



PRESS RELEASE

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Background materials are available at:
<http://www.ifpri.org/media/20080131Guatemala.asp>

Better Childhood Nutrition Increases Productivity

Study First to Show Improving Nutrition in Early Childhood Leads to Significantly Higher Incomes in Adulthood

Washington, DC—Feeding very young children a high-energy, high-protein supplement leads to increased economic productivity in adulthood, especially for men, according to a study published in the current issue of *The Lancet*, a leading medical journal.

Boys who received the supplement, known as *atole*, in the first two years of life earned on average 46 percent higher wages as adults, while boys who received *atole* in their first three years earned 37 percent higher wages on average. Those who first received the supplement after age three did not gain any economic benefits as adults.

This study is the first to present direct evidence of the effects of early childhood nutrition programs on adult economic productivity and incomes. The research was conducted in Guatemala by Emory University, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama, the University of Pennsylvania, and Middlebury College.

“The study confirms that the first two years of life are the window of opportunity when nutrition programs have an enormous impact on a child’s development, with life-long

benefits,” said Reynaldo Martorell, Woodruff Professor of International Nutrition at Emory University.

From 1969-1977, four rural communities in Guatemala participated in a food supplementation study in which children received one of two supplements fortified equally with micronutrients. The first, *atole*, was high in protein and energy; the second contained no protein and was low in energy.

In 2002-2004, researchers returned to Guatemala to interview individuals who had participated in the nutrition supplement program as children. They collected information about all income-generating activities, including type of work; hours, days, and months worked; and fringe benefits received.

“This research demonstrates that early childhood nutrition is not only crucial for the physical growth of children, but is also a wise, long-term economic investment,” said Martorell, who was one of the researchers who conducted the original study in Guatemala. “Just as we need to invest in infrastructure, we need to invest in children.”

The Guatemala study is part of an ongoing focus by *The Lancet* on maternal and child undernutrition and a featured article in the current issue.

“We have long known that nutrition interventions can provide significant benefits in terms of a child’s health, growth, and mental and physical development,” said John Hoddinott, lead author of *The Lancet* article and IFPRI senior research fellow. “This study in Guatemala is important because it shows that improving nutrition in early childhood can also be a driver of economic growth for developing countries and a pathway out of poverty for poor households.”

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The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI is one of 15 centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, an alliance of 64 governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations. www.ifpri.org