

## Call for Papers

### JPAM Symposium: **Empirical Strategies in International Development Research**

Submission Deadline: July 1, 2013

The Journal of Policy Analysis and Management (JPAM) invites papers for a symposium on Empirical Strategies in International Development Research. Since the end of World War II, hundreds of billions of dollars have been invested directly by developed country governments, or indirectly via multilateral institutions, to promote economic development in the Global South. Private foundations have also become major players in at least some categories of development aid. Yet, the results of these resource flows have been variable, at best, and discouraging, at worst. An important reason behind “aid fatigue” is the belief that resource transfers via foreign aid have insufficiently achieved their goal: to promote economic development. This has been attributed to a range of factors that include poor choices about development instruments, the challenging institutional and social contexts in which development efforts take place and even the shortcomings of aid beneficiaries. Fears of inefficiency, abuse and fraud abound. Scholars have responded by seeking to empirically assess “what actually works”; alas, their efforts have often been frustrated by a range of methodological problems that include establishing causality and reliably estimating the effects of policy inputs.

Encouragingly, however, in the last two decades scholars have pioneered new empirical techniques to address these problems. These include the use of randomized field experiments and sophisticated econometric techniques. This JPAM symposium seeks to assess as well as showcase cutting edge empirical work in this vein. We invite papers that explore how the efficacy of different types of interventions in different types of institutional and social settings and targeted at different audiences might be assessed in relation to well specified development objectives. We invite both original papers as well as papers which coherently weave together extant work. JPAM is the flagship journal of the Association of Public Policy Analysis and Management. It typically ranks among the top public policy journals. While JPAM readership is sophisticated, we would like the papers to be written in a way that makes them accessible to wide audiences.

Submissions for this special issue should be made through the regular online submission process for the journal at [editorialexpress.com/jpam/](http://editorialexpress.com/jpam/). Please indicate with your submission that you would like your paper to be considered for this special issue. Initial submissions for this symposium will be accepted until July 1, 2013. Professor Victor A. Menaldo ([vmenaldo@uw.edu](mailto:vmenaldo@uw.edu)) and Professor Aseem Prakash ([aseem@uw.edu](mailto:aseem@uw.edu)) will serve as guest editors for this symposium along with JPAM editor-in-chief, Dr. Maureen Pirog. Please direct all your enquiries to the guest editors.

*Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*  
Symposium on

## **Empirical Strategies in International Development Research**

Guest Editors:

Victor A. Menaldo and Aseem Prakash  
University of Washington, Seattle

In the modern era, governmental and non-governmental actors have increasingly promoted economic development to improve the material and social well-being of specific groups. These efforts have targeted, inter alia, underprivileged segments of society such as ethnic minorities and marginalized social classes, women, children, and farmers. Targeted development of this sort is now a major public policy concern that preoccupies a broad cross-section of national, regional, and international institutions.

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sophisticated, we would like the papers to be written in a way that makes them accessible to wide audiences.

Field experiments are increasingly popular in the field of international development primarily because of the shortcomings that beset observational research. Experimentalists rightly question the contributions made by research that uses observational data but does not provide sufficient information about the nature and magnitude of the bias that may plague the findings. Although field experiments centered on randomized control treatment (RCT) evaluations have produced several intriguing findings, they are not a panacea. There is a concern that research has devolved to the rote administration of program evaluations of less interesting and important questions. Put another way, a concern over omitted variables may have led us to omit the most important questions, and focus exclusively on the type of questions in which only a narrow set of variables can be manipulated by researchers. Furthermore, there are serious concerns voiced about external validity that include both the potential inability to scale up findings and the inability to extrapolate findings from one place to other places. Some researchers lament the fact that random assignment is ultimately artificial and usually temporary, belying the historical evolution of political institutions and practices that are organic and more permanent.

Another challenge faced by the field experiment approach to international development is the search for causal mechanisms to explain the reason behind aggregate relationships. Without a firm base of contextual knowledge, as well as knowledge about basic correlations between variables that occur in the real world, it is hard to know what hypotheses to test for via experimentation. Theories provide mechanisms so that we can better understand why there may be covariance between randomly assigned variables and outcomes of interest. What are the most promising theoretical insights about targeted development strategies in the developing world that can inform our understanding of the mechanisms behind development?

Finally, what are the best practices in terms of research design, sequencing and casual inference? Some propose that research plans should be submitted and disseminated before any field experiment is actually run. The logic is that this promotes transparency and prevents data mining. Yet this policy might rule out an inductive approach in which the experimental design can be adjusted based on information gleaned in the field during the research process. What is the best way forward? Is there a compromise between the deductive and inductive ideal types? What can we learn from more traditional approaches to development that have already negotiated this debate?