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NO CHILD WITHOUT A FUTURE

# Listening
## to the most vulnerable children
Year Two: Children's views of vulnerability in Myanmar and Sierra Leone

**Summary Report** World Vision UK 2019

# Year Two summary report

## Children's views in Myanmar and Sierra Leone

This is part of a five-year project begun in 2018 involving four countries: Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The research looks at who are the most vulnerable children, as well as children's own perspectives of who is being reached by development programming, whether the most vulnerable are included, and how they are benefitting. Children's views on vulnerability are central to the research and they are supplemented by those of adults in the community, women, men and leaders.

This year's report covers Myanmar and Sierra Leone in Year Two following modifications to the timetable. The two countries have different cultural, social and political contexts. The programme backgrounds and some details in research approach and capacity also differ. However, many vulnerability factors in both contexts are similar. The research exercises were mainly focus group discussions. Children were also encouraged to speak about their lives through drawings.

**BANGLADESH**
Camp 13,
Cox's Bazar



**SIERRA LEONE**
Upper Nyawa,
Jaiama Bongor chiefdom,
Bo District

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO (DRC)**
Lwambo, Haut-Katanga



**MYANMAR**
Saizang Village,
Tiddim, Chin State
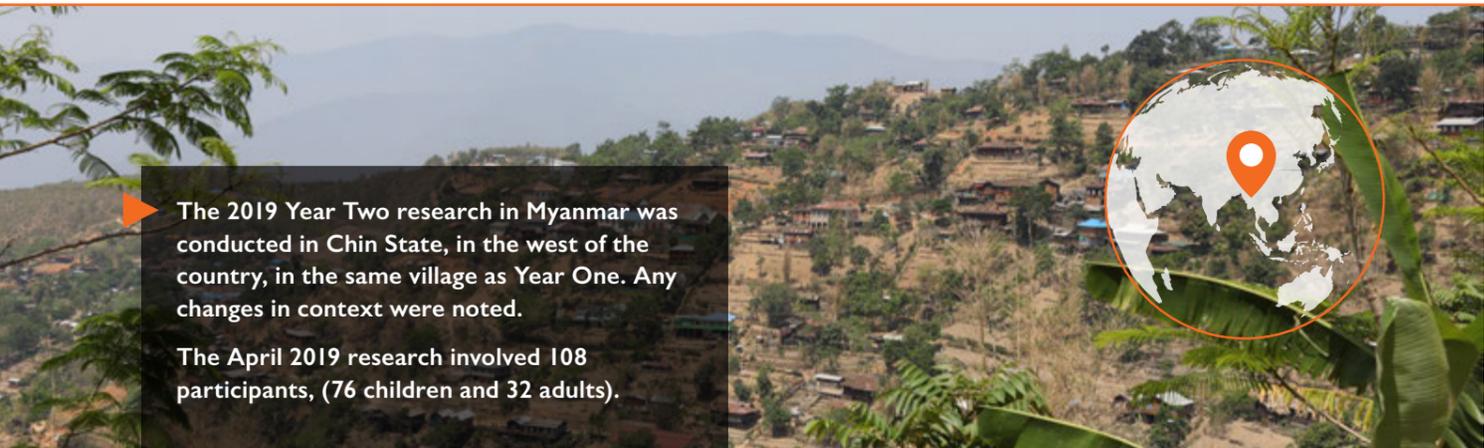
# Myanmar

> The 2019 Year Two research in Myanmar was conducted in Chin State, in the west of the country, in the same village as Year One. Any changes in context were noted.
>
> The April 2019 research involved 108 participants, (76 children and 32 adults).

## VULNERABILITY

### Children's views

The main experiences raised by children focussed around school and family, along with work, food shortages and problems of resources such as housing and electricity. These indicate both material problems, but also issues of relationships and behaviour, such as abuse, bullying and alcohol use, along with children's own anxieties and stresses from school and family circumstances.

Although up to a third of children highlighted being happy at school and passing exams, there were difficulties for many others. These included the cost of school, getting to school, exam anxieties, difficulties and pressures of rote learning, bullying and simply being unhappy at school.

Children's family life and circumstances, including siblings, sickness, income, relationships and behaviour, were clearly important in determining vulnerabilities.

Lack of electricity was linked to safety at home, rote learning study, and child labour: children believe electricity at home would reduce their need to chop, collect and carry firewood.

### Children's views of who is most vulnerable

Girls and boys identified children who suffer poverty including insufficient food, disabled children and all children who suffer discrimination, (who often include disabled children) as among the most vulnerable in their community. Both boys and girls emphasised that parenting and relationships can make children more or less vulnerable, including children who are orphans or living with another caregiver, for example, girls mentioned living with grandparents, due to economic hardship.

Girls added children using drugs and alcohol. When boys described problems with parenting and relationships,

they cited children with no caregiver, whose parents have divorced, whose parents are unable to guide them and who suffer abuse.

In stage two of this research, some of the most vulnerable children in the community were selected to talk about their lives and also to try and identify children who had more difficult lives than them. This is another opportunity to hear from children in the study about who they believe are most vulnerable – and it echoed the earlier group discussion findings.

### Adult views

**All adult groups** (men, women and leaders) listed poverty as a cause of vulnerability, including insufficient food and lack of schooling, and children who are disabled.

In addition to this:

**Women** focused on the relationships of children with their parents/caregiver (or lack of them), and problems such as discrimination and abuse.

**Men** identified the problem of discrimination.

**Leaders** mentioned children who were disaster affected (linked to income).

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**KEY EXPERIENCES OF VULNERABILITY**

- **School** – exam anxieties, pressures, bullying, getting to school, cost and lack of education.
- **Family life** – relationships, lack of parents, sickness, abuse, alcohol use, work and income.
- **Poverty** – food shortages, problems of resources (e.g. housing), discrimination and affects of disaster.

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## Summary

The full report includes discussion on the differences between Year One and Year Two findings. In this summary we can say simply that the lists are essentially the same, with a few differences:

This year, children with no electricity were added by boys, men and leaders. The most significant addition however, is children with alcoholic parents. They were added to the 'vulnerable' category by girls, boys, women and men, but not leaders, who thought `drug and alcohol abuse is not a big issue'.

This highlights, that children's perspectives may differ from adults, for example, abuse is seen by some adults as relatively minor or not a big issue. In 2019, children suffering from abuse were again considered vulnerable,

but didn't rank among the 10 highest priorities for the community (taking into account the views of all five discussion groups). World Vision staff who were interviewed as key informants, thought abuse, where visible, to be to be in the form of neglect. Yet for the children involved, who have raised problems of abuse, of alcohol abuse and addiction, these are likely to be important strands in vulnerability and wellbeing, especially when the long term physical and mental health impacts of such experiences are taken into consideration.

Children living with disabilities have been prioritised in both years. The Year One community-led survey in Tiddim found 35 males and 45 females with disabilities in the village, a number that surprised the leader. But no children with disabilities were involved in the research, due to a failure to ensure their inclusion.

## INCLUDING THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN



### Which children are helped by us

Children's views on which children are helped overlap with their views of which children are the most vulnerable (page 4). In addition to this were children in families where there has been disaster. However, one group of girls thought that children with mental health difficulties were not supported by World Vision.

### Support we provide and its impact

Some groups of children identified benefits for the whole village, notably the water supply. Children also listed specific materials including: mats, light bulbs, water pipes (for gardening), water cans and containers, cups, potatoes, seeds, saplings, teak plants, hoes, spades, pick-axes, piglets, solar lights, school bags, stationery and books, and school uniforms.

Children's groups spoke of the impact of the water supply (not having to collect water), gardening, school materials, and farming supplies.

Children's views of who World Vision's programmes are aimed at, and what support is provided, changed little from Year One. However, the perception that World Vision support is associated with sponsorship seems greater in Year Two. Children continue to see World Vision as a provider of material benefits. Boys suggested that children should be involved more in the World Vision programme.

**TOP LEFT:** A view from within the research community. **ABOVE:** Girls working on their river of life drawings.

# REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

The report concluded that "World Vision support is reaching vulnerable children… and making a positive impact on their lives… Nonetheless, it is unclear whether the most vulnerable in Tiddim are benefitting" beyond material benefits. Children with disabilities are noted as a key group. "World Vision could better ensure that those most at risk are better aware of the support available to them from various sources… including support from World Vision and the type and level of support available."

## Programming recommendations

Increase market opportunities in Tiddim to improve families' incomes; connect with local partners to support adult education in Tiddim, so that parents can better support their children's learning; support the community to mitigate the negative impacts of new technology (social media, smartphones) on children and youth; and support the community to advocate for household connection to the national power grid.

## The research recommendations

- **Ensure inclusion in the programme**
  Build on disability mapping already done in Tiddim to conduct a more comprehensive exercise based on the vulnerability indicators identified in this study. Make sure those who are most vulnerable know about the support available to them from various sources, including government departments such as health, social welfare, agriculture, World Vision, and others such as the Church and community leadership.

- **Reaching and involving children with disabilities**
  Intentional inclusion of people with disabilities in the research for Year Three. People with disabilities should be consulted on the existing village development plan.

- **Tracking progress**
  Conduct further work to understand the impact and value of our service provision and support for the most vulnerable children, compared to that of capacity building activities.

# UPDATE

## Since this Year Two research was conducted

It's been encouraging to see progress towards including the most vulnerable children in World Vision's work, since the research:

- The annual programme report by World Vision staff described how this project has set criteria (informed by the research) to ensure that the most vulnerable children are included as a priority.

- The disability anti-discrimination message is being given at every opportunity. The concept of disability inclusion and access was part of recent building works, for instance. World Vision staff met with disabled children and their families and encouraged them to participate. Staff feel that children with disabilities now have a better relationship with their peers, the wider community and World Vision as they can speak with greater confidence.

- Staff also encouraged the poorest families, with most vulnerable children, to be involved in village savings groups, which help families to save small amounts of money for use in times of crisis.

- 25 children and their families suffering extreme poverty also had unsafe housing renovated and vocational training was provided for older children who haven't managed to stay in school.

The report also states that relationships amongst community members have improved as a result of increased awareness, identification and inclusion of the most vulnerable children in the programme. An example of this is seen in greater involvement of women and children in addressing community issues.

**ABOVE LEFT:** Boys working on their river of life drawings. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Leaders prioritising vulnerabilities.

# Sierra Leone

▶ **The 2019 research in Sierra Leone was conducted in the same community as 2018, in the Jaima Bongor programme, Bo District, in the southern province of the country. Change in the local and national context from Year One was noted. The 2019 research involved 107 participants, (with 74 children and 33 adults).**

## VULNERABILITY

### Children's views

Poverty from families breaking up (parental separation, abandonment) or the sickness or death of a parent, impacts relationships – that may then be abusive. Poverty can also affect school attendance, largely because of the cost of basic school materials and due to the attitude of teachers or school rules regarding clothing, so that children have been sent home if their clothing is too poor or insufficient. The emotional effect of children's circumstances was highlighted too, particularly for those orphaned and attending school and those not in school, or suffering discrimination and emotional abuse. Experiences of violence and abuse (often by foster or stepparents) were described by both boys and girls. In addition, children commonly work after school.

Early marriage was mentioned a number of times in group and individual discussions with girls, as well as two young wives (aged under 18) who attended one group. Another girl used early marriage (to a man she fell in love with) as a means to escape violence at home.

Sensitivities around teenage pregnancy were indicated by girls. They mentioned that they had let elders know about a pregnant girl, but she hadn't received any support. Boys explained how adults' behaviour, such as neglect, abuse and discrimination, can act on children's and family circumstances to cause vulnerability.

### Adult views

**Women** included sickness, disability, education, poverty, being orphaned, lack of safe drinking water, food,

clothing, housing, and discrimination. They were especially forthright on teenage pregnancy, mentioning similar situations as the girls.

**"It's disappointing that our leaders are not that proactive and as women, we have little or nothing at all to contribute in certain situations."**

**Men** focussed on livelihood as the basis for children doing well, differentiating between parents and families with plantations and those without who had to work hard for other people.

**Leaders** focussed on the fact that incomers to the area aren't entitled to own lands to farm, and consequently find it difficult to support their children. They also raised the issue of intergenerational poverty.

**World Vision staff** described indicators of vulnerability; children out of school, child labour in the family, farm work after school, lack of health facilities, and limited livelihood sources. They also noted the high levels of sexual abuse by men of girls, making girls more vulnerable.

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**KEY EXPERIENCES OF VULNERABILITY**

- **School** – cost of materials and lack of education.
- **Family life** – neglect, abuse, work, early marriage, child pregancy, the emotional effect of sickness and death of a parent.
- **Poverty** – from families breaking up, parental seperation, abandonment.

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## Summary

Consolidating all the groups' views, vulnerabilities include: children from very poor families; disabled children; orphaned children; children suffering from neglect and abuse; children involved in child labour; and children suffering from chronic sickness.

Men and leaders in this community don't see teenage pregnancy as a problem in their village now because it's "no longer existing in the community, because the perpetrators [abusers] were driven out of the village by the elders." The community definition now reflects this main change from Year One although it should be noted that the evidence from women does not agree.

From children's perspective, the categories of vulnerable children are essentially the same in both years. Disabled children were prioritised in 2018 and again in 2019. But in Year Two, the researchers again failed to meet children with disabilities within the research, although some children do identify disabled children as one of World Vision's target groups.

## INCLUDING THE MOST VULNERABLE CHILDREN

### How do we decide who to support?

Who World Vision supports is viewed in terms of the process of registration, rather than in terms of people's circumstances.

### Which children are perceived as receiving support from us?

Younger girls and older boys listed orphans, poor children, those without access to toilets, good drinking water decent clothes or medical facilities, as well as children who've been sexually abused. Older girls said we help the vulnerable, less privileged, orphans, those from poor backgrounds and families, and malnourished children.

Younger boys had limited ideas that selection just happened, or because children were brilliant.

As in Myanmar, in the second phase of the research we heard from most vulnerable children themselves, giving another opportunity to ask about children whose lives are more difficult than theirs. Sick children, disabled children and children involved in child labour were all mentioned, but it was also thought that World Vision doesn't support them. So, whilst it seems children believe that World Vision targets many of the groups regarded to be vulnerable, the picture is mixed and dependent on examples the children have personally seen or heard about.
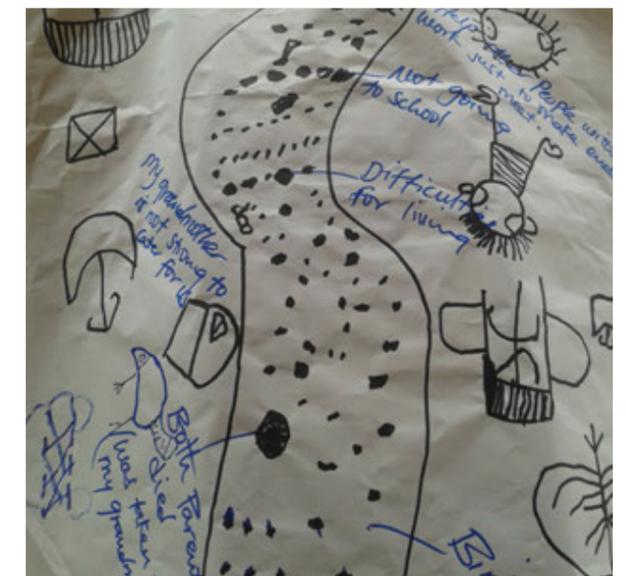



**TOP LEFT:** On the road to the research community. **ABOVE LEFT:** Girls working together on a drawing.
**ABOVE RIGHT:** One of the river of life drawings in Sierra Leone.

## Inclusion in World Vision's programme

This was essentially limited to material goods and services (for example, basic school materials), improving the education system, a loan scheme for parents and unspecified help for sick children. Some children believed that World Vision usually provides school items, food and clothes. A girls' groups explained they felt unsupported by leaders and local government and therefore expressed a high degree of expectation on World Vision to help.

## Programme and impact

Children's views on who we aim to help and how haven't changed much over the year. Children do see vulnerable children as being included in support. The provision of

material benefits and loan schemes will help many children in many of the circumstances they've identified. But some issues may need other types of support. In 2018 one girls' group raised the issue of help for children who have been sexually abused – although not specifying what sort of support. In 2019 whilst staff noted high levels of sexual abuse of girls by men, there has also been a greater enforcement of the law. These changes seem to focus on action against the perpetrator, and the potential of the law to act as a deterrent. But the question of what support is available for abused girls (and boys), and how it is accessed, remains. Staff noted changes in programming include a focus on child protection. Future years' studies will hopefully be able to offer an assessment on whether this is encouraging and promoting the right types of support.

# REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Defining the 'most vulnerable children'**
  The proposed change of definition was strongly influenced by the national context (the presidential drive to reduce sexual violence). It will be important for World Vision Sierra Leone to carefully monitor this and ensure that other vulnerable children are not being 'missed out'.

- **Ensure inclusion in the programme**
  Reaching villages which have high numbers of the most vulnerable children is a high priority. The findings of this qualitative research should be reviewed alongside other mapping and used to inform decisions on target communities within the Jaima Bongor programme area.

- **Tracking progress**
  It will be important to support a community-led annual review of how the programme is impacting the most vulnerable groups identified, in order to assure that progress is being made – and to celebrate progress.

- **Reaching and involving children with disabilities**
  Community members identify children with disabilities as among the most vulnerable, but the research does not contain any evidence of work with children with disabilities. Capacity and trust in the community should be built to ensure that children with disabilities are routinely included, including taking part in future research.



# UPDATE

## Since this Year Two research was conducted

A mapping exercise has taken place of where most vulnerable children live. This has helped the programme know where to work most urgently, ensuring that remote villages with high numbers of the most vulnerable children are not excluded. The research has informed the World Vision team on which interventions are most urgent based on the issues affecting most vulnerable children. As a result, positive parenting sessions have already been conducted as a priority.

The 2019 annual report for the programme describes some further examples of progress:

- Savings for Transformation groups which save money for household use and to begin small businesses, have

used their social funds (money collected to help in crisis) to cover school costs for orphans and other vulnerable children in their communities.

- Children with disabilities have been intentionally involved in the planning and implementation of programme interventions.

- The community recommended that stakeholders enforce all child protection by-laws. The Jaima Bongor programme has trained parent and caregivers in positive parenting and referral pathways, increasing awareness in protecting children as well as reporting and following up on child protection issues. The community recommended that child protection structures monitor the wellbeing of children in alternative care. (For example, staying with relatives not parents), as well.



**"We ensured children with disabilities are not left out and they don't stay in the background during meetings and other activities and we let them know everybody is equal in the sight of God. We also encourage them to believe in themselves and to know they have the capacity to have to make things happen."** Frances Berewa (Programme Manager)

**LEFT:** Women's group defining most vulnerable. **ABOVE:** Children playing in the research community.

**FRONT COVER:** 8-year-old Thang Thang* (in red) and his family, during a visit by Project Manager Muan Suum (in orange) and the research team.
All photos: © 2019 World Vision *Name changed to protect the child's identity.