

Economic Behaviour During Conflict: Evidence from Displaced People's Camps in Northern Uganda

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation investigates men and women's labour force participation and children's education and health outcomes using original data collected in Ugandan Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps in 2005 and 2007. The random nature of the conflict and mass displacement in the region is exploited to identify their impacts on behaviour. Furthermore, a randomized trial of two alternative food for education programs implemented in the IDP camps is evaluated. The impacts of the programs on school participation, cognitive development and learning achievement are investigated.

The data analyzed in this dissertation was collected with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). I have been involved in this project from its inception. Along with colleagues at IFPRI, I created the survey questionnaires, was involved in determining the sampling and randomization, oversaw the data collection, organized the data entry and cleaned the data.

My job market paper uses a unique data set and the exogenous nature of the conflict and resulting displacement in Northern Uganda to examine their impacts on labour market participation. I find that the longer the existence of the camp to which people moved, the less men work. In contrast, women's labour market decisions are not influenced by the age of the Internally Displaced People's camp in which they live. I argue that these responses result from the development of gender-specific social norms regarding idleness and not from a lack of opportunities. A decline in the percentage of men working in a camp leads to a reduction in the probability that a given man works of the same magnitude. I provide evidence of social interactions in male labour market participation. Moreover, I show the diffusion of norms using variation in the date of camp formation.

The evaluation of the food for education programs provides solid empirical evidence of the educational impacts of these programs. Food for education programs are implemented in IDP and refugee camps worldwide and convincing evidence of their impacts is unavailable. Joint with IFPRI colleagues, I compare outcomes between three randomly assigned groups: beneficiaries of the World Food Programme's free on-site school feeding (SFP) program, beneficiaries of an experimental take-home rations (THR) program giving equivalent food transfers conditional on school attendance, and a control group. Results are estimated using a difference-in-difference technique. The findings are consistent with the literature and suggest that the SFP program performed somewhat better than the THR program at increasing school attendance, reducing age at entry for girls, and decreasing grade repetition. The THR program was more effective at bringing children to school in the upper grades and at improving cognitive development and learning achievement. A cost-benefit analysis of the two programs will be undertaken.