

Policy Brief 4: Poverty Alleviation

This is no 4 of a series of briefs providing new insights on the wellbeing of rural children in Sub-Saharan Africa, a previously much under-researched population. Findings are derived from a longitudinal (2008-2010) controlled study in 5 communities of Kafue District, Zambia. This study was aimed at evaluating and developing a results-based intervention programme focussed on the interface between psychosocial wellbeing and livelihood. In addition, the study identified particular risk and protective factors for the psychosocial wellbeing of vulnerable children.

Research has shown that psychosocial wellbeing is strongly affected by poverty (see Research Briefs 6 and 7 for further data). Economic stressors also affect school enrolment (Research Brief 8), and even attendance for intervention programmes directed at vulnerable children (Research Brief 5). Hence, a livelihood intervention was implemented as part of a psychosocial programme, aimed at relieving the material distress of participants. This brief reports findings from the impact evaluation, which suggests that simple livelihood interventions can increase children's access to essential resources. Even participants living in households not directly part of the economic programme, but situated in the intervention community, experienced an increase in material benefits. However, improved economic conditions at the household level do not necessarily trickle down to vulnerable children living in the same household, and concurrent caregiver sensitisation is recommended as part of a poverty alleviation programme.

Research Questions

- Do economic benefits from a livelihood intervention provided at household level trickle down to vulnerable children within the same the household?
- Are there factors that prevent vulnerable children from accessing resources within a household?

Programme

- Livelihood intervention: 14 livelihood groups (sunflower cultivation leading to pressing for oil, and chicken- and goat-rearing), comprised of approximately 20 households each. Households were provided with the intervention based on a predetermined set of economic criteria.
- Overall psychosocial support interventions (Children's Committees, (Hero Book and Tree of Life – see Research Brief 3).
- Economic benefits from these projects were intended to support vulnerable dependants, and savings were to be reinvested in the project or offered as small loans to other households in the community.

Research Methodology

- Standardised face-to-face interviews: baseline (2008), interim (2009), final (2010).
- Participants: orphans (50%), vulnerable non-orphans (living with an elderly and/or chronically ill caregiver, 13%) and non-vulnerable children (10-18 years, 37%); girls: 50%.
- Quasi-experimental design: control group (n=105); intervention group with livelihood (n=125); intervention group without livelihood (n=206).¹

Key findings

1. This livelihood intervention improves access to resources of both children who received the livelihood intervention and children who did not

Individuals' access to resources such as education, food and personal belongings improved compared to the control group. Interestingly, participants that were not enrolled in livelihood groups also reported increased access to resources. This suggests a diffusion effect, i.e. increased wealth at the level of households that received livelihoods

¹ The numbers here reflect respondents who participated in all 3 survey rounds, and who met minimum exposure criteria. Both intervention groups were drawn from the same communities. The control was from a separate, comparable community.

support was dispersed to non-livelihood households in the intervention communities (Figure 2).

However, after two years, the effect of the livelihood intervention on an individual's access to relevant resources was still relatively small.

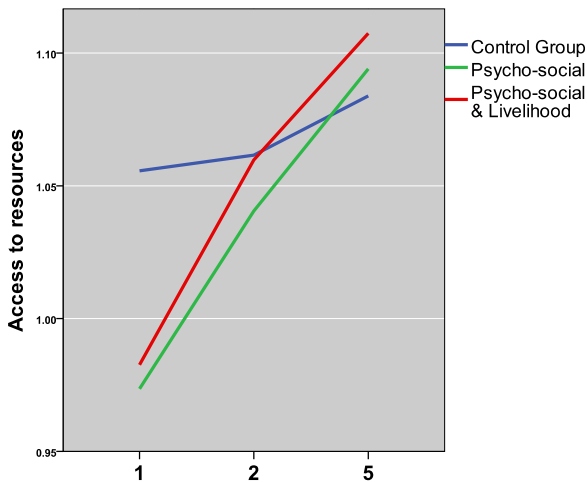


Figure 2: Effect of Livelihoods Support on participants' access to resources

2. Children's access to resources at the individual level is predicted by the socio-economic status at the household level but also by the quality of care

- While levels of household poverty is an important predictor of children's access to household resources such as education, food and basic possessions, access is additionally influenced by within-household discrimination. In a regression model based on the baseline survey (2008, N=960), poverty at household level explains a large proportion of the child's resource access (26%), while level of self-reported within-household discrimination explained an additional 3.4% of a child's access to within-household resources.



Figure 1: Poultry project in Kabweza, 2009

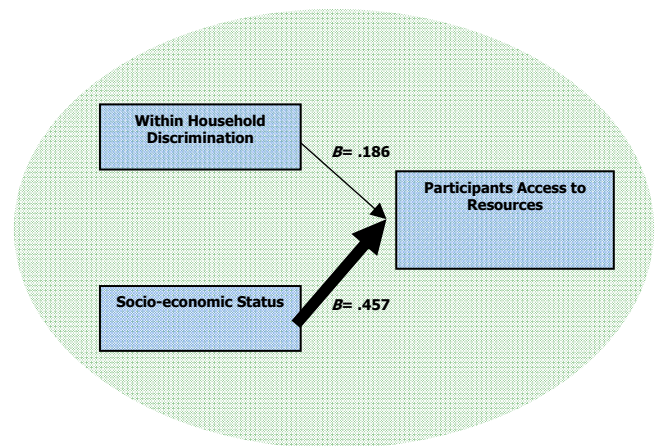


Figure 3: Predictors of a child's access to basic resources

Conclusions

- A livelihood intervention that targets the household level can increase an individual child's access to education, food, and basic possessions such as shoes and clothes.
- A livelihood intervention in a rural community can potentially benefit children that were not directly targeted by the interventions, as livelihood skills and inputs are likely to be passed on to neighbouring households.
- Poverty reduction at the household level does not necessarily trickle down to all children in this household. Discrimination against some children compared to others within the same household can prevent a child from benefiting from improved household economic conditions.
- Therefore, livelihood interventions should be combined with efforts to sensitise caregivers, in order to improve access to resources for all children within a household.

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