

## **The Foundation for the NIH Supports Research to Combat Global Malnutrition**

**BETHESDA, MD** (June 20, 2012) — The Foundation for the National Institutes of Health (FNIH), along with the NIH Fogarty International Center (FIC), is contributing to research focused on the discovery of novel dietary and microbial therapeutics that will benefit infants and children living in countries with widespread malnutrition and at risk for disease and growth deficits.

The Breast Milk, Gut Microbiome, and Immunity (BMMI) Project is conducted by an international team of scientists and clinicians led by Jeffrey I. Gordon, M.D., at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

Malnutrition is not simply a lack of available food. Scientists now understand malnutrition is far more complex and may involve a breakdown in the way gut microbial communities process various components of the diet. A vital part of the BMMI Project will be evaluating the relationship among first foods (breast milk), the developing community of microbes in the intestine, and the developing immune system.

The community of intestinal microbes and its vast collection of genes, known as the gut microbiome, are assembled from birth and are influenced by babies' early environments and the first foods they consume, such as breast milk.

Malnutrition in infants and children is a critical global health challenge. The potential impact of the project on the development of preventive measures and/or treatment options for malnutrition is considerable.

The BMMI Project builds on a number of ongoing clinical studies in Africa, South Asia and South America, including research infrastructure and partnerships established through the larger FNIH- and FIC-supported MAL-ED (Malnutrition and Enteric Diseases) Consortium – a network of international investigators working collaboratively on the Etiology, Risk Factors, and Interactions of Enteric Infections and Malnutrition and the Consequences for Child Health Project. A subset of the study participants enrolled in an ongoing birth cohort study at five MAL-ED Consortium sites (Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Peru, and South Africa), will also be enrolled in the BMMI Project.

“Both of these projects are working to bring us closer to reducing the effects of global malnutrition and improving the growth and development of children living in resource poor environments,” says FNIH’s Acting Executive Director and CEO, Stephanie L. James, PhD. “This is one of many examples of FNIH-supported research with direct implications for improving human health.”

The BMMI Project and MAL-ED Consortium are funded by grants from the Bill & Melinda

Gates Foundation.

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**About the Foundation for the NIH**

Established by the United States Congress to support the mission of the NIH – improving health through scientific discovery in the search for cure – the Foundation for the NIH is a leader in identifying and addressing complex scientific and health issues. The Foundation is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) charitable organization that raises private-sector funds for a broad portfolio of unique programs that complement and enhance the NIH priorities and activities. For additional information about the Foundation for the NIH, visit [www.fnih.org](http://www.fnih.org).