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Pathways through Early Childhood Education in Ethiopia, India and Peru: Rights, Equity and Diversity

August 2009

Martin Woodhead



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Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	ii
The Author	ii
1. Introduction	1
2. Rights, equity and diversity	2
3. Early education for all?	3
4. Early childhood in Ethiopia	5
Beniam: early transitions in rural Ethiopia	6
5. Early childhood in Peru	8
Lupe: early transitions in urban Peru	11
6. Early childhood in Andhra Pradesh (India)	13
Revanth: early transitions in Andhra Pradesh	16
7. Realistic promises for early childhood?	18
Quality and inequalities	18
References	21

Abstract

The potential of quality early childhood and primary education to help break inter-generational poverty cycles is widely recognised. My focus is on how far this potential is being translated into reality, through implementing positive early childhood policies in practice. The paper summarises evidence from Young Lives research into early transitions, based on both survey and in-depth qualitative research with 2,000 Young Lives younger cohort children in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh (India) and Peru. Primary education is still being consolidated in Ethiopia, and pre-school is a minority urban experience, mainly offered by the private sector. Peru offers a very different story, with a well-established government primary and pre-school system but concerns about quality and coordination between sectors. Andhra Pradesh offers the most complex set of challenges, with a long-established government system of ECCE, but an increasing trend towards use of private services, including amongst the poorest communities. The paper offers five broad conclusions, about the importance of: ensuring quality and equity in early education; better coordinated pre-school and school systems; targeting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; recognising the full range of equity issues; and ensuring more effective governance, including governance of the private sector.

Acknowledgements

This paper is part of ongoing research within Young Lives into early childhood transitions. The early transitions stream within Young Lives is supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, which funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development and child rights (www.bernardvanleer.org). This paper looks at children's experiences of early transitions within early childhood and primary education in three of the four Young Lives study countries. It summarises research carried out for a much longer report published as part of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's own 'Studies in Early Childhood Transitions' series. The full report is available as:

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This paper was first presented as a keynote lecture at the University of Melbourne, Centre for Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood, Annual Conference in November 2008. Many Young Lives project colleagues contributed to the research reported in this paper, especially country-based researchers: Patricia Ames, Vanessa Rojas (Peru), Yisak Tafere, Workneh Abebe (Ethiopia), Uma Vennam, Anuradha Komanduri (Andhra Pradesh, India); and UK-based researchers: Gina Crivello, Laura Camfield, Natalia Streuli, Lita Cameron and Karin Heissler (Oxford).

For other reports of Young lives early transitions research, see Ames et al. 2009; Vennam et al. forthcoming 2009; Vogler et al. 2008, as well as forthcoming country-based reports within the 'Studies in Early Childhood Transitions' working paper series published by Bernard van Leer Foundation.

The Author

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The views expressed here are those of the author(s). They are not necessarily those of the Young Lives project, the University of Oxford, DFID or other funders.

1. Introduction

Early childhood has moved closer towards being in the global policy spotlight than ever before. Numerous lines of research have converged to produce a compelling case for prioritising early childhood care and education (ECCE) services. Research demonstrates that the earliest years of a child's life is a crucial period of biological, neurological, psychological, social and emotional growth and change; that poverty and other disadvantages can impact in numerous (and in some respects irreversible) ways on 'developmental potential'; and that well-planned early interventions can have long term positive outcomes for children. Economic analyses have translated research into a compelling claim that access to quality early childhood care and education isn't just good for children's development and consistent with realising their rights; it is an important pro-poor strategy capable of increasing equity. And it can also be cost effective, with some well-designed programmes calculating high rates of return from early 'investment in human capital', in some cases many times higher than initial financial investment in the programme. Underlying all these persuasive lines of research and analysis is the foundation principle on which all initiatives should be built – that young children have a right to development and to education in their best interests, without discrimination (Woodhead 2006; Siraj-Blatchford and Woodhead 2009).

Growing global recognition of the potential of quality programmes to improve and change young lives provides the backdrop for this paper. My focus is on how far this potential is being translated into reality, through implementing positive early childhood policies in practice. My starting point is what might be described as 'the everyday ordinariness' of the ECCE programmes that most children actually attend, if they have access to a programme at all.

This paper is a summary of a report by Woodhead et al. (forthcoming, 2009). It draws on data from Young Lives, a 15-year longitudinal study of 12,000 children growing up in poverty in Ethiopia, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam. The study is tracking two age groups, a younger and an older cohort. This paper is based on research with the younger cohort, namely 6,000 children and families across three of the Young Lives countries: Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh) and Peru. These children were around 5 to 6 years old and at the point of transition to primary school when they were studied in 2006-7. The research comprised a combination of large-scale survey and detailed qualitative sub-studies, including case studies of individual children. Studying experiences and perspectives of Young Lives parents and children makes it possible to examine the diversities in children's early childhood experiences in three contrasting contexts. From a policy viewpoint the key question is how far promises made for what can be achieved in early childhood are currently being translated into practice, in terms of accessible, equitable, quality programmes and successful school transitions.

2. Rights, equity and diversity

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is arguably now one of the most significant starting points for policy development on behalf of the world's young children. It requires that all children be respected as persons in their own right, and states four 'general principles': the right to survival and development; to non-discrimination; to respect for views and feelings; and the 'best interests of the child' as a primary consideration (Articles 6, 2, 12 and 3). It has been ratified by nearly all countries, and national governments have to make regular reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on progress in implementing the Convention.

But implementing a child-rights approach within early childhood policies and practices is still only at the beginning. Indeed, one of the major reasons the UN Committee decided to devote its Day of General Discussion 2004 to early childhood – defined as the period below the age of 8 years – was expressly because country reports had devoted so little attention to the implications of the UNCRC for the youngest children. Subsequently, the Committee prepared an interpretive document, General Comment 7 on 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood', ratified in September 2005 (<http://www.ohchr.org>).

The General Comment confirms that: 'young children are holders of all the rights enshrined in the Convention. ... [and] that the Convention on the Rights of the Child is to be applied holistically in early childhood, taking account of the principle of the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights' (Paragraph 3). It goes on to review implications of the UNCRC for policy development in early childhood, covering general principles, assistance to parents and families, development of comprehensive services, young children in need of special protection and resources and capacity building.

Framing early childhood policy in terms of children's rights departs radically from many formerly influential images of young children. Children are no longer envisaged merely as the recipients of services, beneficiaries of protective measures, nor subjects of social experiments. Early childhood should not be seen primarily as an investment opportunity, about exploiting human capital to achieve strong economic outcomes for children and for society. Nor should the primary motive be to enable women to enter into the labour force. These justifications may play a role in policy, but they should not be seen as the foundations on which early care and education policies and services are built. Instead, every child's rights are respected as an end in themselves. Genuinely child-centred policies recognise each child's entitlement to care, education and comprehensive services; to quality of life during each day of their young lives – in their best interests – as the underpinning principle. This is matched by identification of the responsibilities of caregivers, communities and the State to enable young children to realise their rights in practice. Other justifications build on this foundation, including the importance of promoting social equity, respecting cultural diversity and achieving economic benefits, and they are underpinned by scientific evidence about, for example, the formative significance of the early years, the consequences of early adversities and the long-term benefits of quality programmes.

3. Early education for all?

Much progress has been made towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education. However, the limitation of focussing on primary education access alone – unless this is linked to ensuring quality and positive outcomes – is widely recognised. At the same time, policy debates have been drawn to another question: whether starting school at 5, 6 or 7 years old is already too late as a pro-poor strategy. By the time most children start school, their most formative years are already past, inequalities in readiness for school are already well established, and the opportunities for reducing these inequalities through schooling are very limited in practice. More usually, inequalities increase with age, as Young Lives data confirms (Cueto 2008). Bearing this in mind, inability to access pre-school education is ‘Zone of Exclusion 0’ according to the model proposed by Lewin (2007).¹

The Dakar Framework for Action for Education For All (EFA) prioritised early childhood as Goal 1:

Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children. (*World Education Forum, Dakar, 26-28 April 2000*)

Young children’s right to education has been set out in some detail in the UN Committee’s General Comment 7 (2005). The Committee goes beyond a narrow interpretation of education as ‘schooling’:

The Committee interprets the right to education during early childhood as beginning at birth and closely linked to young children’s right to maximum development (Art. 6.2). States parties are reminded that children’s right to education includes all children, and that girls should be enabled to participate in education, without discrimination of any kind. (*General Comment 7, Art. 2*)

General Comment 7 offers a vision for comprehensive, community services, both for children and for parents and other caregivers. These policy initiatives have been bolstered by the growing scientific case for ECCE endorsed by leading development economists (notably Heckman 2006), in turn drawing on robust evaluation data demonstrating long-term outcomes of early intervention, whether through home-based or centre-based education programmes (reviewed by Engle et al. 2007).

The case for quality ECCE, especially targeted towards disadvantaged groups, is indisputable. Yet, despite rapid global expansion, inability to access such programmes adds to the multiple disadvantages of the poorest groups in many country contexts, especially in rural locations (UNESCO 2007). The equity challenges for early childhood are huge. Many high-quality programmes have been established throughout the world, with dedicated professionals ensuring millions of individual children benefit. Even so, the overall picture is far less encouraging. Globally, and within many regions and countries, current arrangements for ECCE are at risk of reinforcing rather than combating inequalities. Moreover, in some countries, inequities in early childhood are amplified by inadequacies of primary education, perpetuating inter-generational poverty cycles. A report to UNESCO concluded:

1 The CREATE research centre on access to education has identified seven Zones of Exclusion from basic education to shape policy dialogue. Zone 0 covers pre-school participation. More information available at: http://www.create-rpc.org/pdf_documents/Policy_Brief_Zones.pdf

There is a major crisis during the first critical years of primary education across many parts of the developing world. Many children are dropping out altogether or repeating classes – the vast majority within the first two years. The problem is at its worst in countries where poverty, exclusion and other systemic factors exacerbate the situation (overcrowded classrooms, extremely high teacher-child ratios, early or late enrolment into grade 1 etc). (*Arnold et al. 2006: 19*)

Faced with these challenges in primary education, the potential for early childhood programmes to support children's learning and improve school readiness are substantial. But there are also tricky policy issues to be confronted, for example about the value of extending children's education into the early years unless sufficient resources and quality can be assured in primary as well as early education, and about building a stronger partnership within and between early childhood and primary education systems that are all too often organisationally and professional separate, even fragmented. While ECCE has been at the forefront of curriculum and pedagogical innovation in some countries, the risk in many others is that expanded ECCE will simply extend low-quality, weakly resourced and managed schooling into children's earliest years.

Young Lives data confirms global evidence of rapid growth in early education opportunities in our four study countries. Young Lives 5 to 6 year olds were reported as having attended pre-school at some point since their third birthday by 94 per cent of caregivers in Vietnam, 87 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, and 84 per cent in Peru, with very little difference in overall participation rates for girls and boys at this stage of their education. It is only in Ethiopia that pre-school is a minority experience (just 25 per cent of the sample) and mainly in urban areas, which is not surprising given that the policy priority (and substantial achievement) has been in expansion of basic primary education (UNESCO 2007). Again, the gender imbalance favours boys, but only by 2 per cent.

In the rest of the paper, I elaborate on some of the major issues facing young children and their families in three of these countries: Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh (India) and Peru. These countries highlight the challenges faced in diverse contexts. The paper begins with Ethiopia, where primary education is still being consolidated and pre-school is a minority urban experience, mainly offered by the private sector. Peru is a very different story, with a well-established government primary and pre-school system but concerns about quality and coordination between sectors. Andhra Pradesh offers the most complex set of challenges, with a long-established government system of ECCE, but an increasing trend towards use of private services, including amongst the poorest communities. Vietnam (the fourth Young Lives study country) is not included in this paper, but that doesn't mean it does not offer an interesting additional example. On the contrary, 90 per cent of Young Lives children in Vietnam have experienced some kind of early childhood programme since their third birthday according to their parents, with no gender difference in access and greater equity in relation to poverty than for other countries. One of the biggest challenges in Vietnam is to ensure ethnic minorities access quality early and primary education, and this is the focus of a separate paper (Truong, forthcoming).

4. Early childhood in Ethiopia

Ethiopia was identified in the Education For All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report 2008 as one of the countries that has seen the most rapid progress towards the Dakar goals, notably universal enrolment and gender parity at the primary level. For example, the net enrolment ratio in primary education increased from 33 per cent to 68 per cent between 1999 and 2005, and gender equity has improved (38 per cent of boys versus 28 per cent of girls in 1999 to 71 per cent of boys versus 66 per cent of girls (UNESCO 2007: 291)). Meanwhile, the role of government in providing pre-school services has been minimal. This is not surprising. Primary education is still being consolidated in Ethiopia, and current public expenditure is still insufficient to ensure even basic primary schools, especially in many isolated communities. To help fill the vacuum at pre-primary level, the government is encouraging the involvement of other partners, including the private sector.

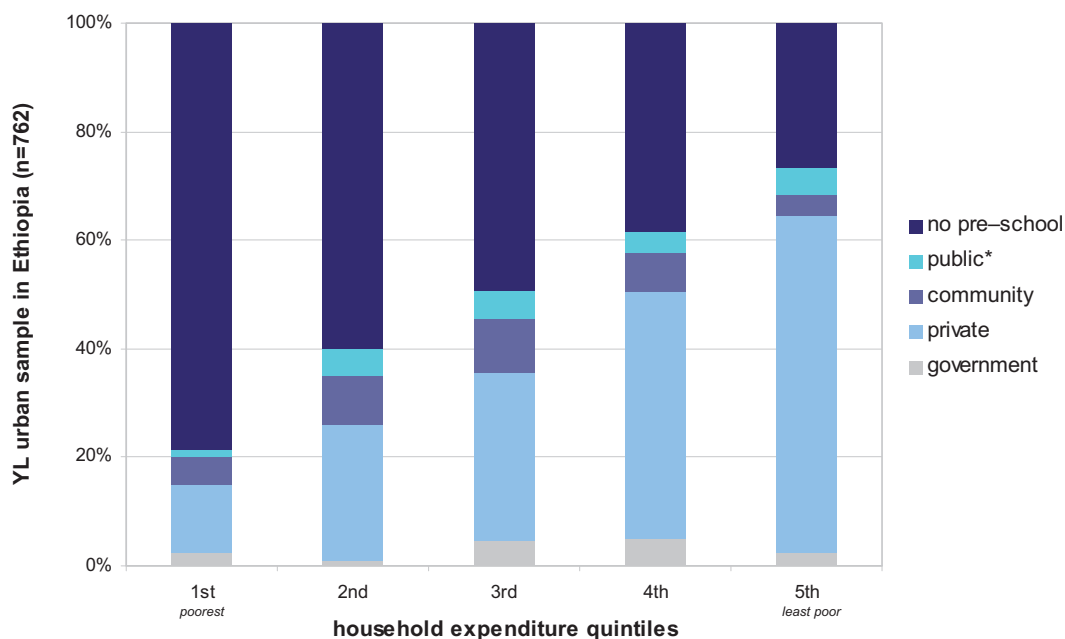
Young Lives research confirms that the opportunity to attend pre-school is almost entirely restricted to urban children. Nearly 58 per cent of children in urban communities had attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3. In contrast, less than 4 per cent of rural children had attended pre-school and for many rural communities even accessing basic primary schooling remains elusive. Also, in those few cases where rural children did access pre-school, they did so later (average around 55 months) than their urban counterparts (48 months).

Figure 1 shows different types of pre-school attended by children in urban areas, with the sample equally divided into five poverty quintiles (where children in quintile 1 are from the poorest households, and quintile 5 are the least poor in the sample).² Pre-school in rural areas is not included as the number of children this accounts for is very small indeed (only 43 children). This highlights the modest but fairly equitable role played by government and community-based services. It also confirms that private pre-schools are the main option for all groups, and that access to private pre-schools strongly favours the more advantaged groups.

2 Household expenditure is considered the most appropriate poverty indicator, based on data from Young Lives survey of individual households and calculated as the sum of the estimated value (approximated to the past 30 days, i.e., a month), of food (bought + home grown + gifts/transfers) and non-food (excluding durables such as furniture, gold jewellery and one-off expenditure). This monthly figure is then divided by household size.

3 For Ethiopia, this analysis is given only for children in urban areas because the sample of rural children with pre-school experience was too small (n=43).

Figure 1. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels: urban sample in Ethiopia³



* Public schools refer to schools that are funded partly by the government and partly by fees paid by students.

The conclusion seems clear enough. If early education is to fulfil its promise, especially in offering educational equity to disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, then this will require major targeted investment in quality programmes, and giving attention to rural as well as urban communities. But it would be a mistake to isolate inequities in early education from the wider range of challenges facing the education system in Ethiopia.

Beniam: early transitions in rural Ethiopia

These challenges can be illustrated through one of the rural communities selected by the Young Lives team for in-depth study, and the particular case of Beniam who was 6 years old when the research team visited his village in 2007. Beniam currently lives with both his parents and siblings. Like most young children, he is already expected to contribute to his family. He already has a variety of responsibilities, both at home and in the fields. He takes care of his one-year-old brother, fetches water and cleans the house. He also sells goods in the small family shop when his mother is dealing with other domestic chores. In the morning, he helps his mother clean out the cattle dung and then during the daytime he looks after the cattle in the field.

This has been Beniam’s early education. There is no organised pre-school programme available to his community, even if his parents could afford to send their children to it. But Beniam’s parents do want their son to go to primary school. His father thinks education ‘is useful for the child’, especially in a context where agricultural work is not as promising as in the past. Perhaps his experience tells us something about the impact of climate change.

[We] are running out of land to support [ourselves] in farming... there is weather pollution here... the water has dried up. [All this is putting farming at risk and therefore I do not think]... anyone will send their children to the farm anymore.

However, it is unlikely this father's educational aspirations for his son will work out in practice. Even when Beniam does get access to school, Young Lives' classroom observations draw attention to the very low levels of resources for his education. For example, one fieldworker reports:

Children had no chairs or tables in their classrooms. Children were observed sitting either on stones or long wooden benches made from whole tree trunks. Others sit on the floor and use their knee as a table for writing. Children have little access to library and toilets. The rooms are poorly built, and the floor is made of loose stones. Students share text books. Children also complained that some teachers [are] repeatedly absent from schools and they spend their time without learning when the teachers do not enter classes. All these contributed a lot to drop out and absenteeism.

All these factors have an adverse effect on the quality and perceived value of education, which may in turn prevent the families in the community from sending their children to school.

Additional factors act as obstacles for families with young children who would like their children to go to primary school. Attendance is costly for families, even where education is provided by the government. According to a primary school teacher in Beniam's village, most of the households in the community are 'very poor' and find it difficult to cover the cost of school-related expenses, such as tuition fees and educational materials. There are also the 'opportunity costs' for households where income only marginally meets the family's basic needs, and children like Beniam are expected to play an active role in their family's economic activity, which they must combine with attending school. This is particularly the case for boys. As one parent put it, a child is called a 'good shepherd when he is 8'.

Finally, even gaining admission to primary school can be a challenge for poor parents. Beniam's father expected him to start school in 2007, but the teacher said he was too young to be admitted. This highlights a very important issue that many children, and rural children in particular, face in Ethiopia: they do not know their precise age. Many children in rural areas do not have a birth certificate, and without the required documentation, families are unable to prove their age. As a response, many schools rely on a traditional way to assess children's physical maturity which they use as an indicator of 'school readiness': teachers ask children to stretch one hand over their head and touch their ear.

Despite Beniam's evident maturity in so many practical ways, he didn't pass this basic test. However, Beniam himself wasn't too concerned because he sees his future very differently from his father. He said, '[I] won't go to school [next year]' as '[I] can't write'. When asked if he wanted to learn in the future, he replied, 'No... I don't have the interest'. What he wants to do in the future is 'become a shepherd' and 'look after the cattle'.

In fact, boys like Beniam have found an interesting way of balancing work and school: they herd in groups. Around 15 children get together and then organise the herding by turns. All children bring their animals to a specific location and then one of them looks after them while the others go, for example, to school. In this way, children are off from school only once every two weeks to take care of the animals rather than every day. This could be a good solution to enable children like Beniam to attend school... one day. Young Lives research teams are now, at time of writing in late 2008, going back to visit the communities and

children participating in in-depth qualitative research to find out more about the factors influencing diverse pathways, including those of children like Beniam.

To summarise, despite the progress towards EFA goals in Ethiopia, the poorest children in Ethiopian communities experience multiple educational disadvantages, with limited access to pre-school education being amplified by the poor quality of many primary schools. In some ways, boys like Beniam do have an advantage compared to their sisters, especially in the later years of primary schooling. This isn't just about different educational aspirations for boys versus girls. Parents in Ethiopia have one particular worry, that rural schools are often a long walk from children's homes. There is a very strong fear that older girls are at risk of being molested or abducted, so they prefer to keep the girls closer to home where they can contribute to domestic chores and care of younger siblings.

These challenges facing a poor rural community draw attention to a major policy dilemma about the priority given to expanding early education in situations where the infrastructure, resourcing and quality of primary education is relatively weak. Put simply, expanding early childhood education in low-resource contexts may make UNESCO EFA statistics look more impressive, but may also entail a risk of children being required to spend even more of their young lives in low-quality schooling. Besides being a violation of children's right to education, it is a very inefficient use of human capital.

One telling finding comes from the Young Lives Older Cohort survey of 1,000 12-years-old in 2006. Only 6 per cent of children reported that they were not enrolled in primary school, yet as many as 39 per cent of these 12 year olds were not able to read a simple sentence as part of cognitive and educational assessments. Aside from these educational and economic considerations, there is a more immediate human cost for children like Beniam if the schools they are required to attend are low quality. While they are sitting in rows reciting the alphabet, they are not building on the domestic and farming skills that have traditionally sustained their livelihoods, albeit vulnerable subsistence livelihoods that are under threat. The choices open to Beniam and his parents are limited and uncertain compared to those of more affluent children attending private pre-schools and schools in Addis Ababa and other rapidly growing urban communities. Young Lives in-depth group interviews with children in Ethiopia confirmed that young people are themselves aware of the significance of schooling in shaping their futures. Attending private school was consistently identified as contributing to a child's well-being, while attending government school was seen as a sign of 'not living well' (see Camfield and Tafere 2008).

5. Early childhood in Peru

Peru has experienced a rapid expansion of early childhood education, building on near universal primary education provision, with a net primary school enrolment ratio of 96 per cent in 2005 (UNESCO 2007). Already in 1972, early education became a high priority for the government and pre-school was renamed 'Initial Education'. It is estimated that gross enrolment rates in pre-school education in Peru more than doubled from 30 per cent in 1991 to 68 per cent in 2006 (www.uis.unesco.org). Early education provision in Peru has been mainly government funded, with two main types of pre-school: low-resourced community-based programmes known as PRONOEIs (*Programas no Escolarizados de Educación Inicial*, school programmes for early education) and better-resourced, professionally staffed programmes known as CEIs (*Centros de Educación Inicial*, early education centres). Here already an issue of equity emerges, in that the most disadvantaged, especially rural children

and those living in the outskirts of the cities, are more likely to access PRONOEIs while the CEIs are more often found in urban and more advantaged areas.

In summary, the overall levels of early childhood provision are high in Peru; indeed the percentage of the age group accessing pre-school is amongst the highest in the region. But official statistics disguise significant diversity in access, character, resourcing and quality of both public and private provision. Of greatest concern is that the ‘most vulnerable and disadvantaged children’ (prioritised by Dakar Goal 1) are at risk of being excluded from quality pre-school education.

These concerns are reinforced by data from Young Lives when the 2,000 younger cohort children were around 5 to 6 and their parents were asked whether their child had attended pre-school at any point since their third birthday. Although overall participation rates are remarkably high (84 per cent), with only a small gender difference (85 per cent boys and 82 per cent girls), other inequities are quite marked. Twenty-nine per cent of 6-year-old children from the poorest households have no experience of attending pre-school, despite being seen as most likely to benefit (in terms of, for example, preparation for school). By contrast, only 4 per cent of children from more advantaged households have not attended pre-school at some point since they were 3 years old. However, these overall figures underestimate the inequalities because they do not distinguish access to lower-resourced PRONOEIs compared to better-resourced CEIs. Also, they do not distinguish the very different opportunities available to urban versus rural children, and the contributions of public versus private provision, (see Figures 2 and 3).

Figure 2. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels: urban sample in Peru

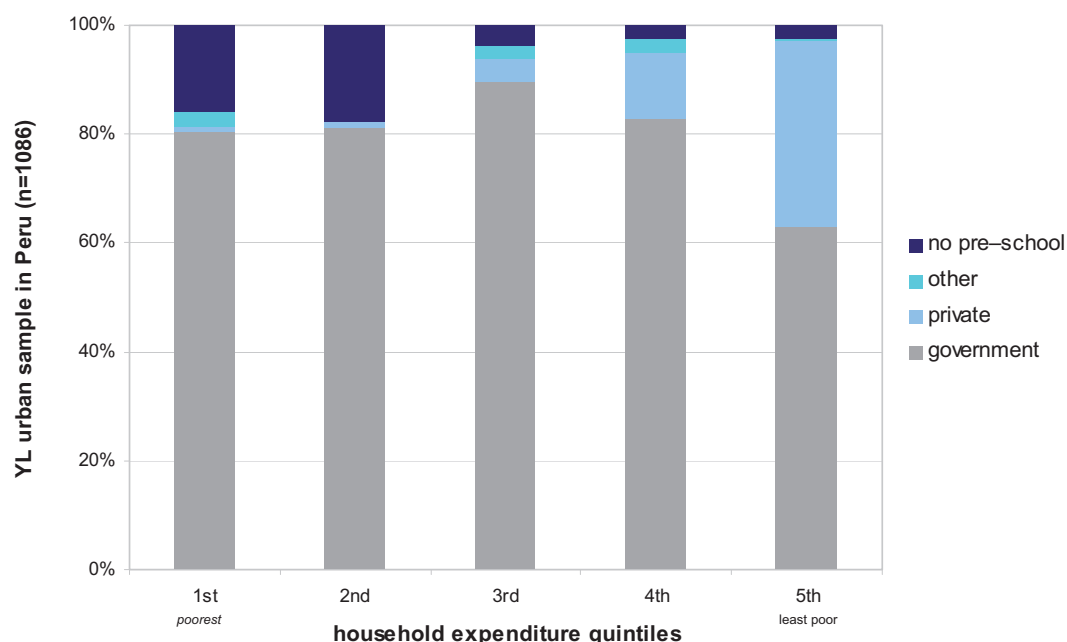
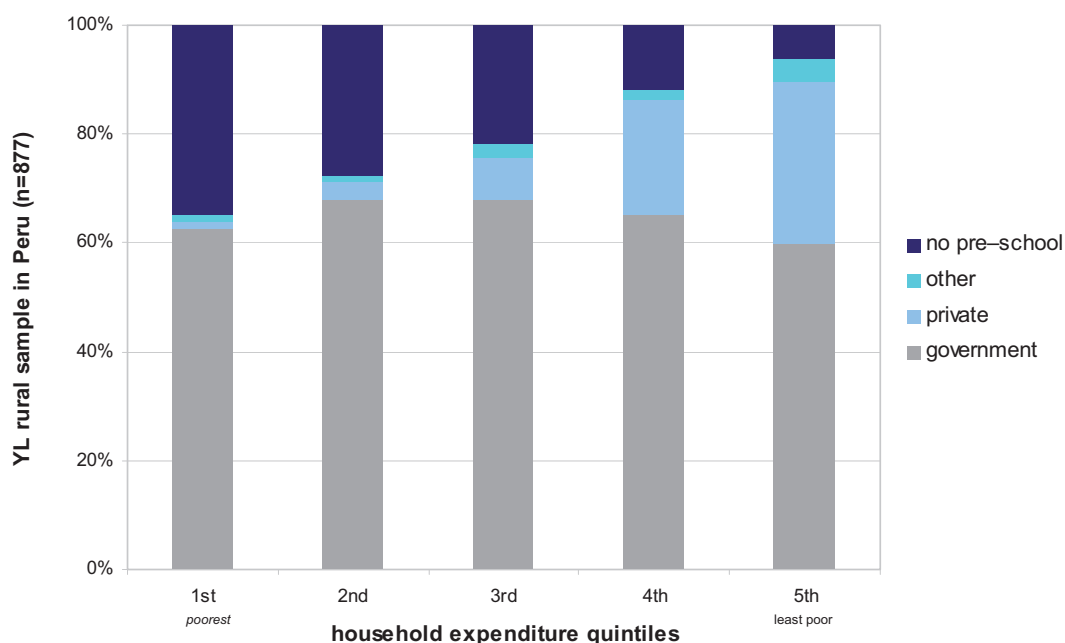


Figure 3. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels: rural sample in Peru



As in most countries, pre-school services in Peru have evolved most rapidly in urban communities. More than 92 per cent of the urban Peru sample is reported to have attended pre-school at some point since the age of 3, compared to 78 per cent of rural children.⁴ Figures 2 and 3 confirm that most children attend government pre-schools irrespective of where they live and of household poverty levels. In urban communities, 15.9 per cent of the 'most poor' children did not access pre-school, compared to 2.4 per cent of the 'least poor'. In rural communities, 34.9 per cent of the 'most poor' children did not access pre-school, compared to 6.3 per cent of the 'least poor'. These statistics confirm that rates of attendance at pre-school are linked to poverty levels for both urban and rural children.

Figure 3 also suggests that, for rural children, these inequalities are largely about differential access to government-run pre-schools, since the private sector is only of marginal significance as a provider for most children. However, amongst the least poor group, it accounts for nearly 30 per cent of the children. Figure 2 shows that in urban settings the picture is more complex. The highest percentages of children in government-run pre-schools come from the mid-range quintile (3rd). Children living in the 'most poor' households have less access to government pre-schools. At the other end of the scale, 'least poor' households make less use of government pre-schools, but this is mainly because 34.1 per cent of children are attending a private pre-school.

In short, Young Lives research shows very clearly that children in Peru start school on a far from equitable footing. Although, overall participation rates are high, it is the poorer households that have the lowest participation rates, even though these children might be expected to gain most from pre-school in terms of preparation for the transition to school. Another way to look at these differentials is in relation to parental education levels. Thus, amongst the Peru sample, virtually all children with highly educated mothers (with more than

⁴ The Young Lives project followed the same definition as that outlined by the Peruvian National Statistics Office (INEI), which defines a 'rural' community as one that has less than 100 dwellings and is not the capital of a district.

ten years of school) have attended pre-school, whereas over 30 per cent of children whose mothers have low levels of education (zero to four years) will have begun first grade without any experience of a pre-school programme, which risks perpetuating intergenerational poverty and inequalities.

Ensuring equity of access is not the only or even the major challenge for early education in Peru. Given that most children attend some kind of pre-school before they start first grade, the major emphasis of Young Lives qualitative research has been on the relationship between early childhood and primary education. Peru, in common with many countries, shows a marked organisational, professional and pedagogic divide between early childhood and primary education. This translates into issues of continuity and discontinuity for children (Woodhead and Moss 2007) and shifts the question from 'are children ready for schools?' to 'are schools ready for children?' (Arnold et al. 2007). For detailed Young Lives research on these issues in Peru, see Ames et al. (2009).

Lupe: early transitions in urban Peru

A brief case study of 6-year-old Lupe illustrates these issues. She is growing up in one of the oldest and most well-established shanty towns in the capital city, Lima. This district is not among the poorest in the city and basic services such as water and electricity, schools, hospitals and public transportation are available for most people. However, families in this area experience other difficulties, such as living in overcrowded households, high unemployment, and high levels of criminality and insecurity. Lupe lives with both her parents, grandparents and two siblings. She was enrolled in a government-run pre-school from 3 years old and is now in primary school.

Lupe's parents value education as a stepping stone to a better life, and would like her to become a professional, maybe a teacher, a midwife or a doctor. Lupe's case illustrates the many different experiences and feelings that both parents and children go through while making their transition into primary school. This transition is far from being a straightforward process; in fact, it involves active adaptation of both parents and children. For example, while in pre-school, Lupe was only surrounded by children of her own age, because the two buildings were independent although located within the same compound. Now that she is in first grade, her parents are concerned about her spending time alone with older children during breaktime and in the toilets, and with boys in particular. Another issue is the suitability of the playground for young children as this is used by other children in school. The following quote from Lupe's mother illustrates the fears that some parents experience when changing schools:

It's like she's on her own, not like in pre-school, it's completely different, ... different. In pre-school they also take care of her, they looked after her. Here [in primary school] they don't, here the teacher stays in the classroom, she looks at them for a while but when all the children are together in the school-yard. Then she [Lupe] could tumble and fall, she might be pushed and hit... so many things can happen during the break time.

The differences between pre-school and primary school are not only related to the physical environment, but also to the teaching philosophy and practice in the classroom. For example, Lupe associated first grade with an 'assembly', which represents an adult place where important decisions are discussed in a fairly tense atmosphere. The world of play and symbolism that the children had known hitherto is over now: they have entered the adult world. In this regard, Lupe associated the beginning of primary school with the 'end of holidays', buying new school-related materials and having a 'bigger school bag', which may

symbolise the fact that she has more things to do now, more rules to follow and more responsibilities to fulfil.

Among parents and teachers, there is also an idea of primary school as a stricter and more rigorous place where children should learn 'to behave properly', 'work independently', 'to follow instructions' and 'to respect others'. The main problem here is that all this seems to be associated with tougher discipline. According to one of the teachers in this community, children who joined first grade often say to her: 'Miss, next year we're going to have a mean teacher who is going to hit us with a ruler', or: 'We're going to school... there they're going to pull our ears'.

Transitions are not only relevant as children enter school but throughout the entire cycle of education. This was made clear by Lupe, who highlighted the need for support in facing new circumstances when she starts second grade.

Lupe: I wonder how is it going to be when I'm 7 [years old]...

Interviewer: What grade would you be in when you are 7?

Lupe: Second grade. ...

Interviewer: And has anyone told you how second grade is gonna be like?

Lupe: No. ... I wonder how would it be...

Interviewer: And what do think?

Lupe: Well, second grade, ... I would need to put more effort on it.

Interviewer: Put more effort? Into what?

Lupe: My homework.

Interviewer: Your homework? Do you think it is going to be more difficult?

Lupe: Yes. More difficult than first grade.

Interviewer: And is first grade more difficult than pre-school?

Lupe: Yes. [...] A little bit.

Interviewer: What is going to be the most difficult thing?

Lupe: Difficult? ... not to fall behind.

A factor that contributes to the way in which schooling is experienced is peer relationships. This can be a positive influence as some children go to school because they want to hang out with their friends, but it could also be a limitation. For example, for Lupe, starting primary school was not an easy task. Although she was 'cognitively prepared', according to her mother it was difficult for her to make new friends as she was 'very shy'. Sometimes, children are bullied in school and this happened to Lupe. According to her, some girls were calling her names and only after she cried did the teacher solve the problem. Lupe seems to be striving to fit in and reveals high anxiety, which was evident during her individual interview.

All this points towards the need for better coordination between pre-school and primary school systems. Teachers from this community also agreed that a better link between them would help children and their caregivers in their transitions. At present, when children go to first grade they only bring their pre-school enrolment form. There is no exchange of information about children's adaptation process, learning skills, or anything like this. Everything starts from scratch.

Children's educational trajectories and experiences of schooling seem to be influenced by the expectations and the experiences of other family members. In short, ECCE in Peru appears to be facing the same challenges that have been confronted by education systems throughout the world, with a few notable exceptions. There is little evidence from this data of a 'strong and equal partnership' between sectors planned with the child's interests as the primary focus (OECD 2001, 2006). Indeed, the research teams' conclusion is that:

- (i) Transition from pre-school to first grade is not understood and structured as a process within and between educational institutions.
- (ii) Parents have an overall positive attitude towards education but little information on transitions. In this context, the main burden of adaptation rests on children, who show a positive attitude and abilities to cope with it. However, this is not necessarily easy for them and causes some stress. (Ames et al. 2009)

6. Early childhood in Andhra Pradesh (India)

In India, it was expected that the goal of universal primary education up to age 14 would be achieved by 1960. Nearly 50 years later, this final goal remains elusive, although the past decade has seen a substantial increase in enrolments in primary schools: 114 million in 2000-1 to 131 million in 2004-5 (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay 2008: 1-5). In Andhra Pradesh, overall enrolment in primary schools during 2006-07 was 73 per cent. In this context of rapid economic change where universal primary education is close to being achieved, education levels of parents are higher than in previous generations, parents recognise the potential of education to alter their children's fortunes, and they actively seek ways to boost their children's chances through early childhood and primary education.

Although government schools are still the major provision at primary level, India has witnessed very rapid growth in private schools, including in Andhra Pradesh, and that growth is largely at the expense of government school enrolments, rather than contributing to increases in overall enrolment. Thirty-seven per cent of children enrolled in primary education attended a private school in 2006-7 according to state government records (www.ssa.ap.nic.in). One of the major attractions of the private sector is that English is often offered as the medium of instruction. This is especially true for high schools, but the pattern percolates down through the primary sector, and in turn is impacting on early childhood too. Faced with widespread pressure for English-medium teaching, the Andhra Pradesh state government is beginning to introduce English instruction in some secondary schools, but for the time being the trend towards private English-medium schools is apparent at every level, as Young Lives research reveals.

Andhra Pradesh has a long established early childhood care system, based on *anganwadi* centres (literally 'courtyard shelter' in Hindi), under the umbrella of Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). The world's largest national early childhood programme, in terms of children enrolled, ICDS originated with the ambitious 1974 policy 'to provide adequate services to children, both before and after birth and through the period of growth to ensure their full physical, mental and social development... so that within a reasonable time all children in the country enjoy optimum conditions for their balanced growth' (National Policy for Children 1974, cited in CIRCUS 2006).

Officially launched in 1975, ICDS was conceived as a comprehensive early childhood intervention (a model influenced by HeadStart in USA), including immunisation, growth monitoring, health and referral services, as well as pre-school education. ICDS depends largely on individual States for implementation through the establishment of a network of *anganwadi* (pre-school) centres in both urban and rural areas. The quality of provision has depended on the skills and commitment of the individual '*anganwadi* worker' who, along with the designated '*anganwadi* helper', is responsible for most aspects of management, enrolment of children and the daily programme. *Anganwadi* workers are mostly married women from within the community. Most have completed basic secondary education (up to Class 10) and have received some training for working with young children. By contrast, more than 50 per cent of *anganwadi* helpers are either uneducated or received basic primary schooling (up to class 4 only) (FOCUS 2004, cited in CIRCUS 2006).

Figure 4 highlights the continuing significance of government provision (*anganwadis*) for children in rural communities, where patterns of take-up favour the poorest households. It is only for more advantaged groups that private pre-schools are a significant option, accounting for 31 per cent of the children in the 'least poor' group. However, the picture in urban Andhra Pradesh is strikingly different (Figure 5), with private pre-schools being the main option chosen by parents. Poverty levels are strongly predictive of whether children attend private pre-school education, but a surprising 34 per cent of the poorest households are opting for a private pre-school, compared to 46 per cent attending government pre-schools.

Figure 4. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels: rural sample in Andhra Pradesh

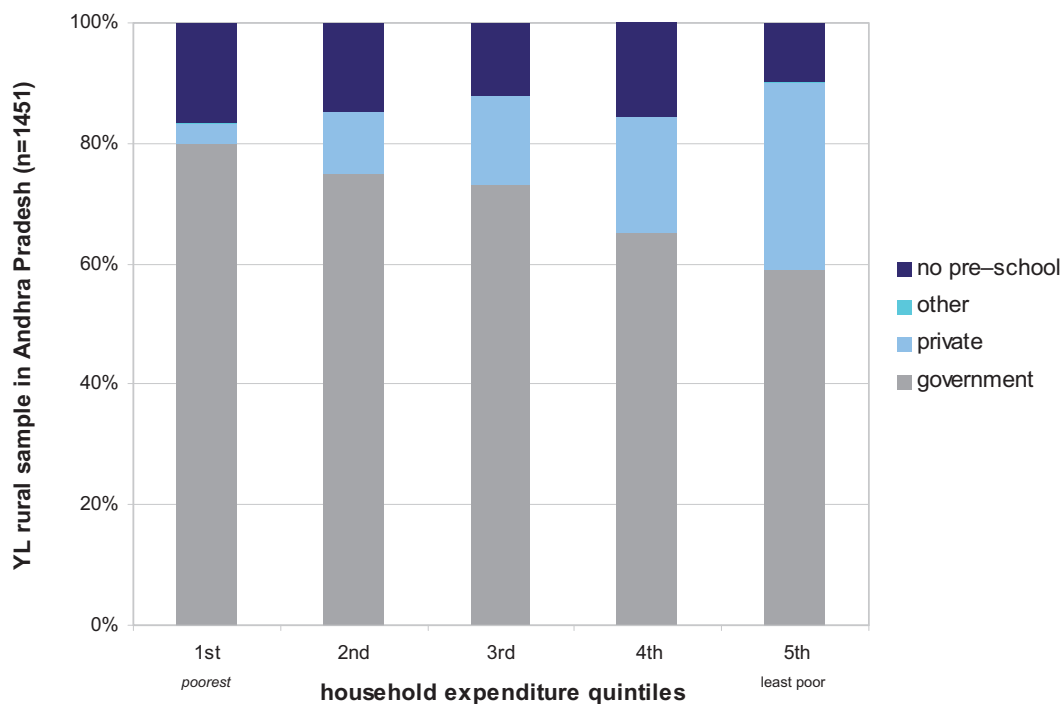
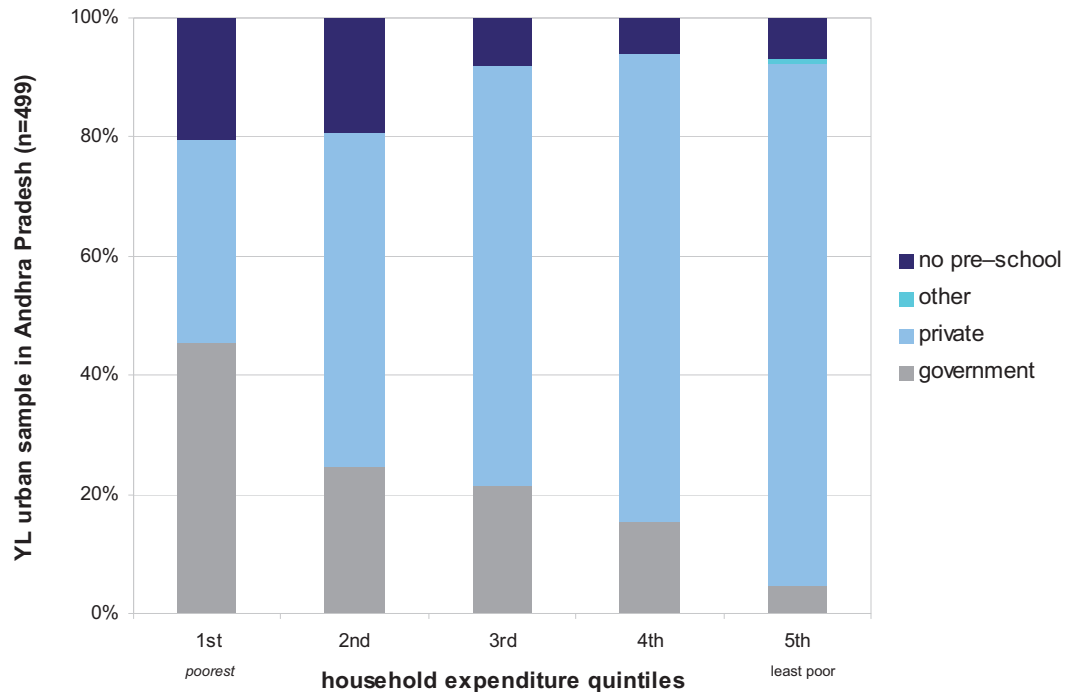


Figure 5. Attendance by pre-school type and poverty levels: urban sample in Andhra Pradesh



Selective enrolment in private kindergartens is also linked to gender differentiation, with girls more likely to be educated within the government sector and expected to leave school earlier than their brothers. Evidence for these different trajectories comes from the Young Lives Older Cohort (12 year olds), with 10 per cent more boys than girls enrolled in private schools, and 68 per cent of boys anticipating university education compared to 54 per cent of girls (and only 42 per cent of girls' caregivers).

One of the major motives for early education choice in Andhra Pradesh is, as mentioned above, that most private schools offer English as the medium of instruction, tantalising parents with the prospect of getting their children on track towards participation in the new global labour market. By contrast, the language of instruction in government primary schools is traditionally Telegu, although that policy has been under review. This particular pattern of moving from government to private sector is confirmed by the main survey data, where for Andhra Pradesh, 123 caregivers reported that their children had attended more than one pre-school since the age of three. In 101 of these cases, the caregiver reported the child had been moved from a government pre-school to a private class.

These statistics are all drawn from the Young Lives 2007 survey of 2,000 caregivers of children in the Younger Cohort, across 20 sites in Andhra Pradesh, when the children were around 6 years old. They suggest young children in Andhra Pradesh experience very early differentiation in their transition experiences and educational opportunities which are strongly shaped by where they live (urban versus rural), by household poverty levels, by levels of maternal education and by access to government versus private educational provision.

As for Ethiopia and Peru, I will offer one case study drawn from Young Lives qualitative research based around a sub-sample of 25 young children from four (out of the 20) Young Lives sites (see Vennam et al. forthcoming).

Revanth: early transitions in Andhra Pradesh

Revanth is growing up in a village in the Mahaboobnagar district, with a population of around 2,000, a majority of whom speak the official State language of Telugu. This is a drought-prone district on an inland plain, where the poor in the community face food shortages during the months of June to August. The major occupations are agriculture, livestock and daily wage labour. A number of acres are used to grow seed cotton, for which child labour is engaged, and children (mostly girls) are out of school for 2 to 3 months a year while they undertake this work.

The community has two *anganwadis* (pre-schools) and a government primary school, which most children attend. Although, as explained earlier, use of private schools is mainly an urban phenomenon, increasingly, even the poorest parents in rural areas are seeking out a private alternative. No private schools are available in Revanth's village, but several parents have chosen to send their children to a private English-medium school about 30km from the village. Revanth is one of these new recruits to the private system.

Revanth used to attend one of the *anganwadis* in the village but his parents were very disappointed with the poor quality:

What is there. She [the *anganwadi* worker] doesn't know anything. She doesn't know which children are registered in the *anganwadi* and which are not. ... She comes to *anganwadi*, stays for some time with the children who turn up on that day, and then leaves. Sometimes she doesn't come. Only 'ayah' [the helper] manages... They don't even look after the children. If she comes that's it, they sit... and both of them talk with each other.

Initially, Revanth transferred to the village primary school, but by then his parents already had a more ambitious plan for their son: to enrol him in a private school as soon as possible:

[The village primary school] is not at all good. In our village the teachers are not good. We just send them so that they get used to the routine of going to school... If he goes [to private school] and studies further he will become very wise – that is why we are sending him there. The teachers here are not teaching well.

Revanth is attending a private, English-medium school which has a hostel facility, serving children in the surrounding 15-20 villages. The hostel is located in the school premises and therefore children are not required to travel long distances to access a private English-medium school. There is a small playground with limited equipment, but better than the government school in the village.

Revanth proudly talks in English about what he has learned:

Interviewer: What do they teach you?

Revanth: A,B,C,Ds
Uh...E, F, G,...H, I, J, K, L, M, N, O, P (taking a deep breath)
Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y, Z.

Interviewer: And, what else do they teach you?

Revanth: A, P, P, L, E [he goes on to recite short poems, and numbers up to a hundred].

Although Revanth's family are amongst the 'less poor' groups in the Young Lives sample, paying for private school, even low-cost private schooling, is a very significant expense. However, it is one they are willing to bear as an investment in their son's future:

We are ready to spend; we want him to study well, that is why we sent him there... There is no one [to help with payments]. Our parents don't give...we don't ask anyone. We take as debts... He should not do agriculture, that is why we are spending so much for his education. That means we will make him study, come what may!

The costs of the private school for Revanth's parents are Rs9000 a year (approximately £115). This includes the fee towards education, the child's stay and food during the school days. The other costs relate to the textbooks which cost about Rs4-500 a year (approximately £5-6), and notebooks as and when required, and a child of this age needs a minimum of 15 notebooks each year. The number of pens, pencils, slates and slate pencils required all depends on how careful the child is. These have to be replaced whenever any are lost, as private school teachers insist on children having these materials. Teachers in government schools manage with a slate and a notebook. Moreover, the textbooks are provided free of cost in government schools for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes.⁵ The other costs include about Rs500 per year towards uniform (approximately £6).

However, these investments are not spread evenly within the household. There are hard choices to be made, which for this family are made along traditional gender lines:

Two of my girl children attend (government) school in the village... We are not buying for them; they are here only [at the village school]... when he is old enough, we will also send our younger son to the [*private*] school.

Since the original interview with Revanth's parents, the fee at this private school has been increased to Rs12500 per year due to inflation (i.e. from approximately £115 to £158). Some parents have therefore shifted their children to another school and hostel where the fee is Rs8,500 per year (approximately £107). The rising costs of schooling are a major factor that risks disrupting educational pathways for boys like Revanth, even though he is on a more privileged trajectory than his sisters.

5 Scheduled Castes (SCs) are the lowest in the traditional caste structure and were earlier considered to be 'untouchables'. In rural Andhra Pradesh, SC colonies are located separately, and in most cases away from the main villages. These colonies are named after the caste and even in the official records are often called *harijana wada*. They have been subjected to discrimination for years and therefore had no access to basic services, including education. National legislation aims to prohibit 'untouchability' and discrimination.

Scheduled Tribes (STs) are the indigenous people, living in and dependent on forests. Different groups of tribes live in different parts of Andhra Pradesh and vary in their culture, language and lifestyle. Though a good number of them are mainstreamed and live in plain areas, a considerable population continues to live in isolated hill tops and have little access to services. Special provisions are made to promote education, health and sustainable livelihoods through the Integrated Tribal Development Agency.

Backward Castes or Classes (BCs) are people belonging to a group of castes who are considered to be backward in view of the low level of the caste in the structure. In Andhra Pradesh, the BCs are further divided into four groups, and some caste groups are placed into each of these subgroups. Separate boarding hostels, scholarships etc are provided to promote education for these groups, as for the SCs.

7. Realistic promises for early childhood?

These brief portraits of early childhood in three contrasting country contexts draw attention to the numerous challenges of translating Dakar Goal 1 into reality. Ethiopia, Peru, and Andhra Pradesh represent very different economic, political and cultural contexts, with quite different educational traditions and progress towards Education For All goals. In Ethiopia, universal primary education is still being consolidated, pre-schools are few and far between, and for some rural children, there may be doubts about following the schooling option at all. In Peru, government pre-schools and schools are well-established, and parents are most concerned about the lack of continuity in children's transition experiences. Andhra Pradesh has a well-established and respected early education system, but parents are increasingly turning towards a private educational pathway, especially for their boys. All three countries are faced with issues of equity, related to gender and ethnicity, but especially related to poverty, with the most disadvantaged least likely to have access to quality early education and primary education.

There is no avoiding the high expectations for early childhood education to deliver on the many ambitious promises made for it, especially the potential to intervene in intergenerational poverty cycles. Evidence that the early years is a period of rapid growth and change and that early interventions are most likely to produce positive child outcomes underpins the World Bank's vision for early childhood education, as presented on their website. A graph proposes a linear relationship between human capital investment and rates of return in early childhood, with benefits well above costs, but also shows rapidly diminishing returns from investment during later childhood. The accompanying text offers the promise that:

A healthy cognitive and emotional development in the early years translates into tangible economic returns. Early interventions yield higher returns as a preventive measure compared with remedial services later in life. Policies that seek to remedy deficits incurred in the early years are much more costly than initial investments in the early years. (<http://web.worldbank.org>)

Framing the case for early childhood education in the language of economics is increasingly persuasive. We may reject this approach in favour of a rights-based argument: that every young child is entitled to quality education now for his or her personal benefit, rather than as a potential return to society in terms of productivity. Irrespective of which argument for ECCE is most persuasive, early childhood policies and services have come a long way in recent decades, but they also have a long way to go before these ambitious expectations can be realised.

Quality and inequalities

Young Lives research has not to date been able to make an independent assessment of the quality of the pre-schools attended by the full sample of 2,000 young children in each country. Nonetheless, qualitative sub-studies draw attention to the huge variation in buildings, resources, care and teaching at pre-school. The poorest pre-schools are very poor indeed, by any standards (Woodhead et al. forthcoming).

Some indicative evidence on quality is available for the full sample, from caregivers' answers to the question: 'In your opinion, how good is the quality of the care and teaching at this pre-school?' In both Peru and Andhra Pradesh, a higher percentage of caregivers using private schools judged them to be 'good' or 'excellent' than did caregivers judging their children's public pre-schools. These judgements are very likely shaped by private education users' financial investment in their children's schooling. However, one highly significant finding for Andhra Pradesh is that differences in quality judgements between public and private pre-school users is greatest amongst the poorest quintile, with less than 50 per cent judging the public *anganwadi* their child attends to be good or excellent, compared with over 90 per cent of private kindergarten users. This finding is also consistent with national reports into the shortcomings of *anganwadis* (FOCUS 2006). Another suggestive finding centres on 123 of the Young Lives children who had attended more than one pre-school since the age of 3, 80 per cent of whom had been moved from a government to a private pre-school.

These findings point to the emergence of new inequalities *within* poverty groups, between those with – and those without – personal and economic resources and opportunities sufficient to make educational choices that parents calculate will result in improved outcomes and long-term social mobility. Despite the evident benefits to some children, the consequence seems likely to be increased differentiation in children's trajectories within households and within communities, with inevitable risk of increased long-term inequality. If EFA goals are to be realised – *for all* – then improving equity of access and quality of public pre-school and primary schools becomes a high policy priority.

Several general conclusions are offered from *Young Lives* research:

- **Ensuring quality in early education:** Early childhood programmes are playing a major (and increasing) role in young children's lives, even in countries where primary education systems are still being consolidated. But early education services are often of very variable quality, as are the school classrooms to which children progress. Identifying cost-effective and sustainable ways to improve quality in early childhood and primary classes is a high priority.
- **Better coordinated pre-school and school systems:** Even in countries with well developed early education services, transition experiences into first grade are frequently stressful for children and parents because of a lack of communication and coordination between two sectors that are governed by different management structures, organisation and financing, professional training, curricula and pedagogy. Ensuring effective coordination of transitions between pre-school and primary classes has been a major ECCE theme amongst the world's richest countries over many decades. Addressing these issues is now a global challenge.
- **Focusing on the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children:** Current arrangements for early childhood care and education appear in many cases to run counter to the requirements for implementing the rights of every child, and are equally incompatible with achieving social equity. While some government services in the countries studied are explicitly intended to be pro-poor, all too often they do not function effectively to achieve that goal in practice. At the same time, the impact of a growing private sector is to reinforce rather than reduce inequities of access to quality education. In order to reverse these trends, governments along with international donors and other agencies have a central role to play.

- **More effective governance, including governance of the private sector:** The three countries in this report offer contrasting experiences on the impact of the private sector. In Ethiopia, private pre-schools have to some extent filled an ECCE vacuum, but for the most part they benefit only the most advantaged urban groups. Both Peru and Andhra Pradesh have well-established government systems, but there is also a significant private pre-school and primary sector. The situation in urban Andhra Pradesh is extreme, with largely unregulated private providers dominating and displacing traditional *anganwadis* as the pre-school of choice for parents. While some individual children benefit, quality is highly variable, and inequities are amplified.
- **Addressing the full range of equity issues:** All too often early education opportunities combine with parental choices to reinforce ethnic, caste or class divisions. Inequities within households have also been identified, where families make choices about which child to educate privately, which to send to a government school, which to withdraw early, and so on. Unregulated ECCE can amplify rather than reduce inequalities. The poorest families are at an inevitable disadvantage over better-off parents, and these disadvantages are often compounded by differences in quality between poor schools and rich schools, especially in the private sector.

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Young Lives is an innovative long-term international research project investigating the changing nature of childhood poverty.

The project seeks to:

- improve understanding of the causes and consequences of childhood poverty and to examine how policies affect children's well-being
- inform the development and implementation of future policies and practices that will reduce childhood poverty.

Young Lives is tracking the development of 12,000 children in Ethiopia, India (Andhra Pradesh), Peru and Vietnam through quantitative and qualitative research over a 15-year period.

Young Lives Partners

Young Lives is coordinated by a small team based at the University of Oxford, led by Jo Boyden.

Ethiopian Development Research Institute, Ethiopia

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Save the Children – Bal Raksha Bharat, India

Sri Padmavathi Mahila Visvavidyalayam (Women's University), Andhra Pradesh, India

Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (Group for the Analysis of Development), Peru

Instituto de Investigación Nutricional (Institute for Nutritional Research), Peru

Centre for Analysis and Forecast, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam

General Statistics Office, Vietnam

The Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Child and Youth Studies Group (CREET), The Open University, UK

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Save the Children UK (staff from the Rights and Economic Justice team in London as well as staff in India, Ethiopia and Vietnam).



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