

## Part II

# Dynamics of Childhood Poverty

This theme covers ways in which different dimensions of poverty overlap and interact; it incorporates attention to the levels of household and environment, to conditions behind movement into and out of poverty, and to the mechanisms of intergenerational poverty. We consider the interaction between poverty and other household adversities, such as sickness, crop failure, or other forms of loss of income. Although researchers in these fields cannot afford to ignore issues raised by qualitative research (as Dercon demonstrated in Chapter 4), this section deals mainly with broad patterns that emerge from survey data. Here we are dealing with statistical probabilities rather than the actual outcomes for children that are discussed in Part III, where we consider children's experiences.

The methodological problems in measuring poverty discussed in the last chapter lead directly into this theme. In the introduction to methodology, we pointed out the problems of measuring poverty in terms of wealth or income, and indicated how Young Lives has tried to overcome these by using instead measures of expenditure and consumption. In Chapter 4, Stephan Dercon discussed in some detail the difficulty of measuring poverty as such for the purposes of policy or intervention. In this part of the volume we find a limited use of certain indices and focused measures.

Notwithstanding the limitations of generalized measures, in the first chapter of this section of the volume (Chapter 5), Paul Glewwe uses a number of indicators to assess whether poor people in Vietnam are benefiting from that country's economic growth. Generally, economic growth has increased household incomes among the poor, which in turn appears to have increased school enrolment and reduced children's work. But there was little evidence that improved incomes significantly

reduced under nutrition or improved the survival of children. Moreover, the general trends of improved income and school enrolment do not indicate the different ways in which children of poor people benefit or the extent of such benefits when they occur; nor do the general trends indicate the specific conditions under which benefits can be maximized. Glewwe shows that government programmes designed specifically to help poor people have not successfully focused on the poorest families, and he argues for research to ensure that the poorest children are reached more effectively.

This follows the point made earlier by Dercon. Glewwe uses general indices to offer guides on the overall success of policy. If, however, policy and intervention are to help those most in need, research is needed to focus on specific problems they face and processes that might alleviate these. There is growing evidence of the importance of the first five years of life for subsequent childhood development, as indicated by the chapters by Engle (Chapter 8) and Wachs (Chapter 9) in Part III of this volume, and by Young Lives data generally. This has provoked massive investment in pre-school institutions to prepare children (and particularly those from deprived households) for entry into the school system by providing constructive learning environments (UNESCO 2006). Besides the strong evidence of the beneficial impact of stimulation for learning, there is also growing evidence that early under-nutrition can have permanent effects on both physical development and school attainment. Jere Behrman, after discussing research techniques for establishing causes and effects, presents evidence on the disadvantages of early malnutrition. He discusses strategies for improving the nutrition of children and argues that investment in this area is particularly rewarding. Policy on early childhood development should, therefore, extend beyond learning centres and education: it should integrate the efforts of a number government ministries to ensure a sound start to young lives in both cognitive and material spheres.

Tassew Woldehanna (Chapter 7) picks up this theme, analysing data from two rounds of Young Lives research in Ethiopia. Following the Younger Cohort of children over four years, he considers how pre-natal and post-natal economic shocks relate to the later physical growth of children, and argues that what appears as a temporary setback may have long-term consequences for a family. Pre-natal shocks are significantly related to poor growth at five years, although some children have been able later to recover from early stunting. Woldehanna uses simulation exercises to indicate the benefit of social assistance programmes responding to area-wide shocks, such as drought. He points

out, however, that shocks particular to specific families, such as illness or death of the bread winner, are also significant; since these are not at present adequately covered by social assistance in Ethiopia, the analysis suggests an expansion of current policy.

Data that we present in this volume underline the importance for policy of early childhood nutrition (Chapters 3, 6, and 7, reinforced by Chapters 8 and 9 to come). As we pointed out in the introduction, Young Lives data reveal broader consequences of early under-nutrition in the psycho-social realm, which will be reported in further volumes of this series. The next section points to a broader range of early childhood risks.

## **References**

UNESCO (2006) *Strong Foundations: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Education For All Global Monitoring Report 2007, Paris: UNESCO.