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### Timeline

2017-2020

### Study Status

Results

### Study Type

Randomized Evaluation

### Sample Size

168 villages (3,500 households)

### Research Implemented by IPA

Yes

#### BEYOND POVERTY REDUCTION: EVIDENCE FROM A MULTIFACETED PROGRAM ON POVERTY, NUTRITION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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We study the impacts of a multifaceted program implemented in Burkina Faso that targets ultra-poor households with young children or pregnant women. The experimental design includes a cash transfer program, a cash plus animal transfer program and a cash, animal and nutrition-focused transfer program. We find that the programs significantly reduced extreme poverty in all treatment households, but only the third, nutritionally focused program, positively impacted child nutrition and development. We find large impacts on young children's anthropometrics measures, motor development and cognitive development of new born-children in the nutritionally focused program branch. Our results suggest that while transfer programs are effective at reducing household poverty, nutritionally focused programs are critical to trigger cognitive responses at the child level.

**KEYWORDS:** Multifaceted, Nutrition, Cognitive development.

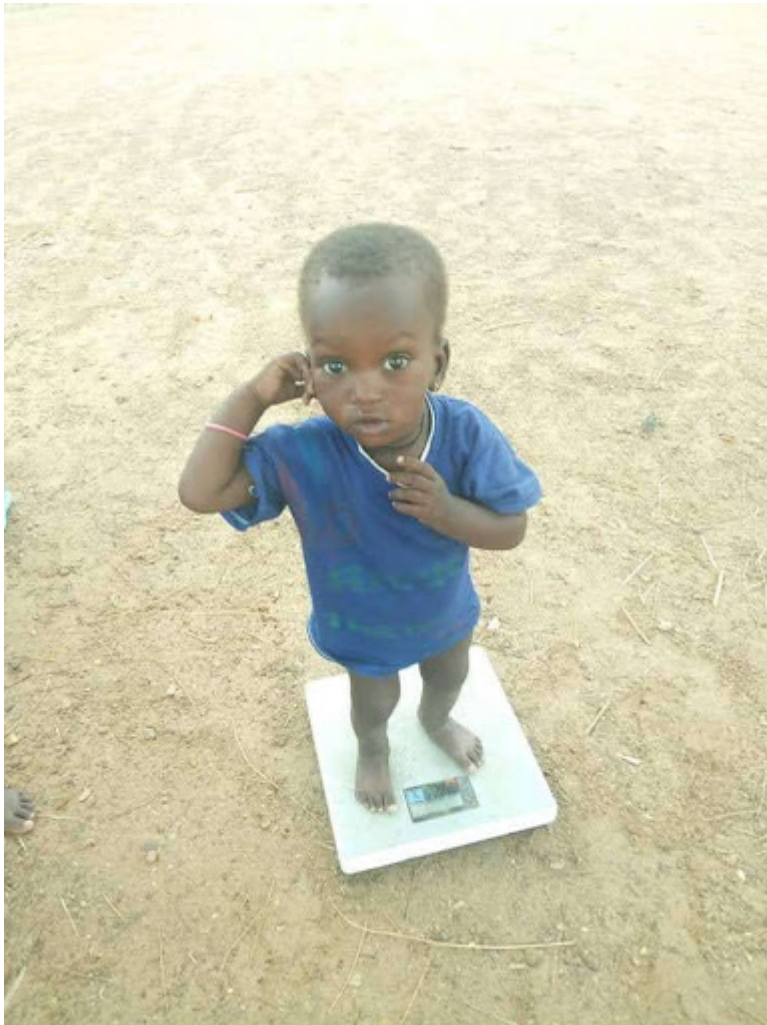
#### INTRODUCTION

Evidence from multiple studies (e.g., Banerjee et al. 2015; Bandiera et al. 2017; Angelucci et al. 2022) suggests that multifaceted programs targeting ultra-poor households have lasting impacts on poverty reduction, asset ownership, household income, consumption, and business investment and revenues. However, whether such programs can effectively address malnutrition and subsequently enhance child cognitive development remains an open question with antecedents in previous debates about the calorie-income elasticity (Bois and Haddad, 1992; Dutton and Subramanian, 1996; Colen et al., 2018; Almas et al., 2023), intra-household reallocation (Thomas, 1990) or cash transfers, whose impacts on child nutrition remain limited (Manley et al., 2020), specifically when provided unconditionally, as shown in the full literature review available online (Table OB.1). Can multifaceted programs outperform simple cash transfer initiatives in addressing malnutrition and enhancing cognitive development? This broad question is our main motivation, not only because malnutrition affects more than 148 million children worldwide 24 percent of whom live in West Africa, but also because chronic malnutrition can lead to irreversible cognitive and motor development issues (UNICEF et al., 2023). It is also a relevant question for social protection investment because programs that address immediate poverty without reducing child malnutrition might be unable to durably affect inter-generational poverty given the high negative correlation between malnutrition-related cognitive deficits and future earnings (Alderman et al., 2006; Hoddinott et al., 2008).

We study three models of a multifaceted programs to estimate the relative impacts of cash transfers (T1), cash plus asset (livestock) transfers (T2), or cash, asset and a nutrition-focused program that includes nutrition training and nutrient-rich food transfers (T3). Our assessment spans three follow-up surveys: one conducted approximately one year after the initiation of all transfers (later referred to as the *1-year follow-up*), another at the two-year mark (*2-year*

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# The Impact of a Nutrition-Focused Livelihoods Program on Child Nutrition in Burkina Faso



This photo was taken by an enumerator during the Baseline collection in 2018 in the province of Tapoa in Eastern Burkina Faso. © IPA 2018

**Abstract: In collaboration with IPA Burkina Faso, Action Contre la Faim, and Terre des Hommes, researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to measure a nutrition-focused livelihoods program's impacts on household income, assets, and child nutrition. Two years after the end of the intervention, the program reduced extreme poverty by 29 percent, reduced short-term and chronic child malnutrition by 33 percent, and increased cognitive and motor skills of children born during the program.**

Malnutrition affects more than 148 million children worldwide, 24 percent of whom live in West Africa. Chronic malnutrition can lead to irreversible cognitive and motor development issues.<sup>1</sup> In Burkina Faso, a 2020 statistical survey found significant levels of malnutrition in

children between the ages of six months and six years, with approximately 9 percent experiencing wasting, 25 percent experiencing stunted growth, and 18 percent experiencing malnourishment.<sup>2</sup> In an effort to reduce malnutrition and poverty in ultra-poor households with young children, Action Contre la Faim and Terre des Hommes implemented a multifaceted program consisting of cash transfers, productive asset transfers, and nutrition interventions.

In partnership with Action Contre la Faim, Terre des Hommes and IPA Burkina Faso, researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to measure whether the nutrition-focused livelihoods program improved child nutrition, household income, and assets. The intervention took place in 168 villages in the East and Boucle du Mouhoun regions, with 3,500 ultra-poor households with young children under the age of 5 or pregnant women participating. Villages were randomly assigned to one of the following groups:

1. **Unconditional cash transfers:** This group received monthly cash transfers (USD 36 in year 1 and USD 27 in year 2) during the lean season.
2. **Cash and productive assets transfers:** This group received both cash and vouchers to acquire poultry or livestock.
3. **Full program:** This group received cash, productive assets, and a nutrition-focused program that included nutrition training and nutrient-rich food transfers (enriched flour) intended for children aged six to twenty-three months and pregnant or lactating women.
4. **Comparison group:** Households in this group received no intervention.

During the evaluation period, all villages also received community-level interventions, unrelated to the evaluation, which sought to enhance community resilience through health management, accountability, risk preparedness, and climate adaptation.

One year after the beginning of the intervention, extreme poverty was reduced by between 50 and 70 percent across the three groups. Two years later, the full program had lasting impacts, having reduced extreme poverty by 29 percent—driven mainly by increased investments in agricultural equipment. Only the full program—which included the nutrition-focused component—had an impact on child health outcomes, reducing acute and chronic malnutrition by 33 percent and increasing motor and cognitive development among newborn children.

## Sources

<sup>1</sup> UNICEF, WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, AND WORLD BANK GROUP (2023): “Levels and trends in child malnutrition: Joint child malnutrition estimates,” Tech. rep., UNICEF, WHO, and World Bank.

<sup>2</sup> ENN (2020): “ENQUÊTE NUTRITIONNELLE NATIONALE,” Tech. rep., Ministère de la Santé du Burkina Faso.

## Implementing Partners



**Terre des Hommes**



**Action Contre la Faim**



**Save the Children**

**Save the Children**



**Tin-Tua**



**Gret**

