3ie-IFPRI Joint Seminar: A Discussion of the Methodological Approach and Findings from a Quasi-Experimental Evaluation of an Economic and Social Empowerment Intervention in Mozambique

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Holly Burke and Samuel Field, from the ASPIRES project at FHI360, presented their research on the impact of an empowerment intervention on reducing adolescent girl's vulnerability to HIV in Mozambique at the 3ie-IFPRI joint seminar series in Washington D.C. on June 7. The study, registered on 3ie's Registry of International Development Impact Evaluations (RIDIE) evaluates the Women First (WF) program, which is a combined social and economic empowerment intervention implemented in 22 communities and funded by PEPFAR and USAID, to reduce HIV risk behaviors.

Adolescent girls who were in treatment communities and had participated in the WF intervention were selected for the treatment group. The baseline data represented a total of 265 and 618 adolescent girls respectively for the treatment and control group, whereas the endline data, added up to 231 and 542 adolescent girls respectively for the treatment and control groups. The researchers originally identified seven outcomes of interest but dropped five because they failed validity tests. To estimate project effects on the remaining two variables, knowledge related to gender-based violence and school attendance, the researchers used exact matching followed by a difference-in-differences model. For both variables the researchers reported no statistically significant results.

A number of limitations influenced the results of this evaluation. Specifically, the evaluators were brought into the project after it had already begun; thereby, they were limited in their ability to design an adequate quasi-experimental evaluation. The treatment group was not randomly selected and the choice was therefore made to use a difference-in-differences model. As baseline data were not collected, the researchers extrapolated a baseline from midline data, assuming linear trends amongst treatment and control groups from the beginning of the project through midline data collection. This prior assumption is a necessary condition in order to apply a difference-in-differences model. In addition, the data collection timeline was short. All these limitations may have contributed to the conclusion that Women First had no statistical impact on the two reported outcomes.

The discussion was led by Jeffrey Bingenheimer, an Associate Professor at George Washington University. Dr. Bingenheimer focused on the paper's difference-in-differences model, arguing that it did not work well within the parameters of this particular project. The way the data collection was conducted meant that it was not possible to refer to the true baseline values because those values were collected one year later after the intervention started. Moreover, the time variable was not dichotomous (i.e. data was collected at many different time points). Dr. Bingenheimer therefore recommended removing the difference-in-differences model and instead just comparing the two groups. The audience requested a deeper discussion of the theory of change, as some of the outcomes of interest were not intuitive to the program.