



Youth Vulnerabilities in Life Course Transitions

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines youth vulnerabilities, with a particular emphasis on low- and middle-income countries. It touches on the challenges confronted by young people exposed to extreme, life-threatening circumstances, such as political violence and armed conflict, but focuses on vulnerabilities that emerge in key transitions experienced by most young people, such as those linked to school, work, partnership and parenthood. Such vulnerabilities not only hold young people back, but also are a barrier to capitalizing on the demographic dividend. The paper employs a life course perspective, highlighting the relationship between early influences and later outcomes, and examining individual life trajectories within a societal context. It draws on a range of secondary sources, and it makes extensive use of life course analysis from Young Lives, a longitudinal study of children growing up in poverty in Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh (India), Peru and Viet Nam. It concludes by highlighting policy implications.

Introduction

This paper about youth vulnerabilities defines ‘youth’ in accordance with the United Nations delineation as all persons aged 15 to 24.¹ ‘Vulnerability’ denotes susceptibility to adversities of one form or another. The paper addresses youth vulnerabilities globally, although with an emphasis on low- and middle-income countries where the majority of youth live, and where risks to their development and well-being are greater. It touches on particular challenges confronted by young people exposed to extreme, life-threatening circumstances, such as political violence and armed conflict, but focuses mainly on vulnerabilities that emerge in the key transitions that most young people experience around the world: into and out of school and work, and into parenthood and partnership. The paper employs a life course perspective, highlighting the important relationship in young people’s lives between early influences and later outcomes, and examining individual life trajectories in social, political, economic and cultural contexts. It draws on a range of secondary sources centred on young people globally, and it makes extensive use of life course analysis from

¹ The authors take adolescence to be the lower threshold of youth and therefore also make occasional reference to this life phase. While in all countries generational categories are distinguished by legal and institutional norms that employ chronological criteria, chronological age has less relevance for social and cultural definitions. The authors therefore do not employ strict age criteria when referring to youth. In many contexts, social markers such as marriage or bearing children are far more important than chronology in distinguishing adults from youth (Bledsoe 1980, Sommers 2006, Utas 2005).

Young Lives, a longitudinal study of children growing up in poverty in Ethiopia; the state of Andhra Pradesh, India; Peru and Viet Nam.²

There are important reasons for focusing on youth vulnerabilities. First, susceptibility to adversity is heightened during this critical period in the human life cycle. Young people confront specific life phase challenges. Beginning with adolescence and continuing into youth, this is a period of accelerated maturation and social transition, when individuals shift from a position of relative powerlessness and dependency characterizing childhood to the responsibilities and in some contexts the autonomy expected in adulthood. These transitions can be very difficult, and the deficits, deprivations and other risks experienced during youth can have debilitating emotional, political, economic and social consequences for those concerned, and their families and communities.

Second, when young people fail to realize their full potential, this undermines their future capabilities as adults, thereby weakening whole communities and economies. In the many low- and middle-income countries with exceptionally youthful populations, this results in a substantial loss of national developmental momentum. Youth should comprise a demographic dividend to society. Ensuring their well-being, self-determination, productivity and citizenship is the best way to reap this dividend.

Third, the world has undergone significant changes in the life course of this generation of young people. While some of these changes have opened up important new opportunities for the young, there is also much uncertainty, as well as untold privation and suffering (United Nations 2013). Young people everywhere are negotiating the implications of, among other things, economic transition, climate change, the depletion of natural resources, the rapid advance of communication and information technologies, and new forms of surveillance and control. Though all age groups and generations are affected by these trends, young people experience some of the most profound hardships.

Finally, consideration of youth vulnerabilities is timely since there is growing political will in the international community and among many national governments and civil society groups to develop more effective policies for the young (ILO 2013, United Nations 2013, UNESCO 2012a, World Bank 2006).

² Young Lives is funded by UK aid from the Department for International Development, and by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2010 to 2014. The authors wish to thank the Young Lives children and their families for generously giving their time and cooperation with the study, and to acknowledge the contribution of numerous Young Lives researchers whose work is summarized in this paper. The full text of all publications and more information about the work is available at www.younglives.org.uk.

This paper explores how the social, economic and political contours of young people's everyday lives influence future outcomes. It highlights the short- and long-term implications that certain vulnerabilities may produce. It begins by outlining the scope of the review, introducing analytical entry points, and delineating analysis of vulnerabilities in youth transitions using a life course perspective. The paper goes on to review several key trends in the vulnerabilities young people experience during transitions through education, work and family life, and discusses young people's responses to more extreme vulnerabilities through conflict, protest and escape. It concludes by highlighting some policy implications.

Framing youth vulnerabilities

SCOPE

This paper concerns youth globally, since the experiences and vulnerabilities of this life phase have important universal features. That said, the focus is on young people in low- and middle-income countries. Approximately 85 percent of all youth aged 15 to 24 live in the developing world (United Nations 2005, see table 1), and in general young people experience a greater burden of risk in developing than in high-income countries.

The life phase of youth everywhere is distinguished from adulthood as a time of transition, as it involves significant changes in biology, social status, roles and responsibilities, and institutional context (Durkin 1995). Beginning in adolescence, young people go through rapid developmental changes in their bodies, their cognitive abilities, and their social and emotional engagement in their worlds. These interdependent processes have a bearing on the wider social transitions that young people experience. This is when sexual identity often crystallizes, the institutional context changes from upper primary or secondary education to full-time work or continued learning, and many young people change residence, including through migration. It is also when some individuals enter (and exit) marriages and cohabitations, and when some become parents. The 2007 *World Development Report* summarizes five major areas of life in which young people make significant choices on the path to adulthood: continuing to learn, starting to work, developing a healthful lifestyle, beginning a family and exercising citizenship (World Bank 2006). It highlights how the choices made in these different arenas can enable young people to realize their full potential in adulthood as citizens, household heads, workers, entrepreneurs, leaders and so on, and, therefore, how constrained or ill-advised choices can have significant adverse implications for their human capital and future capabilities.

There are commonalities also in the challenges and hardships young people encounter globally. Thus, young people living in poverty in high-income countries experience very similar risks to those encountered by young people in low- and middle-income countries (Wachs and Rahmann 2013).³ Young people have a precarious labour-market position in high-, middle- and low-income countries, with youth unemployment rates well above national averages, and alarmingly high in some countries—for example, above 40 percent in South Africa since early 2008, and above 50 percent in Spain in early 2012 (World Bank 2012a, p. 6). While the causes and nature of youth underemployment or unemployment may differ across countries with more or less formalized job markets, globally, young people face particular challenges in attaining secure livelihoods.

Table 1: Regional distribution of youth, 2005

	Total population (millions)	Youth population (percentage)	Youth aged 15-24 (millions)	Global youth population (percentage)
Asia	3,905	16.4	639	62.4
Africa	905	15.9	145	14.1
Europe	728	14.3	103	10.2
Latin America and the Caribbean	561	16.9	95	9.3
North America	330	12.4	41	4.0
Oceania	33	3.0	1	0.1
Total	6,465	15.8	1,024	100

Source: United Nations 2005.

Notwithstanding commonalities, youth is a social category shaped by political and economic forces, and societal norms and expectations in specific localities. These specificities are apparent in

³ There is a substantial research literature in the developmental sciences addressing child development, with only about 10 percent of it coming from low- and middle-income countries, in which more than 90 percent of the world's population lives (Bornstein et al. 2012). Moreover, the lion's share of this literature focuses on early childhood, with a dearth of research evidence on adolescence and youth.

the timing and manner of the transition to adulthood, the roles and responsibilities young people assume, what is considered appropriate in their conduct, and their vulnerabilities. Many societies mark the transition out of childhood and into adolescence or youth with a special celebration or event.

Movement *through* youth is often gradual, the result of multiple and complex transitions (Morrow 2013), involving numerous shifts and even some reversals in social status, duties, domicile, codes of conduct and the like, each occurring at different points in time. The process can entail significant ambiguities and contradictions, with young people frequently gaining some recognized autonomy and being able (and required) to hold limited responsibility, while simultaneously remaining dependent on the household and family (Durham 2000), and lacking political rights. Equally, while “the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics, and changes such as the onset of menstruation may ‘mean’ that ... [young people] are reproductively mature in a physical sense, most social groups require further social proof of reproductive responsibility, such as the skills or means to support the next generation” (Ennew et al. 1996, p. 45). A smooth transition to adulthood is also very dependent on livelihood opportunities. In line with evidence of the commonalities and specificities of youth, this paper points to both universal and contextual aspects of young people’s vulnerabilities.

COMMON ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOUTH

Discourse and assumptions about youth are often based on stereotypes rather than evidence. Much media, academic and policy attention given to youth internationally separates them as individuals existing apart from family, home or community (Leonardi 2007). The focus is commonly on young people who face extreme risk and deprivation, such as those living on the street, trafficked into hazardous work, or exposed to armed conflict and forced migration. Early views of young people in extreme situations are often pejorative. For example, ‘street youth’ in developing countries have tended to be portrayed as ‘throwaways’, ‘runaways’, ‘urchins’ or ‘delinquents’ (for a critique, see Ennew and Swart-Kruger 2003).

Regardless of circumstances, young people are repeatedly classified as either ‘having problems’ or posing ‘a problem’ for others. For instance, for a long time, research in the United Kingdom and the United States conceptualized young people as deficient and in need of education, delinquent and in need of control, or dysfunctional and in need of therapy (Griffin 1993). ‘Having problems’ tends to be associated with young people doing things that make them vulnerable to adverse outcomes through risk-taking and ‘risky’ behaviours, such as smoking, consuming drugs and alcohol, or engaging in unprotected sex. Posing ‘a problem’ for others commonly involves their construction as vandals, vigilantes, delinquents or hoodlums, or, in other words, as simultaneously at risk and causing risk for society more broadly (Kelly 2000, Spencer and Thompson 2013). Risk and risk-

taking in the form of ‘deviant’ behaviour are frequently cast as individualized pathologies stemming from various personal and moral deficits associated with the condition of being young.

These discourses are frequently gendered, females typically being described as ‘troubled’ and males as ‘troublesome’ (Stainton-Rogers and Stainton-Rogers 1992, p. 183). Thus, vulnerability among young females is repeatedly framed in terms of victimhood, with an international focus on practices such as early marriage, circumcision,⁴ trafficking, commercial sexual exploitation and abuse that violate their rights, and are harmful physically and emotionally. International instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) are invoked in powerful advocacy campaigns to bring an end to all such violations. In the process, young women can be thought of as helpless under circumstances of gendered inequality, poverty, violence and mistreatment of various kinds. Attitudes towards young males, on the other hand, are more ambivalent. While boys under age 18 have the same rights and protections as girls in the CRC, less is known about and less attention is given to the vulnerabilities of male youth—a significant cause for concern. Equally worrying is that when boys grow into adolescence and youth, they are frequently designated as idle wastrels, troublemakers or perpetrators of violence (see Singer 2010, p. 97).

Many young people experience extreme deprivation and hardship. Many young women are exposed to appalling violations, and some young men (and women) perpetrate heinous crimes. The authors of this paper do not wish to diminish the associated suffering and distress. Nor do we seek to romanticize the resilience of young people to the neglect of very real vulnerabilities that can seriously limit their life chances. We avoid classifying youth vulnerability in terms of victims or perpetrators, troubled or troublemaker, however, because such designations frequently involve significant and often inaccurate generalizations. Quite often these are based on stereotypes rather than evidence, and can lead to profound stigmatization and/or inappropriate interventions. For example, treating young people as victims can fail to respect their own efforts to help themselves; focusing on crimes committed by the young can fail to account for the constraints that encourage such activity. Likewise, problematizing young males as vandals or vigilantes places disproportionate blame on a generation without attending to the myriad structural constraints bearing on them.

⁴ In this report, the term ‘circumcision’ is used in place of ‘genital mutilation’, which has been widely endorsed by the United Nations and other international bodies. Our usage is not intended to underestimate the potentially harmful effects of the more invasive forms of circumcision or negate women’s right to bodily integrity, but reflects a concern to encourage consensus building and engagement with local values and understandings in bringing about social change.

DEFINING YOUTH VULNERABILITIES

Understanding what it means for young people to be vulnerable requires appreciating the complexity of human development and well-being, typically delineated as comprising the physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social domains. Each entails an array of states and competencies that can be compromised by deprivation or by a shock of some form.

Developmental domains interact with each other, so that functioning in one influences functioning in others (Shaffer 1996). For example, neurological or biological shocks can affect social, emotional and cognitive functioning, as well as physical growth and development (Engle et al. 2007). Youth vulnerabilities can thus manifest in numerous ways, including through impaired physical growth, low levels of self-efficacy and well-being, irregularities in behaviour, and/or reduced capabilities for employment, interpersonal relationships, community membership and citizenship.

Youth vulnerabilities also have multiple causes, some that are immediate or close at hand (often termed proximal), and others that are more remote (or distal) (Rutter 1979). Individual disposition, individual biological make-up and peer influence may be contributory, as might be a troubled experience in family life, or chance events and circumstances. But whatever the immediate causes, more often than not, broader social, cultural, political-economic and environmental factors play a significant part. This is especially the case in low- and middle-income countries where resources are limited and risks to human well-being are pervasive. The coexistence of multiple forms of adversity in the lives of many young people means that varying moderating and mediating influences at the individual, family and societal levels interact to influence youth development outcomes (Stevens 2006, Burchinal et al. 2008, Toth and Cicchetti 2010). In this sense, a sole focus on the more dramatic examples of youth vulnerabilities, such as those arising during armed conflict and displacement, runs the risk of overshadowing the ordinary worlds of youth and the daily challenges many face.

Four interconnected contextual influences dramatically heighten the vulnerability of countless youth across the world: poverty, inequality, social exclusion and hazardous environments.

First, absolute poverty remains one of the gravest threats to young people in low- and middle-income countries (Engle et al. 2007, Walker et al. 2007, Wachs and Rahman 2013). It also affects significant numbers of youth in high-income countries. Though the developmental impacts appear to be indirect, poverty is associated with a range of specific risks, such as malnutrition, environmental

toxins and overcrowding (Wachs and Rahman 2013).⁵ Overcrowding, for example, has been associated with less responsive parenting (Wachs 2003). In turn, poor parent-child communication adversely affects cognitive development and academic outcomes. Young people living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries also confront certain types of risk, such as malaria and conflict-related displacement, that are infrequent in high-income countries (Wachs and Rahman 2013; see also Machel 2001).

Second, in most communities, poverty is shaped by political-economic structures, institutions and values that consistently privilege some groups of young people and disadvantage others. Inequalities among individuals in consumption, income or assets (often termed vertical inequalities, Stewart 2002) can be a crucial constraint on young people's transitions to adulthood, restricting resources and opportunities for the most marginalized or deprived. For example, poverty can significantly undermine self-esteem. Evidence from Ethiopia, Andhra Pradesh, Peru and Viet Nam compiled for the Young Lives study shows that the impacts of poverty-related shame on children's educational outcomes may be far-reaching (Dornan and Ogando Portela forthcoming). Shame in children aged 12 was gauged through the level of embarrassment felt at a lack of good clothing or belongings, and was found to typically rise with decreasing household wealth in all countries. Further, higher levels of shame at age 12 were associated with lower learning indicators such as the ability to read and write, and scores in vocabulary and mathematics. Effects were also evident at 15, even after taking into account key household characteristics, including an indicator of poverty. By the time children had reached age 15, scores in mathematics and vocabulary typically remained lower, especially in Andhra Pradesh and Viet Nam.

Third, many young people are vulnerable not simply, or even primarily, because of variation in individual material resources or absolute material want, but because of "the cultural devaluation of groups and categories of people in a society by virtue of *who they are*, or rather, who they are perceived to be" (Kabeer 2005, see also Stewart 2002). Thus, vertical inequalities commonly align to greater or lesser degree with group-based disadvantages or horizontal inequalities (Stewart 2002) associated with ethnicity, caste, language, religion, gender and/or physical or mental disability. These groups and categories of people are consistently stigmatized, excluded socially and deprived economically. Disparities anchored in socio-cultural values find expression in intra-household dynamics, participation in institutions, and community, political and economic life. Some group-based disparities, for example, those based on gender, appear to open during adolescence when young people begin to assume the gendered roles and responsibilities of adulthood (Woodhead,

⁵ Wachs and Rahman 2013 cite Barros et al. 2010, Goodburn et al. 1990, Okiro et al. 2008, Ozer et al. 2008, Robila and Krishnakumar 2005, and Wasserman et al. 2007. See also the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2005 and Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007.

Dornan and Murray 2013). Horizontal inequalities and related social exclusion can be further exacerbated by spatial constraints associated with rural location, which commonly signifies isolation from quality services, exposure to environmental hazards and other risks. In this way, spatial disadvantages, and horizontal and vertical inequalities converge in the lives of many young people, so that options are particularly reduced if a young person happens to be a girl, from a minority ethnic group and living in a rural area. As a consequence, poverty and social marginalization become increasingly entrenched within families and communities, grow over the life course of an individual and are transmitted across generations (Boyden and Mann 2005, p. 11).

Fourth, whether due to environmental toxins associated with human activity or to natural events such as drought or earthquakes, hazardous environments are a significant cause of vulnerability for young people in many parts of the world. The effects of early exposure to environmental toxins, including unsafe drinking water, air pollution, poor sanitation and infectious diseases, can have devastating long-term consequences; young children are more susceptible to the physiological effects of toxins⁶ (Gavidia, Pronczuk de Garbino and Sly 2009). Environmental risks include air pollution (Brims and Chauhan 2005), lead exposure and noise pollution (Clark et al. 2006). In addition, a link has been established between psychosocial and cognitive development and traffic noise exposure (Stansfeld et al. 2005), and lead exposure (Cairney et al. 2004). Air pollution has been implicated in respiratory conditions such as asthma (Payne-Sturges and Gee 2006).⁷

A LIFE COURSE PERSPECTIVE ON YOUTH VULNERABILITIES

Youth vulnerabilities are seldom the consequence solely of an emergency or single crisis. More often, they occur through a build-up of forces operating at the levels of individuals, households, institutions, communities and societies.⁸ Because past experience can be so important for young people's outcomes, research in this area calls for a life course approach, identifying and examining

⁶ See Winneke 2007 for a review of neuro-behavioural toxicity from environmental exposure to toxins during early development.

⁷ Overall, an estimated 23 percent of deaths in children aged 0 to 14 years can be attributed to environmental toxins. In developing countries, 25 percent of all deaths are attributed to environmental causes, compared to 17 percent in developed nations (Prüss-Üstün and Corvalán 2006).

⁸ Investigations into the mechanisms and pathways of influence in young peoples' development tend to highlight three separate processes leading to three types of effects: latent, cumulative and pathway (Schoon, Sacker and Bartley 2003; Maggi et al. 2010). Latent effects refer to the consequences of early exposure to adversity; these may become manifest later in life or even in subsequent generations. Cumulative effects refer to the accumulation of both positive and negative experiences and risks over the life course. Pathway effects refer to the ways in which early experiences determine life pathways that, in turn, lead to particular social positions affecting health and well-being.

the effects of early adversity on later development (see Kroenke 2008 for a review). Four principles guide a life course approach to the analysis of youth vulnerabilities (Elder 1994, 1998).

The first principle is that the *historical time and timing* of events have implications for human development and the experience of vulnerabilities. This refers to the challenges and opportunities associated with growing up in a particular era, revealing how young people's well-being is enabled and constrained by broader events and circumstances at the local, national and global levels.

The second principle is the *timing of events in the life course*. There are critical moments when specific risks or protective influences are particularly salient (Knudsen 2004; Shonkoff, Boyce and McEwen 2009). Early childhood is generally recognized as the most critical phase in human development. Susceptibility to risk is heightened, and deficiencies and shocks often have permanent consequences. Across the life course, risk susceptibility may grow during institutional and social transitions, including one-time, irreversible passages such as circumcision or first entry into school, and transitions that regularly occur, as with movements between school, home and farming fields (Vogler, Crivello and Woodhead 2008, p. 15).

The third principle is that *interdependent social relations* have a significant influence on young people's susceptibility and responses to different adversities. The suggestion here is that young people's vulnerability to and protection from risk are heavily mediated by their relationships, especially those within families and with peers.⁹

The final principle concerns the role of *human agency* in life course development. Young people do not suffer crises passively, but have a major role in shaping their destinies. Some display significant resilience in the face of adversity (Eisold 2005, Masten and Obradović 2006, Obradović and Boyce 2009). As noted, some become involved in risk-inducing activities and circumstances that can be detrimental to themselves and others.

⁹ Glen Elder, who developed the life course approach, laid particular emphasis on intergenerational relations, although during adolescence and youth, peers are an especially important influence (Harris 2009). Supporting Elder's view, strong connections can be seen between the levels of education obtained by parents and community members, and young people's educational enrolment, health and subjective well-being (Woodhead 2009, Moestue and Huttly 2008, Dercon and Krishnan 2009, Ko and Xing 2009). Social class at birth can be a powerful determinant of health even into adulthood (Hertzman and Boyce 2010). Growing up in poverty can adversely impact intergenerational relations, resulting in inadequate cognitive stimulation, maternal depression, exposure to violence and poor nutrition, all of which have been associated with poor developmental outcomes (Barros et al. 2010, Walker et al. 2007). In particular, cognitive stimulation shows a strong and independent association with psychosocial development, with a clear interaction effect with maternal schooling—confirming findings of other studies that point to a link between maternal education and child development in both developing and developed contexts (Barros et al. 2010; see also To et al. 2004, Santos et al. 2008).

Youth and transitions

VULNERABILITIES IN TRANSITIONS THROUGH EDUCATION

This section discusses youth vulnerabilities in the movement into, through and out of school. In recent decades, formal education has received tremendous global emphasis as the primary means of improving young people's life chances. Education systems have expanded remarkably, stimulated by an international push for universal access via the Education for All initiative and the Millennium Development Goals. Primary school participation, for example, now is nearly universal in most countries (Grant and Behrman 2010, World Bank 2012b). Despite these advances, many significant problems remain across all educational levels, with tertiary education in particular largely restricted to youth from the most advantaged families (UNESCO 2012a, p. 171). Poverty is exacerbated by significant weaknesses in school systems. It also commonly interacts with horizontal or group-based inequalities and remote locations to disadvantage young people in both access to and transitions through school. Some children may be unable to go to school. Enrolment may be delayed, attendance intermittent and performance poor. Many young people leave school early with very limited academic skills.

Learning problems tend to start with developmental challenges associated with detrimental family circumstances. For example, poor nutrition in early life is consistently associated with reduced cognitive development (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007). Though some can physically 'catch-up' (Crookston et al. 2010, Crookston et al. 2011), impaired nutrition is generally associated with educational, social and economic disadvantages that reduce young people's capabilities as they mature (Woodhead, Dornan and Murray 2013). Box 1 shows that food shortages continue to affect children's development and engagement with schooling as they enter middle childhood and adolescence.

Early nutritional deprivation is compounded by later disadvantages, including the inability to access quality pre-schooling and its well-established life cycle benefits (Britto et al. 2013). In Peru, the socio-economic status of children at age one strongly predicts opportunities to learn and achievement in mathematics by grade four (Cueto 2014). In this case, problems are to a large extent due to systemic problems with education. Peru has a highly unequal education system and poorer children are less likely to access a library, computer laboratory, the Internet or phone services at their schools, which tend to be in isolated rural areas (ibid.).

Box 1: Impacts on young people's development and learning from malnutrition

Malnutrition early in life has effects that persist into adolescence and beyond. Moreover, malnutrition occurring in adolescence or youth still presents risks for young people's development. And since many young people will shortly become parents, their physical health is also of importance for the health of the next generation.

Early deprivations are likely to have long-term impacts on young people's development in multiple domains. Analysis highlights psychosocial impacts at 12 years of age of earlier malnutrition (Dercon and Sanchez 2013). Controlling for multiple background factors to separate out the effects associated with low height from other background factors suggests that young people who had low height at age 8 also typically reported lower self-efficacy, self-esteem and aspirations. These effects matter in and of themselves for young people's well-being, but they are also likely to influence access to later employment outcomes.

As well as the long-term impacts of early malnutrition, food shortage at age 12 has been associated with a range of impacts on young people's development (Pells 2012). By age 15, those who had experienced food shortages at 12 were 60 percent less likely to have a healthy body mass index for age in Peru, and scored lower in cognitive achievement tests in Andhra Pradesh and Ethiopia. They reported lower self-rated health in Andhra Pradesh and Viet Nam, and lower subjective well-being in Ethiopia and Peru.

Sources: Dercon and Sanchez 2013, Pells 2012.

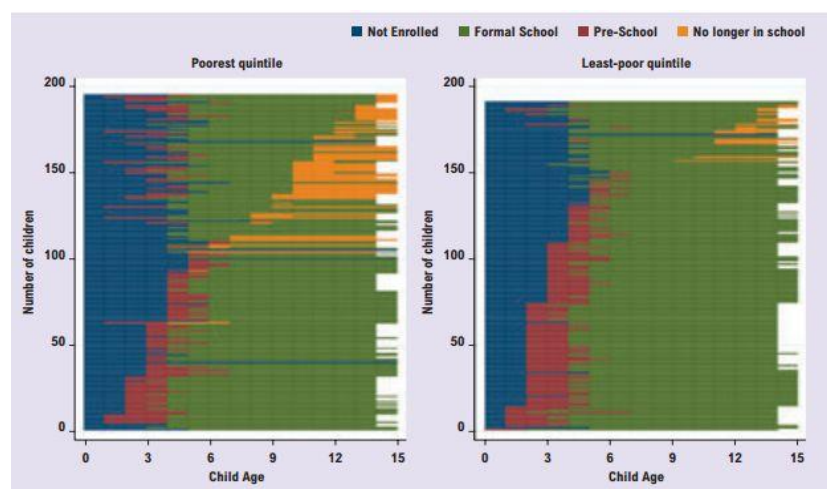
Box 2 illustrates how in Andhra Pradesh, the poorest children tend to start school later, with little or no experience of pre-school. Subsequently, they leave earlier than children from richer households. Box 3 shows the importance of household characteristics for children's ability to learn at age eight.

Ethnicity and/or speaking an indigenous language that is not the teaching medium in formal schools can severely limit educational prospects. Cross-country analysis from Young Lives has highlighted the extent to which gaps between majority and minority groups occur across the life course of children and young people—from different access to pre-school to gaps in learning indicators to varying proportions of young people still in school by age 15 (Murray 2012). In Viet Nam, ethnic minority status is associated with significantly poorer performance in math and Vietnamese at age 10. The extent to which a child's father is literate in Vietnamese is also an important determinant (Rolleston et al. 2013, p. 31). While there is some evidence of the gap in test scores between ethnic majority and minority children closing over time, early tests scores tend to be predictive of later ones, so early disadvantage is likely to carry through into adolescence and early adulthood (Rolleston and James 2011, pp. 38-52).

Box 2: Poverty and inequality shape young people’s trajectories through school in Andhra Pradesh

Young Lives longitudinal data from Andhra Pradesh show that 23 percent of 14- to 15-year-olds are no longer in school. The figure below plots the school histories for individual children in 2009, comparing those in the bottom (poorest) and top (least poor) quintiles in the sample. Each line represents a child, with the chart demonstrating the marked wealth-linked inequalities in access to education. The poorest children are less likely to access pre-school and more likely to leave school earlier than less poor children (Woodhead, Dornan and Murray 2013).

School enrolment by age for poorest and least poor households



Note: School history data runs to either 14 or 15, due to variation in Young Lives children’s ages at 2009 survey.

Poverty, gender and other inequalities influence which young people leave school early. For example, one in four young people in rural areas are no longer in school, compared with 15 percent in urban areas. Young people from Scheduled Castes and Tribes were twice as likely to have left school. Just over one in four girls were out of school, needed for work in the home or on family land. One in five boys had left school, either to work for pay or because of the perceived irrelevance or poor quality of education.

Multiple risk factors converge to contribute to young people leaving school, as can be seen in the life of Ranadeep. He lives in a poor rural community, and left school after failing his math exam in grade 10. By age 16, he was farming. He explained that he and other children in the community failed their exams because they attended school irregularly, trying to combine school with work. He felt his friends who had succeeded and are now at college “look at me very cheaply” [look down on him], and said, “I am hurt because I am not there with my friends.”

He added, “There is nobody to work in the fields, and there is no labour..., and we need to pay 100 rupees as wages every day, and we were not able to afford it, so they stopped me from going to school.”

Source: Morrow 2013.

Box 3: Learning trajectories through school

Panel analysis allows an assessment of key determinants of learning levels at different ages. Modelling these effects enables the inclusion of multiple factors in the same analysis, and so allows an assessment of the impact associated with individual factors within systems where many variables (controls) are changing. Though there are national differences, a four-country analysis using the Young Lives data set highlights some broadly common findings for children and young people aged 8, 12 and 15 years old.

At early childhood household advantage and other characteristics matter considerably. At age 8, better numeracy and literacy was typically associated with background household level advantage; children who were taller for their age; had had access to pre-school; and had higher caregiver education. Boys performed better than girls in Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh.

In middle childhood, previous test scores were an important predictor of later child outcomes. At age 12, prior ability, measured at 8 years, predicted numeracy and literacy at 12 years. Children who had had more years of schooling tended to do better in later tests, with the exception of Peru, where background was more relevant. Household wealth was an important determinant of children's vocabulary at 12, but not with further advantage in literacy and numeracy in three countries, excepting Peru, suggesting that the effects of disadvantage were crystallized in prior test scores, not in further disadvantages while children were in school.

During adolescence, household disadvantage is once again significant. At age 15, prior ability, measured at 12 years, and past years of schooling were predictive of later attainment in math. Some young people had already left formal schooling, especially in Andhra Pradesh. Other disadvantages seem to reassert an additional impact on test scores, not commonly found at 12. Here being male was associated with better math scores in Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh, and being female with better scores in Viet Nam. Household wealth was typically associated with poorer performance on math and general cognition.

Life course analysis highlights, therefore, that early performance is predictive of later learning. Ensuring that children have good opportunities to learn early in life is likely to support better learning for young people. Household advantage matters for learning, as does the school. The effects of disadvantage occur throughout but seem to show particularly marked additional impacts on learning early in life, and through adolescence as external pressures, such as the need to work to support the household, become greater.

Source: Rolleston and James 2011.

In developing countries, urban children tend to be consistently advantaged educationally compared to rural children. Urban areas usually afford closer proximity to school (Ames, Rojas and Portugal 2009; Woldehanna, Jones and Tefera 2008). In Ethiopia, pre-school facilities tend to be restricted to urban areas (Woodhead 2009). Half of the high schools in the entire country of Liberia are located within the greater capital city area of Monrovia (UNESCO 2008). Even where education facilities do exist in rural areas, they are often located at considerable distance from children's homes. The perceived and actual risks of travel may delay enrolment and restrict school participation

by girls in particular, which in turn causes intermittent attendance and early departure (Ames, Rojas and Portugal 2009; UNESCO 2012a).

Gender is also a significant factor affecting school participation; gender gaps often widen during adolescence and youth. Box 4 demonstrates that differences between boys and girls in enrolment and cognitive test scores are small at age 8, but in some contexts become significant by age 15.

Gender inequalities in education are not always as commonly expected. Young Lives data reveal a nuanced picture of gender differences that do not always favour boys. Across the four study countries, it is only in Andhra Pradesh that there is a systematic bias in favour of boys as evidenced by participation rates at age 15 (Dercon and Singh 2013; Woodhead, Dornan and Murray 2013). And even strong gender biases in education are smaller than inequalities associated with other socio-economic characteristics (Dercon and Singh 2013). In Viet Nam, boys are more disadvantaged in schooling than girls, and the gender disparity in education access is intensified by poverty—72 percent of boys and 80 percent of girls overall were in school at age 15, whereas only 40 percent of the poorest boys and 52 percent of the poorest girls were (Pells 2011).

Where gender disparities in education occur, they are not fixed, but respond to changing opportunities and constraints in economic and social life. When resources are limited, families are often pressed to make unequal investments in the education of their offspring based on cost-benefit assessments of the returns to the family and the children concerned. Boys often have more access to and opportunity for education because it is assumed that males will become household heads, and a good education is perceived to enhance their employment prospects. Females, on the other hand, are thought to have less need of education because they are expected to marry and depend on their spouse. There may be concerns that educating girls too much can render them unmarriageable or that the parental household will not benefit from educational investments if they marry (*ibid.*).¹⁰

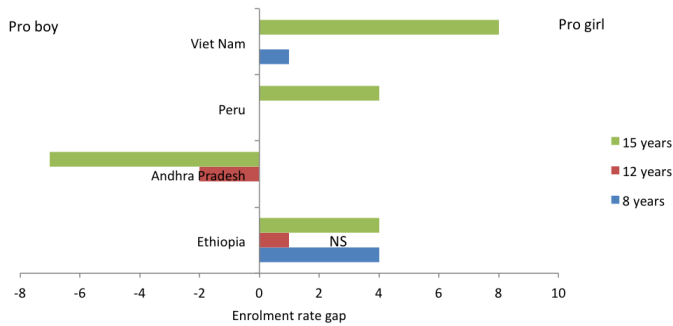
In summary, poverty and other inequalities render young people vulnerable to delayed enrolment in school, intermittent attendance, poor performance and early departure. In turn, low educational achievement, poor quality of education and early departure from school are generally significant obstacles to good employment, effective citizenship and many other life skills.

¹⁰ At one time, gender bias in educational investments was commonly revealed in enrolment, with boys significantly more likely to be enrolled than girls (e.g., Kingdon 2005 on India). Nowadays, where gender bias persists, it is not about enrolment so much as boys being educated longer and/or attending schools perceived as better quality. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh, more money is spent on educating boys (Himaz 2009), who are more likely to attend private schools (Dercon and Singh 2013, Woodhead 2009). One study established that in India, the gender gap in private school enrolment is double that of enrolment overall. For rural areas, this gap has increased over time (Maitra, Pal and Sharma 2011; see also Woodhead, Frost and James 2013).

Box 4: Gender gaps emerge over the life course

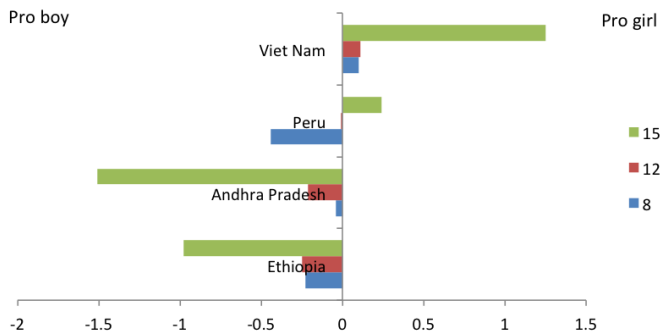
In early childhood, socio-economic and household characteristics are much stronger determinants of children’s development than gender (Woodhead, Dornan and Murray 2013). Gender differences become more marked during middle childhood and adolescence, but boys are not always advantaged. A pro-boy gender bias is more evident in Andhra Pradesh, and to a lesser extent in Ethiopia. Some gender gaps favour girls in Viet Nam. The figure below shows that by age 15, girls in Viet Nam are significantly more likely to be enrolled than boys; the same pattern holds to a lesser extent in Ethiopia and Peru. In Andhra Pradesh, boys are significantly more likely to be enrolled.

Enrolment by gender at ages 8, 12 and 15



At the same age, boys perform better than girls in cognitive achievement test scores in Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh. In contrast, girls in Viet Nam have higher average performance (Pells 2011).

Math scores by gender at ages 8, 12 and 15



Source: Woodhead et al. 2013.

These gendered trends in achievement mirror parental aspirations for girls and boys. In Ethiopia and India, there is a stronger boy bias, whereas in Peru and Viet Nam, parents hold higher aspirations for the scholastic achievement of their girls.

VULNERABILITIES IN TRANSITIONS TO WORK

Schooling has a dramatic impact on young people's ambitions. In the Young Lives countries, formal education is understood by caregivers and children alike as the prime route out of poverty (Boyden 2013, Camfield 2011, Crivello 2011). One Peruvian parent reflects, "I ... walk in the fields with sandals (*ojotas*). At least he will go with shoes (*zapatitos*) if he gets a good head with education (*si coge cabeza con los estudios pues*)" (Crivello 2011, p. 16). Over half of the parents of eight-year-olds in Ethiopia, Peru and Viet Nam wanted their child to complete university (Pells 2011).

Consistent with raised parental and young people's aspirations, the transition from schooling to paid work has been represented in the literature as fairly smooth, linear and direct. Throughout the world, however, the relationship between school and work is in practice very different, with many children working while at school (Furlong and Cartmel 2007) and many school-leavers failing to find jobs.

In low- and middle-income countries, young people commonly begin paid and unpaid work, within and outside the domestic sphere, at early ages (see, for example, Boyden 2009, Heissler and Porter 2013, Spittler and Bourdillon 2012). Tending animals, cultivating crops and caring for sick adults or younger siblings are about contributing to household maintenance and asset accumulation as well as learning essential practical and social skills; these kinds of work should not therefore be confused with the dangerous and exploitative jobs proscribed by International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 182 on the worst forms of child labour. Work at young ages does not, in itself, constitute a vulnerability; indeed, appropriate work by young people has been perceived to foster technical skills, fortitude, and the capacities to solve problems and manage dangerous situations, all of which can ameliorate vulnerability (Boyden, Ling and Myers 1998, p. 75). Moreover, many young people do not leave school to start work, but combine school and work, especially in poor communities (Orkin 2012). In this context, transitions to work during youth often involve more time at work or different kinds of work, rather than commencing work for the first time. Early part-time labour can smooth the transition to full-time employment. This kind of experience highlights the opportunity to build on skills learned outside the classroom, including through scaling up vocational and technical training programmes for young people (UNESCO 2012b).

Despite the large numbers of children who combine school and work, obtaining good, stable jobs on leaving school is a significant challenge. Youth unemployment and underemployment has reached a critical level globally. The 'crisis' of unemployment (ILO 2013) has become so pronounced that the current cohort of youth has been referred to as 'generation jobless' (*The Economist* 2013). The 2013 *World Development Report* estimates that there are about 8 million new job seekers every year in sub-Saharan Africa, and that South Asia's job seeker population grows by 1 million people every month. The most populous countries, particularly China and India, experience the most

significant absolute increases, while smaller countries face large relative increases (World Bank 2012a, p. 51). The problem can be particularly serious for the many developing countries where young people comprise up to half the national population (UNDESA 2013). Even in countries where unemployment rates are relatively low, the youth unemployment rate is twice or more the national average, and youth are far less likely than other groups to have social insurance (World Bank 2012a, p. 6). Many other young people are in informal jobs that are unregistered, insecure and without proper entitlements (*ibid.*). In most countries, youth unemployment rates are small compared to the more than one-third of 15- to 24-year-olds who in some countries are not in school, not employed and not in some form of training (*ibid.*, p. 50; United Nations 2013). In the last quarter of 2012, this group accounted for 15.2 percent of all youth aged 15 to 24 in the countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2013).

Youth unemployment and underemployment are in part due to the unavailability of jobs and limited livelihoods, and in part to a mismatch in skills and labour market requirements. Current patterns of economic growth in developing countries are not leading to the kind of economic, structural transformation that is necessary to ensure that young people can move into productive employment (Yifu Lin 2012, Boyden and Dercon 2012). In these countries, youth are more likely to leave school with fewer qualifications and struggle to find work (Adams 2007, Brewer 2004). The low demand for labour is coupled with a high demand for highly skilled workers (Ryan 2000).

Many high-income countries have experienced economic recession, reducing demand for labour; it takes time for subsequent growth to translate into jobs or livelihood opportunities. This makes it especially difficult for young people with few skills or limited experience to find and remain in jobs. A substantial proportion of young people are engaged in temporary, seasonal, insecure and unpredictable work, which generates cycles of unemployment and employment that may or may not lead to a stable occupation (Furlong and Cartmel 2007; Macdonald 2008, 2009). Other young people are remaining in education for longer periods, although even this does not guarantee steady work that supports economically independent lives (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, Bynner 2005, Côté and Bynner 2008).

Prolonged unemployment, underemployment or inactivity can affect self-esteem and motivation (Ryan 2000), leaving some youth permanently disadvantaged. The period of youth can extend interminably. In the competitive labour market in Uttar Pradesh, India, for example, where opportunities are structured by caste and other social or political considerations, male youth acquire copious qualification, but are unable to find jobs that require their skills and remain in a limbo of student-hood (Jeffrey 2010). In some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, young men are systematically marginalized economically and socially, since they cannot marry until they have a job or other proof of solvency, and are thus forced to remain in suspended minority status well beyond the teen years.

Young men in different contexts globally articulate the frustrations associated with unemployment and related social and economic immobility in terms of ‘waiting’, ‘boredom’ and ‘time-pass’ (Mains 2007, Vigh 2006, Jeffrey 2010). Girls may also face difficulties in obtaining good jobs. For instance, because of social norms requiring them to undertake the bulk of all domestic work, efforts to increase girls’ school enrolment and employment in The Gambia and Ghana are impeded by constraints on the time they can dedicate to schooling, and to making contacts relevant to securing paid work (Jones and Chant 2009). Similarly, young women in Lusaka, Zambia lack job contacts and economic means relative to young men (Hansen 2005).

The search for better education and job prospects, as well as the experience of modern urban infrastructure and material goods and services, result in a substantial number of young people migrating from rural areas to cities, whether locally, regionally or nationally (Sommers 2003). Though migration may improve young people’s options and reduce certain vulnerabilities, it can also lead to new risks. Many youth who are ‘waiting’ and out of consistent work end up in cities where they find fewer opportunities than they had imagined.

The search for better options takes some young people across borders and oceans, sometimes ‘bouncing’ from one country to the next (Vigh 2009). Patterns of youth migration are frequently influenced by young people’s social relationships and material assets. Youth often migrate between households of origin to those of kin or to those known by their families and communities (Heissler 2013, Vogler 2010). Migration is also gendered. For a young man, migration for work or higher education may be an important step, a rite of passage, in establishing his ability to earn an income and to provide for a household of his own (Broughton 2008, Monsutti 2007). Though migration for work and education may be the result of higher socio-economic privilege for some young people, for others it is not. For instance, poor, rural, Mexican young men take great risks to obtain livelihoods in the United States without the legal protection of the state. Their wages, often meagre sums gained in difficult labouring conditions, are sent back to families in the form of remittances (Broughton 2008, Saucado and Morales 2011).

In summary, lack of jobs and livelihood opportunities and a mismatch in skills and labour market requirements mean that around the world, young people are finding it difficult to find decent work and develop sustainable livelihoods (ILO 2008).

VULNERABILITIES IN SOCIAL TRANSITIONS

As they pass through adolescence and youth, young people experience a range of important social transitions associated with the achievement of ‘adult’ status, which may involve taking on responsibilities associated with livelihoods, partnership, parenthood and citizenship, as well as the

establishment of an independent household. As the 2007 *World Development Report* indicates, choices in relation to social transitions can have significant implications for young people's human capital and future capabilities (World Bank 2006). Consequently, adolescent and youth social transitions have attracted considerable international policy attention recently, inasmuch as there is growing concern to reduce associated vulnerabilities and ensure that the young fulfil their developmental potential.

The prime focus has been on young females, a priority justified by a concern that they face a higher burden of risk as well as by evidence that investing in girls brings wider societal benefits. Girls who stay in school longer tend to marry and have children later, thus decreasing the risk of maternal and child morbidity and mortality (Jones et al. 2010, Levine et al. 2008, Lloyd and Young 2009, Temin and Levine 2009, UNICEF 2010).

Three critical features of social transitions emerge as a common cause of vulnerability in young people. The first is the timing of social transitions, amid concerns that not all young people may be physically and emotionally ready for sexual activity and parenting. Second, decisions about engaging in sexual activity, marriage, starting a family and leaving home are often heavily constrained by wider social norms and expectations as well as by economic pressures, often with vastly different ramifications for males and females. Third, a number of specific experiences and practices associated with youth social transitions have been identified in academic and policy circles as representing a particular risk for those involved. This section highlights vulnerabilities arising from early sexual experience, early female marriage, female circumcision, transactional sex, prostitution and the formation of sexual identity.

Social transitions are often depicted in terms of progression from dependent childhood, through adolescence and youth, to autonomous adulthood. In many contexts, however, mutual relations between generations remain strong across the life course (Boyden 2013, Morrow 2013). Alongside new pressures to study well as the foundation for a better life, young people commonly recognize the need to fulfil traditional filial responsibilities of providing and caring for family, especially parents in old age (Crivello et al. forthcoming). This is particularly the case for young men. As illustrated in Box 5, research in Andhra Pradesh on boys who had left school by the age of 15 found that they were preoccupied with their own future marriages as well as how to assist their families in paying for their sisters' dowries (Morrow 2013).

In many contexts, early sexual experience is a major cause for concern among adults. In some cases, young people who contravene social taboos regarding youth sexual activity are in danger of exclusion from their community, school and/or home (Price and Hawkins 2001). On the other hand, a refusal to acknowledge that young people are engaging in sexual activity can result in them remaining unprotected from and uninformed about the risks (UNFPA and PATH 2006). Early sexual

experience tends to be highly gendered. In a study conducted in 14 developing countries, males reported early sexual experience outside of marriage, while females disproportionately reported it within marriage (Singh et al 2000). Among the gravest risks associated with early sexual experience are potential exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and unplanned pregnancies. Regionally, the highest prevalence of people aged 15 to 24 years with HIV/AIDS is in sub-Saharan Africa (Bearinger et al. 2007).

Box 5: Gendered expectations for young people’s roles and responsibilities

In many countries, there is an emphasis on girls acquiring domestic skills for marriage. Latha, age 16, left school in Andhra Pradesh after grade seven. She had wanted to continue to secondary school, but the distance to school along a deserted route prevented her from doing so.

“We are supposed to go to school in [nearby village]... It is difficult to go to, we have to walk to go to school. So that is the reason we stopped.”

Strong social norms persist. Latha also described the importance of learning to work ‘properly’ in order to please future in-laws. Boys have different responsibilities to their parents and families, including the need to provide for parents in old age and for sisters’ dowries.

Ranadeep and his friend Subbaiah also expressed the view that their future wife should be less educated than they are. Subbaiah said, “What my mother says is the girl whom I marry must treat the guests who come home with respect and affection. In villages, why do we need her to be educated? If she is not educated, it will be fine.”

Young people’s social transitions are interconnected with transitions through school and work. They are shaped by specific contexts permeated by economic and social risks, and important social norms founded in intergenerational obligations.

Source: Morrow 2013.

Over the last several decades, teenage pregnancy has been a subject of intense interest and debate in high-income countries, where it has been associated with medical risks to mother and child, increased rates of maternal depression, and lower educational and employment status (Bunting and McAuley 2004). Pregnancy at a younger age is linked with babies born at a low weight. Data from England show that for low-weight babies, or those below 2,500 grams of birthweight, the mortality rate of children born to mothers aged 20 to 24 years was 17 percent higher than for those born to mothers aged 25 to 29 years—40 deaths compared with 33.9 deaths per 1,000 low-weight babies (United Kingdom Office for National Statistics 2013, p. 5). In sub-Saharan Africa, one in five young women have given birth to at least one child by the age of 20 (Bearinger et al. 2007). Girls aged 15 and younger are five times more likely to die in childbirth as women in their 20s, and infant mortality is increased by 60 per cent among children born to mothers below the age of 19 (UNICEF 2009).

Youth pregnancy is also associated with early departure from school. In South Africa, young women who drop out of school due to pregnancy are at risk of not returning, particularly if they are the primary caregivers for the infant (Grant and Hallman 2006). Schoolgirls who share child-care responsibilities with others are more likely to return to school, especially if they are living with an adult female. Though less discussed and perhaps less extreme, there are also implications for young men; acknowledging paternity can mean financial and social obligations that they are not ready to handle (Hardgrove 2012).

Early marriage continues to be common among females in many of the poorest countries, where they experience limited social and economic options. Data on 33 low- and middle-income countries from Demographic and Health Surveys and other sources comparing the situation in the 1990s with the 2000s suggest an increase in the typical age of marriage for young women, from 17.6 to 18.3 years. Within this overall trend, poorer women typically married earlier than richer women. Although the age of marriage went up for all socio-economic groups, the greatest increases were for the richest groups, with the result that the gap in the typical age of marriage between poorer and richer young women increased to half a year by the 2000s (Lenhardt and Shepherd 2013, p. 13).

Early marriage has long been understood in many cultures as ensuring that girls are secure socially and materially. Marriage is intended to protect them from sexual promiscuity that would expose them to the risk of STIs and pregnancy out of wedlock, while also preventing them and their families from experiencing social shame. Recognition has grown in international circles and elsewhere, however, that early female marriage is a violation of children's rights, and an expression of gendered and generational injustice (Jain and Kurtz 2007, Mathur et al. 2003).¹¹ The risks include early departure from school, reproductive health hazards and exposure to abuse. In many cases, early marriage entails a young girl marrying a substantially older man. Jain and Kurtz (2007) suggest that in such arrangements young girls, who are less physically, emotionally and mentally mature, are less capable of asserting themselves, and are thus much more susceptible to physical and sexual violence. So while early marriage may shield young women and their families from certain social vulnerabilities (Boyden, Pankhurst and Tafere 2013), it carries many risks.

In some areas of the world, female circumcision, either shortly after birth or at puberty, is a precondition for marriage. Across 29 countries in Africa and the Middle East, more than 125 million girls and women have undergone some form of the practice; an estimated 30 million girls will be circumcised over the next decade. Though a large number of young women are affected, there is evidence that the phenomenon is declining in half of these countries (UNICEF 2013, WHO 2011).

¹¹ Early marriage is defined here as below 18 years of age, which is the upper threshold of childhood as defined in the CRC and the legal age of marriage in many countries (Boyden, Pankhurst and Tafere 2013).

Female circumcision is associated with potential physical, emotional and social damage to girls (WHO 2011). However, a failure to understand local perspectives on the practice and to take full account of the socio-cultural and economic context may bring about resistance and unintended adverse consequences for young women and their families, as indicated in Box 6.

Box 6: Social change and traditional practices in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, the median age at first marriage is 16.1 for women aged 25 to 49, compared with 23.8 for men. There are signs of change, however, with rising rates of median age at first marriage among younger age groups, urban women and in the north of the country.

Available data suggest that up to three in four women have been circumcised, with three forms used: cliterodectomy, excision and infibulation. Rates are greater in rural areas (three-quarters) compared with urban areas (two-thirds), with significant regional variation—prevalence is higher in the south. In northern Ethiopia, the procedure tends to be carried out after birth, whereas in the south it is usually conducted as a prelude to marriage. The practice has begun to decline, becoming less prevalent among daughters compared to their mothers, and among women and girls with education, in urban areas and in the north.

The Ethiopian Government opposes female early marriage and female circumcision, designating them harmful traditional practices proscribed by law. The Government has introduced constitutional and other legislation, and promoted a wide range of preventive measures, largely comprising advocacy campaigns in the media, in schools and among local associations around the adverse health and social consequences. In some areas, this has resulted in changes in values and practices, also supported by greater participation in school and expanded economic opportunities for young people.

Early female marriage and female circumcision together have often been seen as protecting girls from engaging in premarital sex, and preventing them from being stigmatized, and risking STIs and pregnancy out of wedlock. This has resulted in resistance to reform in some regions, notably Oromia, including in areas where intensive advocacy against the practices has occurred. Peer pressure leads some girls to opt for circumcision against the wishes of their parents. This has caused disagreement within families, contestation of state policy, and actions such as elopements under the guise of abduction and clandestine rituals. The last increases risks to girls because the rituals often take place at night with poor lighting and less experienced practitioners.

Reforming traditional practices is by no means straightforward. In the face of strong prohibitions and advocacy, traditional practices can be driven underground rather than disappear. Uncircumcised girls in traditional communities may contend with stigma, social isolation and even abandonment, while circumcised girls feel shame and regret in adapting to new social norms. Addressing traditional practices needs to be a part of more comprehensive social reform, to ensure young people have good quality and accessible health and education services, and greater employment opportunities to help reduce attachment to such customs.

Source: Boyden, Pankhurst and Tafere 2013.

Changes in social norms can have significant positive impacts on youth social transitions, with young people marrying later and delaying having children. These new opportunities also challenge traditional expectations, however, notably around the roles of males and females as they make the transition through puberty and towards marriage. For example, some parents fear that increasing opportunities for girls and young women to study and delay marriage may put them at greater risk of acquiring a ‘bad name’ or becoming unmarriageable. Studying away from home may be a particular threat to their reputation and marriage prospects (Pells 2011). Consequently, teenage girls in Ethiopia and Andhra Pradesh generally report greater restrictions on their mobility than do teenage boys (Boyden and Crivello 2012, Camfield and Tafere 2011).

Young men also face risks in their daily lives that do not always come to the attention of policy makers. Road traffic accidents and injuries at work are particularly prominent (UNICEF 2012b, p. 19). Across the four Young Lives countries, young people aged 14 to 16 years from poor households were significantly more likely to experience non-fatal work-related injuries than young people from wealthier households. This is especially true for young men as a consequence of physically demanding jobs, such as stone crushing and farm work involving pesticides and sharp equipment (Morrow et al. 2014).

Young people confronted by poverty and limited opportunities for good employment may feel compelled to use their sexuality in very functional ways by engaging in transactional sex or prostitution to meet their material needs. For example, this is how young females provided for themselves in one refugee camp in Ghana where livelihood opportunities were particularly limited (Hampshire et al. 2008). Transactional sex involves the informal exchange of favours or gifts (Hunter 2002), and benefactors are commonly referred to as ‘sugar daddies’ (and less commonly, ‘sugar mammas’). In South Africa, gifts or favours include clothes and school fees, though they might be as mundane as taxi rides (Hampshire et al. 2011).

Prostitution involves more formal exchanges of sexual services for monetary payment. While most often assumed to entail older male benefactors and young women, transactional sex also involves young males (Kuate-Defo 2004). Similarly, prostitution is most commonly thought of as a female line of work, although it also involves young men (Haley et al. 2004).

Transactional sex and prostitution increase susceptibility to STIs and sexual violence through multiple sex partners. STIs are more frequent when young people are also using drugs (Haley et al. 2004, Duncan et al. 2010). In Kingston, Jamaica, condom use is less common among sex workers with non-paying partners (Duncan et al. 2010). So while there are a number of severe risks associated with selling sex, an explicit agreement of payment seems to enhance negotiation power. There is some evidence that more informal arrangements have particular consequences in terms of young people’s vulnerabilities. The lines of consent can become easily blurred due to an imbalance in

power, and the ability to negotiate use of contraception or to refuse intercourse may not be easy or freely expressed.

It is increasingly recognized that sexual identity and orientation are highly complex, diverse and changeable, and may involve young people expressing individual preferences and engaging in sexual activity that puts them at odds with their families and communities. Awareness of sexual differences is growing in schools and universities in many high-income countries; homosexuality is a topic of increasing moral and political debate in low- and middle-income countries. Though progress is being made towards equal rights in many countries, they have yet to be achieved anywhere. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and intersex (LGBTI) youth confront social stigma in all societies, and are vulnerable to bullying, persecution, harassment and violence. It is illegal to be gay in 76 countries, though in some places this only applies to males (United Nations 2011). A recent report by Amnesty International¹² points to the arbitrary arrest of gays and lesbians in Cameroon, rape and murder of LGBTI people in South Africa, and a rise in homophobic attacks in many countries in Africa. Severe social discrimination may also result in reduced access to public health resources, which increases vulnerability to the spread of STIs and HIV/AIDS (Figueroa 2008).

In summary, young people face vulnerabilities stemming from economic pressures and social norms that constrain decision-making over social transitions towards parenthood, partnership, and other adult roles and responsibilities. Risks, such as unsafe sex, or sexual activity or identity at odds with community norms, can have profound implications for young people's well-being and future opportunities. Though international attention has focused on risks to females such as early marriage and circumcision, it is important to be mindful of the pressures on young men.

PROTEST, CONFLICT AND ESCAPE

Youth respond to vulnerabilities in a number of ways, some of which appear extreme and are easily presented in an exceptionally positive or negative light. This section unpacks some of the causes and consequences of youth responses to severe risks and inequalities, recognizing that challenges differ across the globe. Three divergent responses—protest, violence and conflict, and escape—may involve either collective or individual action. They are not the only ways that youth manage vulnerabilities, but they do entail increased vulnerability for youth and societies as well as chances to improve opportunities that could lead youth in new directions.

In recent history, the world witnessed the 'Arab Spring', made up in large part of young people who demonstrated in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey against oppressive regimes that failed to meet

¹² "Making Love a Crime: Criminalisation of same-sex conduct in sub-Saharan Africa," see: www.amnesty.org.

their needs (Honwana 2013). What has captured the imagination of commentators and onlookers is the role of social media as a critical vehicle for organizing and carrying out protests (Allagui and Kuebler 2011, Stepanova 2011). These visible and large-scale demonstrations are the result of a unique moment in history, since they have been facilitated in large part through the technological innovations of the last two decades. More fundamentally, they represent a collective effort by young people and other groups to draw attention to the severity of unjust situations and to pressure their governments. The protests have been widely recognized as to some degree constructive.

Other attempts by young people to improve their opportunities might appear problematic to broader society. In situations where there is little legal opportunity for young people and little governmental presence to establish order, youth (largely male, but including some young women) may join gangs and take part in illegal activities and violence to obtain livelihoods, identity and inclusion, and the respect of peers and superiors, and to maintain a degree of order in their communities (e.g., Dowdney 2003, Jensen 2008, Bourgois 2003). Respect and inclusion as a member of a gang can be an effective counter to the exclusion and shame that often result from severe inequalities. Membership also introduces numerous risks. It places young people outside of 'socially acceptable' pathways through school, and means that their living (or part of it) is supported by alternative channels involving crime, and the use of exploitation, force and violence. Around the world, young men are disproportionately represented in acts of violence, but as perpetrators and victims of fatal and non-fatal violence (WHO 2002). In El Salvador, 157 deaths per 100,000 adolescent boys aged 15 to 19 years are due to homicide, compared with 26 per 100,000 among adolescent girls. In Brazil, the gap is even larger: 83 per 100,000 for adolescent boys, compared with 7 per 100,000 for adolescent girls (UNICEF 2012b, p. 35).

In some areas of conflict, young people (again mainly men, but including some women) can become involved in warfare. Palestinian youth, for example, are brought up with a strong sense of injustice and political values that make them feel compelled to fight (Hart 2008b). Elsewhere, the political motives are more complex. Young people join armed groups for a variety of reasons apart from identity, respect and inclusion, such as to survive, or to protect themselves and their families, or because they are coerced, forced and in some cases willingly volunteer (Bøås & Hatløy 2008, Gates and Reich 2009, Humphreys and Weinstein 2004, Özerdem and Podder 2011, Pugel 2007, Hoffman 2011b, Wessells 2006, Utas 2003). Involvement with military organizations places young people at increased exposure to violence as well as requiring them to commit violence (Blattman and Annan 2010).

Sharp disparities in access to basic resources and opportunities that support survival and well-being are often inextricably linked to the presence and proliferation of crime, violence and conflict in communities, countries and regions—all of which increase youth vulnerabilities and affect their

transitions through school, work and into adulthood. Although inequalities manifest in different ways across contexts, there is a clear and consistent connection between inequality and the onset or increase of crime, violence and conflict (Fajnzylber et al. 2002, WHO 2002). In such circumstances, when youth break wider society norms, the situation rather than the youth comprises the problem.

In armed conflict, daily life becomes precarious. Schools close. Livelihoods can become unmanageable. Youth who are not directly involved in the conflict may be placed at very different risks of exploitation and physical harm. Their responsibilities may multiply overnight as they assume roles as breadwinners, carers, household heads or soldiers (Hart 2008a, p. 7). For many, flight is the only viable response, whether within or across borders. Vulnerabilities during flight and forced displacement vary significantly depending on the circumstances of their departure, means of travel and conditions of refuge. Although most refugees are from low- and middle-income countries, and most settle in neighbouring countries, some travel farther and claim asylum in Europe and North America, where their material welfare may improve but their mental health may deteriorate (Miller et al. 2008). In some instances, young people travel long distances and become separated from families and loved ones (Luster et al. 2008); many become exposed to physical danger and sexual exploitation (Hopkins and Hill 2008).

Once in a situation of displacement, youth may experience opportunities unavailable in their natal communities, including for school or work (Lammers 2006). They also face a wide range of vulnerabilities shaped by different contours of gender, class or other group identity, and to different extents. Although self-settled youth living outside camps are often able to find jobs, unemployment is endemic among young people in refugee camps as host governments generally prohibit refugees from working. Camps have also been used as areas for recruitment to armed groups. Girls may be at particular risk of sexual exploitation (de Berry 2004). Refugees may also face discrimination by host communities (Dick 2002, Mann 2012). Self-settled youth who live and work illegally are at constant risk of exploitation by unscrupulous employers or landlords who use the threat of disclosure to ensure compliance with their demands. Vulnerabilities are highly variable for forcibly displaced youth, depending on the underlying inequalities at work in their situation.

In summary, young people play a significant part in shaping their fate. They use various means to overcome adversities and vulnerabilities of many kinds, including protest, acts of violence and escape. Such strategies may be a source of new opportunities and resilience, but they may also compound youth vulnerabilities.

Conclusions: Reducing vulnerabilities as a route to capitalizing on the demographic dividend

This paper has explored youth vulnerabilities, arguing that contrary to popular assumptions concerning young people as either troublemakers or in trouble, they make important contributions to their families, communities and societies. When trouble arises, contextual factors as much as individual volition frame decisions or actions; therefore, policies aimed at preventing problems facing young people need to engage with context. Life course analysis highlights both that capacities and capabilities develop—in different ways—as children and young people grow up, and that realization of these capacities depends to a significant degree on circumstances and opportunities as young people move towards adulthood. Multiple vulnerabilities, stemming from poverty, inequality, social exclusion and hazardous environments, reinforce and overlap with one another, constraining the development and well-being of young people, and thereby hampering local and national development.

Young people constitute an enormous demographic group, particularly in many low- and middle-income countries. United Nations estimates indicate that 2.8 billion people—46 percent of the population—are below the age of 25 in less developed regions. By comparison, the same age group makes up around 28 percent of the population in high-income countries (UNDESA 2013). There are significant opportunities for national development and substantial risks if young people are not able to fulfil their potential. Policies designed to reduce youth vulnerabilities must therefore address underlying structural inequalities, remove constraints for more disadvantaged young people and enable the realization of potential.

This final section outlines how best to foster young people's productivity, self-determination and citizenship, which together build on and support youth well-being. The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda has identified youth as a cross-cutting issue, carrying a potential demographic dividend for economic growth and sustained national development (United Nations 2013). Policies and interventions for youth, however, lag far behind those supporting children. They lack understanding of youth challenges and workable solutions, including in terms of critical moments for and economic returns to investment in youth (Knowles and Behrman 2003, 2005; UNICEF 2010).¹³ This is true for high-income countries as much as low- and middle-income countries, although constraints vary widely.

¹³ In their assessment of the economic returns to 41 investments in youth in the broad categories of formal schooling, civilian and military training, work, reproductive health, school-based health, other health, and community and other, Knowles and Behrman (2005) highlight the lack of reliable information as critical and argue that this is a top priority for future research. That said, they do find that some investments, such as in formal

Getting the foundation right. Poor conditions in the early years, such as malnutrition or lack of access to pre-school, have long lasting impacts on children's development, and can shape exposure to risk and vulnerabilities during adolescence and youth. Increasing international attention has been focused on the early years of life, cutting across education, health and protection (Grantham-McGregor et al. 2007; UNESCO 2012a, p. 45). Ensuring access to quality pre-school, feeding programmes and increased health care coverage, such as through community-based health extension workers who provide vaccinations and health check-ups, are all critical measures (UNESCO 2007, Flottorp 2008).

Building on this foundation requires a multidimensional approach to human development throughout adolescence and into young adulthood (UNICEF 2011). As shown, risks in one domain of development, such as poor physical health, are often associated with poorer outcomes in others, such as cognitive development. Yet policies and interventions for adolescents and youth are often divided along sectoral lines. National youth plans can be a good way of ensuring that the key policy areas are in place and coordinate the work of different ministries, such as education, health and labour, and give greater visibility to the requirements of young people.¹⁴ They need to be supported by better data collection on key youth indicators (ibid.).

Creating an enabling environment. The risks faced by young people are shaped by the circumstances in which they live. Poverty, inequality, social exclusion and hazardous environments render them vulnerable to a series of other risks in educational, social and work-related transitions. Two areas of policy are important. The first involves improving living environments. Expanding coverage of basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity; ensuring quality and safe housing, especially for young people who have left home; and developing infrastructure, such as roads and transport links, particularly in remote rural areas, can enhance young people's well-being and enable them to be in a better position to take advantage of education, training and employment opportunities.

Second, the social protection floor calls for policy coherence and coordination among different social policies to prevent individuals and their families from falling into and remaining trapped in poverty and deprivation. It also aims to protect those who are unable to earn a decent income through employment, and to empower workers to take advantage of economic opportunities and

schooling, adult basic education and literacy, some types of school-based health investments (e.g., micronutrient supplements and, under certain circumstances, reproductive health programmes) and measures designed to reduce the consumption of tobacco yield economic returns that are at least as high as those for many investments in other sectors.

¹⁴ See: www.youthpolicy.org/blog/2013/01/state-of-youth-policy-2013/.

work their way out of poverty (ILO 2011, p. 10). Recent expansion of social protection schemes offers considerable potential to tackle absolute poverty; enable households to better manage risks, for example, illness or crop failure; and support access to education and health services (World Bank 2012a). As such, the development of social protection mechanisms is likely to be an important driver of the post-2015 ‘leave no one behind’ agenda (United Nations 2013, p. 15). To date, however, social protection schemes, particularly conditional cash transfers, have been more focused on access to education and health for younger age groups, rather than training programmes or health services for youth.

The case for social protection has been well made, and accepted by international organizations and many national governments. Despite an increasing number of schemes, however, coverage remains low (Hanlon et al. 2010). The World Bank identifies protective, preventive and promotive roles for social protection (2012a); others highlight transformation as a key objective (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004). Aligning social protection policy with youth policy raises three key issues:

- First, the recent ILO social floor recommendation (ILO 2012) identifies children as a core focus for basic income security—including redistributive policies to support access to good health and education (ibid., clause 5). Since childhood is taken to end at age 18, this covers the early years of youth. Redistributive policies, including those targeting support at households with children, help assure development. Policies aimed at households with children are well established in OECD countries (see, for instance, OECD 2009). There are also important examples in low- and middle-income countries, such as the South African Child Support Grant, which can provide support up to age 18 (Department of Social Development, South African Social Security Agency and UNICEF 2011). Since households with children are typically poorer and have greater needs than other households, using this criterion to target support can provide an effective solution for identifying priority groups.
- Second, the ILO social floor recommendation makes specific mention of employability and vocational training, both of which are key for young people (ILO 2012, clause 10). Some social protection instruments can actively be used to support skills development and assist transitions into the labour market. The recent popularity of conditional cash transfers, particularly in South America, but increasingly beyond, has been, in part, driven by the explicit focus on human capital development, whereby participation in education is a condition of receipt (Fiszbein et al. 2009). Conditions where receipt is linked with compliance with stated criteria may be used to further programme objectives and encourage public support for redistributive measures. That said, whether conditionality is needed to achieve programme objectives such as school enrolment, of which parents may already be very supportive, remains under debate (Hanlon et al. 2010). Equally important are the longer term implications of such conditionality, which may reinforce stereotypes of why

people are poor, such as through a lack of interest in education (ibid., pp. 128-129; Standing 2011, p. 140). An alternative approach to direct conditionality is to combine receipt of an entitlement with information and support to access education or training options, thus encouraging uptake.

- Third, and more broadly, increasing coverage of anti-poverty and risk mitigation policies, even where young people are not directly targeted, can have beneficial impacts on them. Indeed, as described in this section in relation to health insurance and influencing gendered dynamics, generic social protection measures can support a range of objectives relevant to young people's well-being.

Several specific policy areas are of key relevance to young people:

Education and skills: Significant progress in the expansion of primary schooling has led to near universal enrolment in many parts of the world. Challenges include both improving the generally very poor quality of schooling, as well as supporting young people to access and complete secondary school, and develop skills relevant to their lives and the labour market (United Nations 2013, UNESCO 2012a). Young people's ability to learn is affected both by school environment and home background. Measures to improve learning therefore require improvements in school quality, and social protection or other poverty-reduction strategies that facilitate learning.

- **Improving quality of education:** Quality education is “inclusive, relevant and democratic” (Tikly and Barrett 2009). All learners should have access to potential learning outcomes that are meaningful to them, valued by their communities, consistent with national development priorities, determined through public debate and ensured through processes of accountability. Although the objectives of education systems may differ between countries, steps are needed to address the quality of fundamental areas of learning, such as literacy, numeracy and life skills, across countries (Brookings Institute 2013).
- **Ensuring relevance of education.** For education to pay off for young people, it needs to be not only of good quality, but relevant to the types of jobs, needs and opportunities in different countries. Establishing a better understanding of and response to the sorts of skills required in diverse and rapidly changing national economic contexts is a key policy challenge.
- **Improving capability to learn:** Young people fail to learn and depart early from school for numerous reasons. Circumstances such as poverty, illness (both of the young person and of other family members), adverse events and pregnancy lead to school departure; they cannot be addressed through educational policy alone. Interventions such as India's Midday Meal Scheme, however, can increase enrolment and attendance while bolstering nutritional intake, leading to improved concentration and performance (Singh, Park and Dercon 2012).

Other policies, such as social protection, are also needed to help young people stay in education and training.

Jobs and livelihoods: The World Bank has recently highlighted the centrality of jobs and job creation to human and economic development, attributing much of the recent decline in absolute poverty to the growth in jobs (World Bank 2012a). This means that policies aimed at supporting and increasing smooth transitions into the labour market must address the economic conditions that enable absorption of youth into the workforce, as well as the capacity of young people to participate in it. The creation of jobs must therefore be accompanied by access to quality education, and technical and vocational training programmes that equip youth with skills relevant to the livelihood opportunities in their locality (United Nations 2013; UNESCO 2012a, 2012b). As shown in this paper, the structure of the labour market shapes differential parental investment in the education of sons and daughters. A particular area of focus needs to be ensuring that young women are not disadvantaged, and can access both training and the labour market. This includes removing barriers so that adolescent girls can stay in school (World Bank 2011). Specific policies include:

- **Improving labour market opportunities:** Policies that increase access to entry-level jobs can enable more young people to participate in the workforce. One intervention that has been attempted is the implementation of government subsidies for youth employment. A number of Eastern European countries have tried this with varying results (see Bertchman et al. 2007). These kinds of initiatives tend to be implemented by more developed states with sufficient resources. Governments in developing countries are far less well equipped in many instances.
- **Improving youth capacity to participate:** Skill development interventions are relatively common across both high- and middle-income countries (ibid.). Training schemes improve the employability and entrepreneurial capabilities of young people. Programmes that appear most effective combine coursework with on-the-job training (Fares and Puerto 2009, Roberts et al. 1994). Monitoring and evaluation remain limited, however (Bertchman et al. 2007), and lack the rigour to draw comprehensive conclusions about the efficacy of interventions. Further, and importantly, quality skills training is only as effective as the capacity of the labour market to absorb trained young people. Skills must have a place to be used.

Health and well-being: Access to preventive or curative health care, including reproductive and mental health services, can enable young people to manage risk more effectively and promote their capability to develop their lives (Resnick et al. 2012). But in many regions of the world, health systems are still poorly equipped to address the specific needs of adolescents and youth. National health strategies should contain specific targets on both determinants and outcomes of health for

young people, in order to direct technical support and funding towards systems more responsive to their needs. Improving health services with a focus on young people needs to account for the following factors:

- **Coverage and access:** Access to health care, including whether or not services exist, as well as whether or not young people can access them, is the foundation. In expanding health coverage, there is a preventive element (for example, community-based programmes, such as those deploying health extension workers focused on public health) through to expansion of more formal health care provision (such as health insurance schemes, or movement towards universal health coverage).
 - **Preventive services:** Community-based services, rather than traditional secondary care, can provide a relatively cost-effective approach to improving public health. In Ethiopia, health extension workers receive specific training in adolescent and reproductive health to help young people access information and services (Ethiopia Ministry of Health 2011).
 - **Primary and secondary care:** The direct or indirect cost of seeking health care is a significant barrier in many parts of the world. Health insurance schemes are one measure that has been used to increase financing for health systems, while protecting individuals from high out-of-pocket expenditures. For young people, the fee level will be important; children are often exempt from charges while youth are not. Also critical is how young people are engaged in schemes—for example, linking them to school enrolment will exclude out-of-school youth. Health care items covered by insurance schemes need to be relevant.
- **Quality ‘youth-friendly’ services:** Key services for young people include access to contraception and reproductive health care; prevention, treatment and care for HIV/AIDS and other STIs; mental health services; and physical trauma care for injuries. Given the sensitive nature of many of these services, it is essential to design them specifically for young people. A setting where young people feel comfortable, are treated with respect, receive information in an accessible format and know confidentiality is protected is key to breaking down barriers to access. See Pathfinder International (2012) for one example of a model developed with these aims in mind.
- **Community involvement:** Community involvement is essential in the design and implementation of a responsive health care system. It can support an understanding of local conceptions of health, well-being and risk, as well as assessment of any barriers to access. For example, in some cultures, mental health difficulties are understood in terms of spirit possession. Individuals may not seek help. Community involvement can help elicit key social and cultural details critical for sensitive and appropriate interventions. This approach is also

important in building support for addressing delicate issues such as reproductive health, as stigma may prevent young people from accessing health care. A variety of approaches aimed at engaging communities have been outlined by the Inter-Agency Working Group on Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health (2007).

Addressing gender inequalities: There has been considerable international policy attention to improving the circumstances and supporting the rights of adolescent girls and young women. For example, most recently, the Nike Foundation, the NoVo Foundation, the United Nations Foundation and the Coalition for Adolescent Girls commenced The Girl Effect.¹⁵ This initiative is intended as a ‘revolution’ led by adolescent girls to end global poverty; it builds on their energy, creativity and skills. Undoubtedly in many parts of the world, girls and women face very considerable disadvantages—in the home, community, labour market and civic participation. Often, however, the gender ‘debate’ is focused on girls and women rather than dynamics affecting both girls and women *and* boys and men. To effectively alter these dynamics requires asking where these disadvantages actually come from and attending to the social processes causing them. This paper argues that discrimination within the household is often symptomatic of wider social norms that in conditions of material deficit can advantage males over females. Addressing this challenge requires a two-pronged approach.

- First, **target broader structural inequalities** that shape how young people experience opportunities or are treated. Key examples of wider social processes shaping gender roles include discrimination in laws or the labour market that underpins gender disparities. In addition to legal reform, there are policy opportunities to influence or challenge gender roles. Social protection schemes offer one way of altering dynamics inside and outside the household by determining who can access schemes and resources. An example of a scheme encouraging women’s participation is the Indian Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, which in rural areas provides 100 days of employment a year at a minimum wage. The scheme requires that one-third of participants be women, that equal wages to be paid to female and male participants, and that child-care facilities are provided. Such approaches rely on both regulations and effective implementation. One study in Andhra Pradesh highlights that mothers’ participation in the Indian scheme is associated with an increase in the school attendance and grade attainment of their children, particularly daughters and the poorest children (Alfridi et al. 2013). The authors argue that involvement supports women’s greater economic contribution to the household, leading to more participation in decision-making and bargaining power.

¹⁵ See: www.girleffect.org.

- Second, **policies aiming to reduce gender-based disadvantages should not focus solely on young women**, but take account of the structural causes that disadvantage both sexes, and also engage with men and boys in combatting gender-based discrimination. The work conducted by organizations such as Promundo and MenEngage are important in involving men and boys in combatting gender inequities and gender-based violence, including through educational programmes.¹⁶ This is key to improving the health and well-being of girls and women, as in some contexts men may control access to health care and household resources, and be the main perpetrators of violence. Further, just as gender analysis shows that both young men and young women are affected by the social roles they are expected to fulfil, boys and men can be negatively affected by stereotypes discouraging them from accessing health services or playing an active role in bringing up children (UNFPA and Promundo 2010).

Access to information and citizenship. The rapid growth of information and communication technologies provides considerable opportunities for young people to access and exchange knowledge and ideas, as well as substantial challenges in terms of abuse, exploitation and cyber-bullying (Plan International 2010, UNICEF 2012a). Where access is possible and financially viable, young people are likely to be early adopters of new technologies. Nevertheless, access and use is marked by a digital divide shaped by existing social and economic inequalities. Policies to engage with underlying inequalities also need to consider how information exclusion may curb life chances.

Finally, as they mature, adolescents and youth take on increasing responsibilities within their lives and communities. Their civic engagement is an important avenue through which their concerns may be voiced, their ideas expressed, and their contributions harnessed and acknowledged. Youth participation needs to be genuine, however, and avoid becoming tokenistic or excluding those who are more marginalized in society (UNICEF 2011).

¹⁶ See: www.promundo.org.br/en/ and www.menengage.org/.

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