

Longitudinal Impact Evaluation of the Roving Caregivers Programme in St Lucia

From 2006 to 2009, the AIID will conduct a longitudinal impact evaluation of the Roving Caregivers Programme (RCP) in the Caribbean island of St Lucia. RCP is a home visiting programme aimed at vulnerable families with children in the age group from birth to three years old. Its main objective is the introduction of appropriate child rearing practices in order to support the healthy development of young children. The quantitative impact evaluation of RCP will yield evidence on the effect of home-visiting programmes on the development of targeted children, their families and the broader community. The evaluation is designed as a quasi-experimental study, consisting of a baseline survey and at least three follow-up survey rounds of children enrolled in the programme as well as a matched control group. The study is financed by the Bernard van Leer Foundation.

The evidence on the importance of the early years for the healthy development of children is overwhelming.¹ Especially children from disadvantaged households, such as poor or lowly educated families, run the risk of falling behind their more fortunate counterparts at a young age. This might result in an ever widening gap between poor and non-poor children. To prevent the perpetuation of this ‘intergenerational cycle of poverty’ early intervention programmes have been set up all over the world to reach the most vulnerable children. Impact evaluations of early childhood development (ECD) programmes show that such interventions can have a substantial and immediate effect on children’s cognitive, socio-emotional and physical development. The effects can be long-lasting and reach far into the future especially for children at risk.² However, the evidence on the impact of home-based programmes, as opposed to center-based approaches, is less clear and mostly limited to the United States.³ In the developing world, studies of home-visiting programmes are scarce.⁴

The impact evaluation of RCP in St Lucia consists of three parts:

- a. A child assessment based on child development tests of cognitive ability, motor skills, hearing/speech development, socio-emotional development and on anthropometrics. Once the children enroll in primary school, the developmental tests are complemented with numeracy and literacy tests.
- b. A parent assessment based on a parent questionnaire to measure parental knowledge, skills, behavior as well as income and social support networks;
- c. Measurement of the intensity (quality and quantity) of programme inputs.

¹ For overviews and references, see for example Young (1997; 2002), Keating and Hertzman (1999), Evans *et al.*, (2000), Behrman *et al.* (2004) or Roopnarine (2005).

² See for example Barnett (1995, 1998), Karoly *et al.* (1998), Currie (2001) or Garces *et al.* (2002) for results in the United States and Grantham-McGregor *et al.* (1997), Paes de Barros and Mendonça (1999) or Behrman *et al.* (2004) for studies in developing countries.

³ See Sweet and Appelbaum (2004) for a meta-analysis of sixty home-based projects in the United States.

⁴ One of the few studies is for example Kagitçibasi *et al.* (2001) who conduct a longitudinal comparison of center-based versus home-based programmes in Turkey.

The evaluation study is based on a longitudinal or panel data set of 400-450 children in the age group of birth to 24 months of age at the start of the study. Half of them live in villages where the Roving Caregivers Programme will be implemented. They constitute the treatment group. The other children live in matched control villages where the RCP programme will not be implemented. The same children and parents will be interviewed repeatedly over the years. The first survey round, conducted before RCP starts in the treatment communities, provides a baseline for both the treatment and the control group. Three additional rounds at one year intervals will measure the impact until the children are enrolled in preschool. If attrition can be minimized, two additional rounds of the survey will be carried out when the children have entered primary school and subsequently secondary school.

A longitudinal impact evaluation of RCP will yield better insights into the impact of the programme as implemented in the Eastern Caribbean on parents and their children, both during enrolment and in the long run. This will point out strengths and weaknesses of the programme, which will help to improve the programme design. In addition, the evaluation will provide much needed evidence on the potential of home-based approaches aimed at very young children and their families. In combination with a cost-benefit analysis, the evaluation can provide guidance for future policy decisions on investments in home-based programmes versus day-care centers.

For more information on the Roving Caregivers Programme, see the website of the Caribbean Support Initiative: <http://www.csinews.org/>
For more information on the Bernard van Leer Foundation, see: <http://www.bernardvanleer.org/>

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