Brief Summary in English

Despite the progress made under the millennium development initiative, limited school participation continues to pose a problem in many developing countries. This thesis starts with a review of the latest evidence on the effectiveness and feasibility of interventions that aim to increase school participation in developing countries. The literature review forms a stepping stone to two topics discussed in the remainder of the dissertation.

First, the thesis explores the wide-ranging side effects of a randomized cash transfer intervention in Malawi. This intervention provided financial support to school-aged women to improve their school participation. The thesis shows that, besides improving school participation, the intervention in Malawi helped break multiple social patterns that hamper the development of young women.

The intervention also affected the mental well-being of its beneficiaries. Unconditional transfers resulted in substantial improvements in mental well-being. However, mental well-being declined with increases in the transfer amount offered to the parents conditional on regular school attendance. The mental well-being of non-beneficiaries living in the neighborhood of beneficiaries, moreover, deteriorated. These findings have implications for the optimal design of cash transfer interventions.

The second topic is the role of the school environment in pupils schooling decisions and school participation. Exploiting an ability-based procedure used by Malawis government to assign pupils to secondary schools, the dissertation shows that in Malawi the school environment has a strong causal effect on both of these outcomes. Such assignment procedures, moreover, are shown to affect students before they enter the schools into which they have been selected.