

**Authors**

Orazio Attanasio  
Yale University

Sonya Krutikova  
Institute for Fiscal Studies

Sarah Cattan  
Institute for Fiscal Studies

Bet Caeyers  
Institute for Fiscal Studies

Lina Cardona-Sosa  
Institute for Fiscal Studies

Peter Leighton  
Institute for Fiscal Studies

EDUCATION | PRELIMINARY RESULTS BRIEF

FEBRUARY 2020



### Improving Early Childhood Development and Health with a Community-Run Program in Rural Ghana



As in many other developing countries, children under the age of five in rural parts of Ghana often fail to reach their development potential. This study evaluated the impacts of the Lively Minds program, a low-cost, community-run, play-based preschool learning program, that engaged both teachers and parents on early childhood development.

#### Key Findings\*

At the end of the one-year study:

- The Lively Minds program increased children's cognition, with significant improvements in emergent numeracy, executive function, and fine motor skills.
- The effect of the program on the cognitive skills of children from the poorest 20 percent of households was twice as high as that of children from better-off households. There was also a significant improvement in the literacy skills of the disadvantaged children that was not observed for the rest.
- Children's socio-emotional development improved, with the program leading to a reduction in externalizing behavior, including both conduct problems and hyperactive behaviors.
- Notably, the program led to a reduction in acute malnutrition among the participating children and an increase in average mid-upper arm circumference, an indicator of malnutrition.
- The program also increased mothers' parenting knowledge, increased the amount of time they spent on developmentally appropriate activities, and changed their teaching style (i.e. the way they interact with their children in the context of teaching a new task).
- Overall, the findings suggest that the Lively Minds approach is an effective and potentially scalable way to improve children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, health, and school readiness.

\*These results are preliminary and may change after further data collection and/or analysis.

**RESEARCHERS**

Orazio Attanasio (University College London), Sonya Krutikova, Sarah Cattan, Bet Caeyers, Lina Cardona Sosa, Peter Leighton (Institute for Fiscal Studies)

**PARTNER**

Lively Minds

**COUNTRY | TIMELINE**

Ghana | 2017-2018

**STUDY SAMPLE | STUDY DESIGN**

2,400 preschool children (aged 4-6 years old) and 2,400 caregivers | Randomized evaluation

# Improving Early Childhood Development and Health with a Community-Run

# Program in Rural Ghana

As in many other developing countries, children under the age of five in rural parts of Ghana often fail to reach their development potential. This study evaluated the impacts of the Lively Minds program, a low-cost, community-run, play-based preschool learning program, that engaged both teachers and parents on early childhood development.

## Key Findings:

*At the end of the one-year study:*

- The Lively Minds program increased children's cognition, with significant improvements in emergent-numeracy, executive function, and fine motor skills.
- The effect of the program on the cognitive skills of children from the poorest 20 percent of households was twice as high as that of children from better-off households. There was also a significant improvement in the literacy skills of the disadvantaged children that was not observed for the rest.
- Children's socio-emotional development improved, with the program leading to a reduction in externalizing behavior, including both conduct problems and hyperactive behaviors.
- Notably, the program led to a reduction in acute malnutrition among the participating children and an increase in average mid-upper arm circumference, an indicator of malnutrition.
- The program also increased mothers' parenting knowledge, increased the amount of time they spent on developmentally appropriate activities, and changed their teaching style (i.e. the way they interact with their children in the context of teaching a new task).
- Overall, the findings suggest that the Lively Minds approach is an effective and potentially scalable way to improve children's cognitive and socio-emotional development, health, and school readiness.

February 25, 2020