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Women's Empowerment through Cash-Cropping Improves Child Growth Outcomes in Uganda

by Nassul S. Kabunga, Shibani Ghosh, and Patrick Webb

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Abstract

Women's empowerment has been widely proposed as key to achieving improved child nutrition. But existing evidence on these linkages is often inconclusive and ambiguous. Previous quantitative studies have been dogged by unsatisfactory research designs and the use of composite indicators of women's empowerment that are rarely validated for use in local contexts. This paper is the first to use mixed multinomial endogenous regression methods with instrumentation to estimate such relationships after accounting for potential endogeneity in women's empowerment. Using panel data from rural Ugandan households engaged in cash cropping activities, we show that unobserved heterogeneity does significantly affect the estimates. After accounting for these and other observed factors, we find that women's empowerment with respect to ownership and decision-making of cash crops is positively associated with large gains in child height-for-age Z scores and with reduced stunting in children of all age-groups and gender.

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