

Supporting children's skills development – what works

Kath Ford and Sarah Lane Smith

Sarah Lane Smith is Education Research Adviser in the Research & Evidence Directorate of the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office. The views expressed here are the authors' own and are not a representation of official UK government policy.

Transcript

Cath Porter

My name is Cath Porter and I'm the director of Young Lives, which is a long running research study based at the University of Oxford. You're going to hear a bit more about young lives, but I'll first introduce the speakers who I've got with me today. I'm very happy to have Sarah Lynn Smith, research advisor at the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office, or FCDO, as will probably refer to it from now on. Welcome, Sarah. Lovely to have you here. And Kath Ford, who's our senior policy officer at Young Lives. Thanks, Kath. Thanks, Sarah. Welcome and thanks for being here. So this is one of three podcasts that we're doing on Young lives, latest research about skills and education. As I said before, we've been following the lives of these children who are now not children at all, they're aged 22 and 29 years and we've now got a whole trajectory of their education development and their skills development right up from early childhood into adulthood.

And young lives goes to the homes of children as well we do have some school surveys, but we also capture those who are not in school, which I think is really important. We also ask questions about a whole wealth of other issues than skills and education, so we can look at the whole life of the child, their family, their community, et cetera. So I'd like to focus now on the research that we've recently published.

And I want to bring up three key findings that we've got and get your take. Sarah and Kath, on what these mean for policy? So one of our research themes is the importance of early life circumstances and how these are important for later life outcomes.

So one important finding that we've got is that climate shocks, things like floods or drought or extreme temperatures, etc. These sorts of things, which are becoming more and more common due to climate change. When these things happen in early childhood, they can have an effect on skills in later childhood and our new research that's been published in the last year is looking at another aspect of skills which are called foundational cognitive skills now.

These we call Cass, coined the phrase the building blocks of the brain. So they're things like working memory.

Inhibitory control, that kind of thing. So there's new evidence. It complements earlier evidence that we've got on the importance of early life environment for things like maths, test score and vocabulary, that sort of thing. So Cath, you've been looking at our findings and I think something that's really interesting that we found is that government policy can still remediate the effect of these shocks, even though the first thousand days are so important. So if you could tell me a bit more about that.

Kath Ford

Yeah, thanks Cath. I mean I think the young lives findings are really stark actually on this and just to give a few specific examples to illustrate some of the findings you've been mentioning. So in Ethiopia, for example, we've seen that children in households have experienced drought or food price inflation in times of crisis. They perform significantly worse in basic vocabulary tests, maths tests at school compared to those who haven't experienced those climate shocks in India. We've also seen intergenerational effects of this. So even where during the gestation period. So this is when mothers are pregnant if those if those young women experience climate shocks such as floods or cyclones, we can track and affect on their future children right out into childhood and into adolescence. So, for example, looking at their vocabulary skills by the age of 5. We see significantly worse test scores, but even things like the social and emotional skills. So that's things like children's self esteem, their sense of control over their lives, their sense of agency. We see effects on that right out into adolescence, up to the age of 50 So so this for me is really profound. It's not just the impact on young children, but it's intergenerational effects. And you mentioned on new research on on what's coined as foundational and cognitive skills and and yes, I refer, I think, of those as the building blocks of of complex. Thought and effective learning. So there are things like long term memory skills. There are things like the ability to be able to concentrate on a specific task which is called is referred to as inhibitory control skills, muscle memory, or implicit learning.

So these are very important and basic skills that we all develop throughout our lifetime. So we see an impact on these skin. For example, in Peru, children who've experienced rainfall shocks, again droughts and floods in that first thousand days really important those first early days, we're seeing long lasting effects on their working memory and their ability comes right out to the age of 12. So they're having these long term impacts. So your question really to me, as so. So what does that mean from a policy perspective? What can be done for me? One of the most hopeful messages from our research to date is that we see that these effects are not irreversible, and they're not inevitable either, so I think that's a really important and hopeful message for policymakers. I think our our new evidence is groundbreaking and what we've been able to show is that children from households that have received safety Nets often referred to as social protection, things like cash transfers, food aid, etc. Those children are less likely to be experiencing these effects and the reason is that we see that those safety Nets that cash transfer the social protection. That mitigates some of these negative effects of poverty and climate shocks, so it can improve nutrition. Families have more resources for the whole family, but it also means that there's less pressure on children to help out in family farms, and there's more time for them to study and learn and these have big effects then on their cognitive skills.

Cath Porter

Thanks Kath. You've really summed it up well. Sarah I thought I'd ask you about how this adds value to other research that you know is out there on education on early life etcetera.

Sarah Lane-Smith

Thank you, Cath. I think I'm really coming at this from the perspective of you know, someone who works at FCDO in the research and evidence directory. We fund a huge amount of different research studies. So my perspective is what is new and different about this evidence as compared to some of the other evidence that we invest in, right? What's its value add? And I can't echo enough your sentiments with both of you that this, this new research on the effects of climate shocks in early life and the possible

remediation of social protection mechanisms is really, groundbreaking and new and unique. So I guess I want to talk a little bit about how I think that it's closing a sort of golden triangle of evidence. So the whole area of climate and education research is really emergent. There's not a lot of data and evidence and research studies in this space, and even fewer that are robust and replicable in across different contexts. So what I think that we've had before, before this new young lives evidence is that we've had emergent evidence on the adverse impacts of climate change on education systems, right. So that could be literally things like natural disasters, flooding and washing away of schools. It could be, you know, we've got fairly robust evidence on the impact of rising temperatures on learning, for instance. You know we've got we've got a fairly good evidence based emerging around the fact that climate change is really worsening the outcomes that education systems are able to achieve separately. We've also had good evidence that social protection mechanisms such as cash transfers, conditional weather, sort of conditional or unconditional or so-called cash plus that they can have. You know if well targeted and well designed, they can have really positive educational outcomes, whether that's about getting out of school children back into school, whether that's about thereby increasing their learning. You know, we we've got fairly good evidence on that. What I don't think we've ever had before is evidence that really connects the dots. They're in right? And says yes, climate change climate shocks are having really long lasting, significant impacts on children's skills development and educational outcomes. And as you just discussed, Cath, that's not in one context. We've seen that across several of the young lives study countries, and those happen earlier than we might even have thought that they would be happening right before school age.

And that social protection itself can play a role in remediating the effects of those shocks. So I think that that I really see it as the closing of a golden triangle, and it has huge policy implications, huge and and sort of well defined policy implications. And I just want to talk briefly as well about a unique feature of Young Lives, which is that it's a longitudinal research programme. As Cath, as you mentioned in your introduction, we don't as FCDO, we don't actually invest in many longitudinal data programs and this program in particular has been running for over 20 years and has had support from the UK government throughout its history, which is very unusual.

And what does that? What is our investment? What does having that kind of program in our research portfolio?

Video allow us what insights does that allow us to have that we don't get from other research instruments, right? And I think that it really allows us to take a very holistic, very life cycle approach to developing policy for education system improvement as well as a very intersectoral approach. As Kath was saying, young lives, they don't just ask questions about education and skills. They ask.

Huge array of questions about, you know, household circumstances, family dynamics, nutrition.

You know, you name it, so I, you know, I think that there are two very clear implications that have been possible through this long term approach. Firstly, and I've sort of alluded to this already.

We now know that even very early shocks even shocks experienced by a child in utero can have really long lasting impacts. Which is tragic, right? But like you say, there's a hopeful message as well.

But I think what's important about that is that if we were using instruments that only started to measure skill development at school age or for within school children, then we could be radically underestimating the adverse impacts of climate on skills and on educational outcomes, because we would have missed.

The vulnerability of those first thousand days and the importance of that recognising that for policy and secondly, and this this is really research that was using young lives data, but was actually a secondary analysis done by another investment which is the research on improving systems of education program.

They used young lives data to show that actually low levels of foundational skills. So here they were actually using things the more traditional foundational skills like literacy and numeracy. But I think that it would be really interesting to look at the comparisons with the building blocks that you were talking about, but they showed that low levels of foundational skills can, in and of themselves drive later dropout.

Particularly for girls right in school, so we often think about learning and access as two quite separate agendas, and we can have policies that target improvements in one and policies that target improvements in the other. But to my knowledge, this was the first time that we really saw the the role of low learning itself in driving later, low access to education.

Cath Porter

Thanks so much, Sarah. You've really brought in a lot of ways of rounding this together between, yeah, the research on skills, the research that goes on inside schools and the research outside schools. And I'd like to just build on that a little bit more. Like we say, social protection or cash transfers, et cetera.

They're not run by the Ministry of Education, they're not an education policy.

They have a different objective usually. So just building on this if you can elaborate a bit more, maybe about how this kind of research can complement the kinds of evidence that you see on how schools and education systems can build skills and how we can think more holistically.

Sarah Lynn Smith

Yeah. Thanks, Kath. I think that there's a really important, almost sort of fallacy that I see commonly made in kind of policy making circles, which is to way and it's it's not just a failure of intersectoral ISM, although it that is very common as well. But there's a sort of way of thinking that goes we want to we want to improve educational outcomes, whether that's access or learning or whatever.

Therefore, our intervention point must be the, you know, the schooling system itself, right? And like you say, cash transfers, social protection mechanisms are not formally part of the schooling system. They would not even, you know, control over that kind of policy would not even reside in a similar ministry.

You know obviously there are a whole range of issues that we can target through the schooling system itself and we've we've started to get really, really good evidence on, you know, how we can improve pedagogy, how we can ensure that children are taught at the right level, the so-called sort of teaching at the right level, tile approach, you know, and a lot of these things are shown to be very, very effective. So we we've got a really...the sort of good and increasing evidence base on what can be done at the classroom level, as well as the system level, right? We have good evidence about how we really need to pay attention to relationships of accountability in the education system, right? How a head teachers are reporting to district officials. What are the relationships of accountability and incentives within those

key actors within an education system. But I think that what we're not doing enough is looking outside of the education system and not just when we're targeting out of school children, but even for the in school children.

And really thinking laterally about, you know, what are the intervention points that could leverage real change for children? Taking a holistic and long term view of their education trajectory and social protection is one of those instruments. Clearly, as shown by this new evidence. And so we do need to be working in a more holistic way. We need to be working in a more life cycle approach way and a more cross sectoral way. And I think that young lives evidence has played a real key role in been hammering that message home, I guess just lastly, I would say that I think we've got a huge and unique opportunity with this latest round of data collection that young lives are doing at the moment and for those not aware, young lives are currently in the field doing round seven of their quantitative data collection across the full study countries and what that allows us is the opportunity to compare the early life circumstances. Whether that's you know, in terms of climate shocks, whether that's in terms of the educational opportunities that children have been afforded, whether that was their household situation, household income, gender dynamics, birth order you name it. To look at those factors and how they intersect with each other to drive later outcomes. So whether that's you know, so that is includes schooling outcomes. You know what's the highest level of schooling they achieved, what level of learning did they achieve? Did they pass their final school exams and also their entry into the labour market?

And that is really important and FCDO are hugely interested in that, right?

Are these kids gaining access to decent work, secure, reliable employment that allows them to begin to break cycles of intergenerational poverty, delay fertility, et cetera? And we know it's not an automatic relationship, of course, but what we need to understand are the nuances of how a person's early life and experience through education then translate into later outcomes.

[Cath Porter](#)

Thanks so much, Sarah. I mean, Kath this must be music to your ears.

Your phrase enabling environment is one that we use a lot in young lives. Do you want to just elaborate a bit on what we mean by that?

[Kath Ford](#)

Yes. Thanks Kath. So I would echo what Sarah has so eloquently laid out for us and and we talk a lot in young lives about the importance of a supportive and enable environment for children and I think this is particularly important as vulnerable households are increasingly grappling with global crises. So we've we've seen the COVID pandemic over the last few years, which has had profound effects on for young people and their households in in our study.

And of course, the increasing impact of of climate shocks, climate change, as we've just been discussing in Ethiopia, many of our households are have and continue to be navigating very traumatic experiences of the civil conflict. You know, we've been looking at how these huge global crises compound and impacts on everyday lives, so that supportive and enabling environment is ever you know, increasingly important.

Parents, if we're to maximise investments in schools and what happens in the classroom so that, that means ensuring that children get the right start in life. We've talked about sufficient and healthy diets protecting their time and enabling them to actually get safely to school. All of these things are critical particularly for for for girls and adults and adolescents.

So I think for going back to the discussion we've been having about the the potential for safety net social protection programs to to to really help, I think from a policy point of view that means thinking very carefully about how these programs are adapted to climate shocks and how they're expanded to really target those most in need, so from the perspective of what we're talking about today, that's ensuring that children who are undernourished, who may be physically stunted in the early years, targeting those who've been excluded from preschool and early education, so they may have through poverty or climate shocks, already be experiencing negative effects on their cognitive skills. But we now, as I mentioned before, that these things are are reversible, so targeting support to those most in need is crucial. And that also means thinking about how adolescent go.

Girls and young women during their pregnancy or supported, so getting supported to to pregnant mothers. Young mums is important not only for safeguarding their own health and well-being, but as we're increasingly seeing that's incredibly important for their children's development. So this is about helping to break intergenerational cycles of poverty.

Cath Porter

So moving to another focus of the recent research that Young lives has been working on over the past year, a big focus has been gender and in particular, how gender gaps to the detriment of girls. Young women widened during adolescence, and we've produced three papers recently and there are two podcasts. In addition to this one which focus in-depth on two of the other papers. One is with Doctor Renu Singh.

Looking at how young women are less likely to be able to complete their higher education in the context of India, so she speaks at length to that with me in another podcast. I also talked to doctor Matthew Dukes about his paper, which is looking at how gaps between boys and girls really widening.

Lessons, in particular in social and emotional skills. The things we were mentioning before, like self-esteem, self-efficacy, things that are related to empowerment of girls and young women and these gaps really widening up after the age of 12, there's a third paper in that suite which I have been involved with myself, where we've looked at the consequences of having those skills and it speaks to the point you made earlier, Sarah, about OK we we're we're supporting young people goals in particular to build their skills. But what does this lead to in terms of their outcomes in the labour market? So we've looked at that together with Marcelo Perez and and Vita Ramachandran. And we found that even girls who've actually got relatively high levels of skills are much less likely to secure a decent job well paid with a contract, that kind of thing. So there is a big gap in labour market participation, actually in all four of our young lives countries. So we focused in on India and the gaps in in education systems. But even in Vietnam and Peru, we still see these gaps amongst girls. So Cath, again, you've done some summarizing and analysing of all these research findings on gender. So can you speak a little bit about what you've found and found important in that?

Kath Ford

Yeah, thanks, Kath. I mean you just outlined some really striking findings to me. I think the assumption that better skills equals better opportunities is something that we're able to really challenge. And you know you mentioned two things there that I think are really important.

One is understanding that even though boys and girls in the early years, we're seeing, you know, have very similar skill levels, once they hit adolescents, then we we're seeing these marked differences. So something's going on, not surprising probably to lots of listeners who we have, you know, worked in in with, with young girls and adolescent girls over years, but we're seeing profound differences in skill levels. And as you've said, Kath, particularly in those social and emotional skills, sense of control over your life, belief that you can achieve your goals and we see it despite the fact so Even so in countries like Vietnam where girls actually often achieve higher educational outputs than boys. They're doing better in in their exams than than adolescent boys, but they still were. We're seeing a marked a decrease in in their social and emotional abilities. And secondly then in terms of that assumption that if you have better skills and you come out with good exam results, that means you're more likely to access decent work in countries like India, we see that is not the case.

OK, so so again, from a policy point of view, the glaring issue here to me is really about addressing gender discrimination in its many forms. And and this is really critical. It's critical to keep young adolescent girls in school. It's critical to enable them to fulfill their potential and to be developing the the full skill base across both cognitive and and social and emotional skills. And it's critical for them to then access decent work and fulfill the the the lives with their families et cetera. So what does that mean? It means challenging the social norms that are discriminating against girls and boys. One of the interesting findings that we've recently been looking at is around trying to shift gender bias in aspirations. So not only the aspirations of the girls themselves, but also the aspirations of their parents. So so that's number one, understanding you know what are parental expectations? How are they different for their boys? For for, for boys and girls, for their sons and daughters? And what impact is that having on their children's own aspirations? And it means engaging with whole communities, engaging with with men and boys with local leaders, civil society, etc.

And and continuing to to put that front and center in our efforts on supporting skills development, I think there are some some practical initiatives that are really important and can help as well. So we've talked, we've mentioned a little bit about protecting young people's time to study and to get to school.

For young girls and adolescent girls, that's particularly important. So they're the ones who often carry the greatest burden of helping out in the home. They're much more likely to be doing unpaid care work, of looking after extended family children and and elderly people, particularly in times of crisis as well, so practical initiatives to to help address those unpaid care level. So that might mean better access to affordable childcare. It also brings in the safety net aspect as well. Reducing early marriage is another huge fact with benefits for for girls and young women across many areas of their lives. And and that requires really understanding the underlying drivers of of early marriage, which are predominantly related to to poverty and and discriminatory gender norms.

We know that legislation alone is not enough, so it's about understanding why these things, why early marriage continues to persist in certain communities, and then working with with communities in order to try and work to to reduce that and then I mean specific we we talked about social and emotional

skills. What we do see, you know initiatives that try to combine education curricula with life skills and mentoring tend to to you know that that's where we're seeing some some good results. But we definitely need a lot more research in, in this area in terms of what works and for Higher education, which you've just mentioned, Doctor Renu Singh has spoken about in one of our earlier podcasts, expanding scholarships, accommodation facilities ensuring that again, this is about supportive and enabling environment and really targeting adolescent girls and young women from poor and disadvantaged households is incredibly.

Cath Porter

Thanks so much, Kath. Sarah, would you like to add to that. Yeah, sure. I think that you've outlined some really important practical lessons emerging from the gender dimension of young lives research there, Kath and I think that for us in FCDO, I think it's really important that we recognise that increasing learning levels or schooling access in and of itself is not necessarily going to lead to better labour market outcomes for women and girls.

We need to recognise that, but that does not in any way undermine the need to improve educational outcomes for girls. What it does is point to the need for us to get better at looking at the kind of holistic instruments that we have at our disposal to put the enabling factors in place to ensure that those girls can convert the educational opportunities that they've had into decent work because there's no there's no doubt that better skills alongside other factors will enable them to have better and more productive access and participation in the labour market. So I think it's really about those enabling factors. And when I think about, you know, I in particular work on education research programs and I think that we need to do much more on understanding what are the relationships between cognitive and socio emotional skills? You were saying in Vietnam, you know, even though girls perform better in the cognitive dimension.

From adolescence, we can see that they start to perform worse in the socio emotional dimension, right? So it's not again, it's not an automatic relationship, but we, you know, common sense tells us that there should be some relationship, right. So what are the you know, what are the things that we're missing that are that would allow girls to convert access to schooling?

Improve cognitive skills with simultaneously building their socio emotional and non cognitive skills. Agency empowerment, things like that. And also how can we use schooling and teaching to itself begin to challenge gender based norms for the children and within their community, right? Because these are really key instruments that communities and countries are investing in. So how can we use schooling and the school system as a platform to begin to change gender norms?

And the last thing I would say is that I think that our little too little attention is paid to the issue of gender based violence within school right. So in many schooling systems, it's actually boys that that might face more of certain types of violence than girls, more aggression from teachers, corporal punishment, that kind of thing. But what we know is that sort of gender based and sexual violence is very, very pervasive for girls in schools and unsurprisingly.

If schools are not deemed to be a safe environment for adolescent girls and young women, then you know, how can we even begin to address some of the other issues towards building their socio emotional or cognitive skills.

Cath Porter

Absolutely. Thanks so much both of you on that. So I mean what I'm finding really interesting why I wanted to do this podcast is getting your perspective with your experience in, in the policy world. And as most people know, I'm a researcher. So, you know, I often focus on how to make sure that the evidence we're producing is robust. We're real be able to say what we're saying, et cetera.

But you know we're sitting here in the dreaming Spires of Oxford and it's great to finish a paper and think about what you know, policy implications are, but obviously the next step is how to actually influence policy and it's something that people talk about a lot, but.

Given your wealth of experience, I wanted to ask you both about how we actually do that. So Sarah, can I come to you first as?

Sarah Lynn Smith

Sure. I mean, in a way this is the \$1,000,000 question.

So I'm not going to sit here and say that I have all the answers, but I am going to say that I think that there are sort of two sides to an important coin here. If I might use that analogy, and I think one of those sides is about really patient long term relationship building. It's about trusted Ness. It's about becoming a trusted evidence broker in a policy space, right. And I think that that's something that young lives really excels at. So you know and this is something you can't do it in a couple of years.

Right, you need to build up those relationships, particularly in country. You need to have built up those relationships, not just with politicians who we all know come and go.

But with the you know the middle management with the civil servants, with the officials, right, you need to have really built in those structures that endure that allow you to present your evidence at key moments. And of course, all the all the normal things that we would expect, like salience and timeliness and presentation and framing all of those things are really important. But beneath that, I think is the trusted Ness of the relationship that you need to build up over a really long time. And I think we see that time and time again in examples of young lives, evidence impacting policy, we see that what?

What was the underlying factor there? It was the length and the trusted Ness of the relationship, and I guess one other fact I want to draw attention to, that's important for that kind of patient long term relationship building is research integrity. So that comes back to the robustness point. So it's not easy, especially when research needs to be funded right. It's not easy to remain true to your mission to remain true to the robustness of your findings to, you know, not bow to pressure sometimes to go beyond what the evidence says in policy for a to take money from wherever, whatever source it might be coming from, you need to balance that need to, you know, retain integrity and retain a sort of constant vision of the importance of your project, the importance of the data, comparability of, you know, really restricting yourselves to what the evidence genuinely says about an issue and resisting a temptation to go beyond that and that is how you become trusted.

And I think that young lives from the conversations I have with policymakers in SDO and beyond has that trusted-ness and you can't buy that. You know, it's something you build up over a really, really long time. The flip side of this coin is you need to be reactive, you need to be quick, you need to be agile, right? And so how does a research program balance the first area I was talking about with the ability to pivot.

And be agile when that a window of political opportunity presents itself.

And I think that that's genuinely difficult, but absolutely necessary if we want to influence policy because we know that sometimes these windows or opportunities come and go quite quickly. And if you don't influence it at the right time, then there's a, you know, there's a five year implementation programme rolled out, hundreds of millions of pounds and it's too late to influence it.

Because the machine is already working and I think that, you know, I guess one key learning for me in watching in particular how different research programs were able to influence policy during the pandemic during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance, was that you need to resource that agility, right. So whether that's researchers themselves or whether it's having dedicated staff within your program you know, employed to start bringing out the policy implications and to communicate them strategically and have a sort of engagement strategy you need to resource it because it will not happen automatically. And one of the things that I've noticed is that the.

The Young Lives country leads for the research, spend a good deal of their time engaging in policy for.

Were going to government meetings, even convening and hosting some of these for themselves.

And you know, I'm sure that a lot of researchers would actually like to spend more of their time writing papers and getting published, but it's that time investment that allows them to recognise the opportunity allows them to jump on the opportunity.

And I think we've seen really great examples of that. Whether that was, you know, young lives, evidence from your phone surveys beginning to influence policies around school, safe school reopening in Ethiopia, whether that was, you know, some of the relationships that young lives were able to forge with key international actors such as the food and Agricultural Association on measuring food insecurity during your COVID phone surveys, you know, these are all things that were about capitalizing on opportunities of the moment, and I think it's something that you do really well.

[Kath Ford](#)

And if I make it come in to build on, uh, some of Sarah's points there, I think in terms of I, I completely agree. And you know, I would always underline, you know, the long-term relationships of trust, collaboration absolutely critical.

Alongside that is understanding the country context in which we work in. So it goes, it goes along. I mean, we're talking about, you know, working with so young lives works with teams in the four countries that we, we do our research with, with, with country directors and their teens, who've been there for many, many, many years, and that understanding, when I say understanding country context, what I really mean is really understanding who are the decision makers who holds the the real power levers? Who are the thought leaders? Uh, what are? What are their incentives to change? So what is it within the Ministry of Education? Who is it in the Ministry of Education in Ethiopia that we really need to be targeting? We know the the Minister might come and go as you've just said, you know and having those those relationships as civil servants, with NGO's with, you know, working collaboratively with others who are building coalitions for change, all of these things are really critical and it's different in different country context. And like you say, Sarah, sometimes opportunities just pop up.

You know, suddenly they'll there'll be a a movement for change in, in an area that maybe we haven't been focusing on and and you know to have impact. It does require an organization like Young lives to work very flexibly.

What I would then say is that those relationships of trust are not just between researchers, policymakers, et cetera, but also between us as a research program and our funders and our donors. OK, so having the trust between in in our case at the FCD is one of our main funders over the years. That relationship is incredibly important to allow us to have the space to work flexibly, so not being constrained by very short term deliverables, is really important for a long term longitudinal research to policy impact program like young lives so, so I would really underline that and encourage the Danas and the funders to be brave enough to think long term and to ensure that that you know we can work collaboratively and support programs to actually be able to deliver in the long term. And that's not easy because we all have in a world where short term you know everyone wants results tomorrow.

So so I think that relationship of trust is is equally important at that level.

[Sarah Lynn Smith](#)

If I may just respond to that, I completely agree and I think it's not always possible. It's not always going to be possible, right for us to fund the program for 20 years like has happened in this unique instance.

But I think that we, you know, there's a responsibility from us as funders to ensure that where we have Ecosystems or coalitions for change that have been built up over many years in country context that have built up that key understanding of the political economy locally and the incentives of different actors within a system that we don't come in and start from scratch every time we want to do some research, or indeed implementation in a region, right? We look at the value that we've built up already and right that might include. You know, continuing to channel funding through those instruments where we've already built up a huge amount of value over a number of years.

Or it might include carefully scanning and you know, canvassing from the expertise of those embedded in country partners who really know their stuff, you know, and I think that that's not always easily done when designing new research programs or implementation programs, and like you say, the incentives are always there to do things quickly and to get results quickly. But I think that that's absolutely essential if we want research to policy impact.

[Cath Porter](#)

Thank you very much both of you. I think that's been a really interesting wide-ranging discussion. Anyone who's listening, who would like to hear more? All the research is up on the website www.younglives.org.uk. And thank you for listening.