

The study showed that extreme precarity and often also physical violence remain a defining feature of displacement, even after people settle in cities. Domestic violence was prevalent, and violence by militias, the state's security forces or criminals continues in all four cities, albeit in varying degrees. Crime, often committed by groups of young men, was the biggest security issue in Hargeisa and Bosaaso, while gun violence involving militias or governmental forces was prevalent in Mogadishu and to a lesser extent Baidoa. The location of settlements, types of accommodation, tenure and housing security depend on resources available to displaced people, negotiations between them and urban landowners, and on (potential) inclusion in planned resettlement schemes. In all four cities, displaced people contributed to the physical reconstruction, through clearance of land, the establishment of shelters, and by attracting businesses and humanitarian support. Over time, the settlements developed their own physical and social infrastructures including road and transport networks, and water and electricity supplies. These have successively integrated new settlements into the wider city. Displaced people also provide a huge (casual) workforce in the cities offering many services to residents including laundry, housework, portering, construction labour, and small trade.

## **THE IMPACT**

The research has had a conceptual impact in that it has better informed policymakers and the directly affected communities. Through the organisation of exhibitions of the participants' photos and testimonies in all four cities, the project emphasised self-representation. It provided displaced people with the space and the means to communicate their concerns to policymakers, including the mayors of Bosaaso, Baidoa and Mogadishu, the Commissioner for IDPs and returnees in Baidoa, and representatives of international and national organisations (e.g. International Organization for Migration, United Nations Development Programme, Danish Refugee Council, and the UN Durable Solutions Office).

These exhibitions and research findings were covered by Somali media outlets, including radio, television, and online media. This coverage gave voice to those who are often ignored or actively silenced, and created awareness around the lives of displaced people. Furthermore, the work has had an academic impact as researchers were invited by the Rift Valley Institute (RVI) and the World Bank to contribute to further studies on migration and urbanisation. The lead researcher has also gone on to co-direct the RVI's Horn of Africa annual training course for high-level policymakers particularly focusing on mobility and urbanisation.

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Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, [www.internal-displacement.org/countries/somalia](http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/somalia)

Research briefs for the four cities, and updates on publications: <http://securityonthemove.co.uk/publications/>



The '**Security on the Move**' project was funded by ESRC-FCDO's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and led by Jutta Bakonyi, Durham University, Noragric at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences, and the Somali civil society organisation SOWELPA, in collaboration with UN-Habitat.





**Photo:** Turkana road marshals employed by the local company Amailo, subcontracted by Tullow. Work for local residents is thinly spread and precarious – road marshals, concrete mixers, and cleaners are the more common types of work available for Turkana. Few are employed in more specialist positions on oil rigs.

To find out more read 'Building Peace In the New Oil Frontiers of Northern Kenya' on page 6.

**Credit:** Sven Torfinn

# THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research

THIS BOOKLET PROFILES A SELECTION OF RESEARCH FUNDED BY THE ESRC-FCDO STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AND THE IMPACT THEY HAVE ACHIEVED. WHILE THESE STORIES ONLY SHOW A SNAPSHOT OF THE RESEARCH, THEY ALL HIGHLIGHT THE MULTIPLE, UNIQUE AND SOMETIMES SURPRISING PATHS TO ACHIEVING IMPACT.

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