Dissertation abstract

Dissertation Title: Three essays on child welfare in Côte d’Ivoire

The objective of this dissertation is to examine the impact of early life events such as civil conflicts and rainfall variability on child welfare in Côte d’Ivoire as well as possible mitigating factors. It consists of three essays as follows.

Essay 1: Maternal exposure to conflicts and birth outcomes in Côte d’Ivoire

Inadequate birth weight has been shown to plague both developed and developing countries with lifelong consequences on children’s economic outcomes. In line with the growing literature on the relationship between intrauterine exposure to shocks and birth outcomes, this study examines the effect of armed conflicts on birth weight in Côte d’Ivoire. The focus is on the 2010-2011 post-electoral violence using the 2011-2012 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) survey from Côte d’Ivoire and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED) documenting the timing and location of conflict events. The empirical results show that armed conflicts reduce the birth weight of new-born children who were in-utero during the conflict period, and increase the probability among exposed pregnant women of giving birth to a child weighing less than 2500 grams at birth. In addition, the study gives evidence that the impact of conflict on birth weight is significant for exposure early in pregnancy compared to the later stage of pregnancy. The study also suggests that maternal prenatal care and nutritional intake are possible mechanisms through which the effect of conflict on birth weight might be attenuated.

Essay 2: Rainfall variability and breastfeeding duration in Côte d’Ivoire

International health agencies continue to stress on the importance of a longer breastfeeding period to improve child welfare, despite the challenge it presents for women in developed and developing countries as they have to contend with other time pressures, importantly, work. In the many developing countries characterized by a heavy reliance on rain-fed agriculture, the work-breastfeeding conflict is particularly salient during abundant rainfall. This study examines the effect on rainfall variability on breastfeeding duration in Côte d’Ivoire using the 1994 DHS survey and rainfall data from various weather stations across the country. The empirical results show that for women living in rural areas or engaged in agricultural activities, rainfall variability around the time of birth and one year after birth reduces breastfeeding duration. Breastfeeding duration falls by 2.20 and 2.30 months in the year of birth and one year after birth for farming women and those living in rural areas respectively. However, a rainfall shock in utero increases breastfeeding duration from between 2.4 to 2.9 months for each group respectively. The essay suggests that family labor, land ownership, and the availability of childcare assistance are possible mechanisms that can lessen the breastfeeding time and agricultural work competition resulting from rainfall variability.
Essay 3: Impact of armed conflicts on child welfare in Côte d’Ivoire

Civilian populations, including children, are often caught in the crossfire during armed conflicts. Children are also victims and often forced perpetrators of atrocities, which has lifelong consequences on their wellbeing as well as implications for intergenerational transmission of poverty and the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals. This study builds on previous work on the microeconomic effects of armed conflicts on children, in line with the fetal origins hypothesis to investigate the effects of early life shocks on child health. Unlike past studies in Côte d’Ivoire that addressed the 2002-2007 civil conflicts, this study examines the impact of armed conflicts on child welfare focusing on the 2010-2011 post-electoral violence. It uses the 2011/2012 DHS surveys and data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Database (ACLED) on the exact location and timing of conflicts. The empirical evidence shows that conflict significantly reduces the height-for-age z-score of exposed children compared to their non-exposed counterparts. Both children born before and during the war are impacted. Moreover, the results suggest that child welfare is negatively affected by conflict intensity, while the presence of UN peacekeepers might mitigate the negative effects of conflict on child welfare.