



Impact Case Study

Child well-being in low-income countries

Introduction and background

RMIT researchers Simon Feeny, Alberto Posso and Sefa Awaworyi Churchill have all made significant contributions and innovations towards addressing child well-being in low-income countries, particularly in the areas of child sponsorship, child labour and child health. This case study highlights three of their major projects.

Professors Feeny, Posso and Churchill partnered with three international aid organisations to provide insights and recommend innovations to support more effective child welfare initiatives in low-income countries.

Funding and institutional support

These projects were conducted in partnership with the following global child welfare bodies, which provided datasets and funding to enable the research.

1. World Vision International (WVI)
2015: Evaluating Child Sponsorship Schemes
2. Plan International
2018: A Quantitative Evaluation of Child Sponsorship
3. United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO)
2021: Climate Change and Child Labour in Agriculture.

Project 1: World Vision International 2015: Evaluating Child Sponsorship Schemes

Conducted in partnership with World Vision International (WVI), and led by RMIT University, this project ran from 2015-2017 with researchers Simon Feeny and Cara Donohue (RMIT), Gill Westthorp (Community Matters), Matthew Clarke (Deakin University) and Michael Jennings (SOAS University, London).

The research

- How Area Development Programmes (ADPs) and Child Sponsorship activities contributed to child wellbeing, particularly for the most vulnerable children;
- How effectively WVI's community-based approach supports communities and improves child wellbeing;
- How WVI's Christian identity informs its work;
- How WVI programmes enable communities to sustain improvements in child wellbeing; and
- The life trajectories of former sponsored children after graduating from the programmes

Research reports

- Researchers provided a summary and five country reports to WVI, and presented key findings to WVI's Senior Leadership.
- The Former Sponsored Children: Where are they Now? report gave former sponsored children the opportunity to speak and reflect on transformative experiences in the programme.
- A 3-page policy brief, based on the combined research from RMIT, Deakin and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) University of London:
<https://www.worldvision.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Child-Sponsorship-Research-brief-with-logos.pdf>

Publications

- Jennings, M., Clarke, M., Feeny, S., Westthorp, G. and C. Donohue (2020), "A Potent Fuel? Faith Identity and Development in World Vision Community Programming", *Journal of International Development*, Vol.33, No.1, pp. 70-85.
- Feeny, S., Clarke, M., Jennings, M., Westthorp, G. and C. Donohue (2020), "Impacts of Child Sponsorship Communications: Findings from World Vision Programmes" [under review].

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What's next...

Overview of impact

- Data management issues are being managed through ongoing digitalization, quality improvement and capacity building processes.
- Some of the highlighted data issues are informing an analysis on what Child Sponsorship monitoring data can or cannot be used for.
- WWI is working to improve its research processes to track and link impacts to implementation approaches.
- Insights gained from the Former Sponsored Children: Where are they Now? report are being incorporated into the major Relational Spaces with Children project to define and strengthen the interactions of staff and volunteers with children and share the knowledge and skills within communities. They have also been built into the most critical national office and frontline staff sponsorship training.

Project 2: Plan International 2018: A Quantitative Evaluation of Child Sponsorship

Plan International is one of the world's largest development and humanitarian organisations, working for children's rights and gender equality.

The research

For the 2018 A Quantitative Evaluation of Child Sponsorship project, the research team reviewed a dataset of 12 million surveys taken among 2.7 million sponsored children over a ten year period. Their analysis allowed for the study of different groups of children, including comparisons on girls and boys, children living with a disability, and children in rural/urban settings and conflict-affected countries.

The primary objective was to deepen the understanding of the situation and development of sponsored children at a country-level context in order to develop more effective programs.

Research reports

The team's report, Changing Lives: An Analysis of Child Sponsorship Data, is available online:

<https://plan-international.org/publications/changing-lives-analysis-child-sponsorship-data>

Overview of impact

The project findings have shaped Plan International's policies and practices on implementing child sponsorship schemes in its 75+ offices worldwide. Among the changes, Plan International:

- Has reviewed and revised the organisation's Sponsorship Commitments: these have been expanded to become global commitments and country management teams are now responsible for implementing them.

- Has aligned its Sponsorship Promise with the global strategy and the theory of change. Part of the Promise is that the sponsorship data used for the study will inform program development and influence interventions.
- Is developing new flagship models, to integrate both sponsorship and community programmes and focus more on adolescents.

In 2020, Plan International invited RMIT to conduct further research. The Second Analytical Study of Child Sponsorship has had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

Project 3: United Nations' Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) 2021: Climate Change and Child Labour in Agriculture

In December 2020, the United Nations' FAO commissioned Simon Feeny and Alberto Posso to undertake a global case study on the relationship between climate change and child labour in agriculture.

The research

This study aimed to identify the extent to which climate-change-related shocks affect child labour, reviewing existing UN data sources from Peru, Ethiopia, Nepal, and Côte d'Ivoire.

Research reports

Professor Posso presented the findings from Climate Change and Child Labour in Agriculture in "Climate change and child labour: evidence from Peru" on the 29 September 2021 at a plenary session on child labour in Latin America, organised by FAO, UNICEF and ECLAC.

Professors Posso and Feeny are currently working on the UN FAO report. Prof. Posso presented this work in October 2021 in a virtual global session on child labour organised by FAO and UNICEF in Rome.

Overview of impact

The findings suggest that not all climate-change-related shocks impact child labour, however, when they do, they tend to increase child labour.

These findings are informing a UN FAO list of policy recommendations to be presented to UN member countries.

Other project outcomes

Although not associated with specific projects, the following articles arise from this child well-being research.

- Posso, A., U. De Silva Pereira, A. Mishra (Forthcoming). Community level health programs and child labor: Evidence from Ethiopia. *Health Economics* (ABDC A*).
- Awaworyi Churchill, S., Iqbal, N., Nawaz, S., and Yew, S.L. (2021) "Unconditional cash transfers, child labour and education: Theory and evidence" *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* vol 186, pp. 437-457 (doi: 10.1016/j.jebo.2021.04.012) (ABDC A*)
- Feeny, S., Mishra, A., Trinh, T-A., Ye, L. and A. Zhu (2021) Early Life Exposure to Rainfall Shocks and Gender Gaps in Employment: Findings from Vietnam, *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organisation*, Vol.183, pp.533-554. (ABDC A*)
- Feeny, S., Posso, A., Skali, A., Jyotishi, A., Nath, S and P.K. Viswanathan (2021), Child Labor and Psychosocial Wellbeing: Findings from India, *Health Economics*, Vol.30, No.4, pp.876-902. (ABDC A*).

Next steps

The research team continues its strong track record of work in the field of child wellbeing.

- WWI: Simon Feeny and Gill Westthorp are working on frameworks to assess how far international development outcomes are sustained, incorporating an evaluation of WW programmes in Zimbabwe.
- Plan International: The research for the Changing Lives report is informing a further report, due for journal submission in 2022.