



Reducing poverty in the first 18 years of life: Ethiopia

This illustration presents findings from a research project on monetary and multidimensional child poverty in Ethiopia. It is based on information from the Ethiopia Rural Household Surveys (ERHS) 1999, 2004 and 2009 and discussions with 61 children and 88 adults in Tigray region in August 2013.

This research tries to understand why some children lack basic needs such as food or shelter or access to basic services including education and health despite living in a relatively wealthy family or why other children who live in families with little income are able to go to school or have good living conditions.

Findings

1. Having enough income is important for ensuring good child wellbeing but multidimensional child poverty and monetary poverty are not the same.

In other words, there are children living in low income households with low wealth (are monetary poor) but who have good child wellbeing (are not multidimensionally poor). By the same token, there are children living in households that are wealthy and have ample income (are not monetary poor) but that have bad child wellbeing (are multidimensionally poor).

2. Good child wellbeing in Ethiopia consists of having basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter met, going to school, and not having to spend too much time on domestic chores or farm work. Household wealth includes the ownership of livestock and land.

So why are monetary and multidimensional poverty in Ethiopia not the same?

3. One explanation might be that there is a trade-off between household wealth and child wellbeing with improvements in household wealth going at the expense of child wellbeing. As greater wealth often comes from having more livestock or land, children are required to herd livestock or tend to land, sometimes at the expense of going to school or studying at home.
4. Another explanation is that availability of services such schools, health clinics and safe drinking water will help to secure good child wellbeing, even if families have a poor income. Lack of such services will lead to multidimensional poverty even in cases of ample income.
5. A final explanation is that parents' expectations and children's aspirations are important in determining child wellbeing, regardless of income. If parents attach great importance to children's education, they aim to keep children in school and support their study time even if this might lead to lower household wealth, for example. Also children may see low-skilled work in Saudi Arabia as more desirable than continuing school due to limited economic opportunities and lack of role models.

To improve child wellbeing in Ethiopia, there are a number of steps that can contribute:

6. While household wealth and child wellbeing are different concepts, income is important for providing children's basic needs. Income generation is important, although it will have to be undertaken with care, particularly in reference to agricultural wealth creation through livestock and assets.

Improving access to services such education, health, drinking water but also social protection will be crucial in reducing multidimensional child poverty, regardless of household incomes.

Finally, strengthening education, awareness and aspirations among parents and children can prevent multidimensional child poverty despite lack of monetary resources. This should tie into greater economic opportunities and positive role models for children.

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