African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) Research Grant for research on “Policy impact profiling for child food and nutrition security in Zimbabwe” awarded within the African Economic Collaborative project “Agricultural and Food Policy Analysis for Nutrition Outcomes in Africa”, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

This new project focuses on the heterogeneity of policy impact of agricultural and food policies for child nutrition. These policies interact strongly but complexly with agro-ecologic, institutional, and socio-economic drivers of child food and nutrition security, suggesting that effective and inclusive policies should be differentiated across groups of children and their families. The project introduces the concept of ‘policy impact profiles’ to map the heterogeneity of policy impact, using spatially explicit information on households, food security institutions, and natural resources to characterize groups that will benefit most from specific agricultural and food policies. Matching techniques are used to identify differentiated policy impacts across groups (profiles) of children, and a modified “polling” approach to identify “winning” profiles that capture the types of children covering the largest aggregate impact (“coverage”) and the largest impact difference with the second-best profile (“edge”). The project will look specifically at agricultural and food policy options for improving child nutrition outcomes through improved dietary diversity for Zimbabwe. Earlier research has shown that dietary diversity is associated with child nutrition status, focusing on average treatment effects (Arimond and Ruel 2004). Sub-Saharan Africa (and also Zimbabwe) is however highly diverse in terms of landscape, climate and soil types and spatial diversity in agricultural production patterns and productivity is pronounced.

The research will analyze how the targeting of policies to improve dietary diversity using the policy impact profiling approach has the potential to improve child nutrition outcomes in Zimbabwe, compared to a one-size-fits-all policy approach. Also because information from multiple waves and from many sources are used, it will be analyzed how changes in dietary diversity and child nutrition outcomes fit into the broader changes in the environment, society, and economy in Zimbabwe since the mid-1990s and how the results can be extended to other areas in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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