

**Faculty:** Susan Roberts, Professor of Nutrition, Friedman School

**Project Locations:** 4 weeks in Boston/Medford; 4 weeks in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau, 4 weeks in Boston/Medford

**Duration:** 12 weeks

**Project Title:** Evaluation of a cash-transfer program to prevent childhood malnutrition in Guinea-Bissau

**Project Details:** Cash transfer (CT) programs in low-income countries that allow recipients to receive cash designated for specific household expenditures such as food and family health and education typically show significant program benefits. In particular, several programs have shown positive impacts on use of health care resources, nutrition status and self-reported health. A meta-analysis of 42 cash transfer programs that set conditions for participation also found a significant benefit of CTs on school enrollment, attendance and dropout, especially in older children. However, it is recognized that evaluations have not always been rigorous, and careful evaluations are needed in different regions, testing culturally-appropriate conditions for different countries.

Guinea-Bissau is currently the 11th poorest country and is thus an appropriate target for a cash transfer program. This project will pilot test the effect of a cash transfer program aiming to improve family food consumption patterns, family health and schooling, with resulting benefits for childhood growth and cognition. Family-wide evaluations will be conducted to examine the impact in all family members.

The specific aim of this project will be to conduct a 3-year study randomized trial of a 2-year CT program in 2800 families in 3 regions of Guinea-Bissau, with assessments made both during the 2 years of cash transfer and in an additional year after it is completed.

Because childhood growth monitoring is rarely available, the cash transfer will be made together with the expectation that the head of household and primary child caregivers will attend meetings every 4 months at their local community health center, led by Community Health Workers (CHWs). This program component is based on recent research in Guinea-Bissau that identified growth monitoring and recommendation of traditional malnutrition remedies by CHW to be highly effective for preventing malnutrition (Schlossman et al. 2017). The following activities will be conducted by CHW:

Group meetings every 4 months with Community Health Workers for heads of household and child caregivers with children under 5 years. This meeting will have two parts, both of which will benefit participants:

Have child growth measured, to identify children at risk of malnutrition and participate in group education sessions on healthy eating for pregnant women and children. Areas of emphasis will include clean water and its timed introduction to breast feeding infants, weaning and childhood foods with specific value for preventing malnutrition and stunting, and foods with low nutritional value to limit, along with recommendations for how to achieve these changes.

Monthly growth monitoring and group education sessions for the subgroup of heads of household and child caregivers with children identified as risk of malnutrition or stunting, together with rapid referral to regional tertiary clinics for any child with health problems that cannot be addressed by CHW.

This project will have launched prior to May 2017, with baseline assessments complete. The student assistantship will focus on assessment of quality control of implementation of village meetings to monitor malnutrition and provide health education to parents.

Boston 4 weeks: Be trained in measurements to be made and review of education material to be taught at the village level. How to enter data with best practices, CITI training for human subjects' research.

Guinea-Bissau 4 weeks: site review of local villages implementing the program, working with a local translator. Enter quality control data and analyze.

Boston 4 weeks: Work with data analyst to examine the data and present results to the research group.

**Tasks and Responsibilities of Research Assistant:** Visiting monthly and 4-monthly group meetings, record quality control metrics on how accurately community health workers measure height and malnutrition status, and the accuracy of education delivery, meeting attendance and responsiveness to parents. Analyze the data to produce a report on how the program is going and variability in quality between sites.

**Qualifications:**

*Required*

- Experience working with Excel
- Interest in working in low-income countries

*Preferred*

- GPA above 3.5
- Meticulous disposition
- Conversationally fluent in Portuguese, Spanish, or French.

**Housing in Bissau:** Research Assistant will stay in a hotel in Bissau.