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Skepticism Doesn't Have to Take the Day Off

We were pleased to see Bill Easterly highlight [The Hunger Project](#), a partner of our's in Ghana, on his blog, [Aid Watch](#). In fact, it wasn't necessary for skepticism to take a full day off because there is a rigorous evaluation of the project underway. With funding from the Robertson Foundation, researchers at Yale, Berkeley and IPA have just begun a study of the project's impact on the communities in Eastern Ghana.

The interesting thing about this project is the impressive commitment of THP to not only the mission of their organization but to independent assessment of the "epicenter strategy". One reason is that while the benefits of the program seem positive, the project is indeed expensive. And the costs are not borne just by THP, the people in the communities are expected to devote considerable time to help create, design, and build the epicenters. Are these resources best spent in this way?

The randomized evaluation approach is feasible here because the epicenter project cannot expand to all communities at once, and so researchers and local leaders were able to randomly select communities in public lottery to receive either early or later implementation of the program. We of course cannot control which individuals participate in THP, but we can measure the overall impact on the community from receiving an epicenter. By using natural constraints to implementation, we will measure, using both quantitative and qualitative tools, the impact of a complex and multifaceted community development approach on the health, nutrition, income, the role of women, social cohesion and education in the communities. This will be an exciting project for us because of the community aspect of the intervention. No two epicenters will be the same. This adaptive process of course will make it more difficult to state clearly the procedures to put in place, but it does validate, or not, the impact from the **process** of building and funding an epicenter, with full community involvement and direction and leadership.

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