

Some Advice on Publishing Research in Agricultural and Resource Economics

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Outline

- The basics
- Suggestions on writing, empirics and marketing
- Submission process
- Dealing with the outcomes

Topic selection

- **Novelty**. A research question that has not been addressed so far
- **Relevance**. It has to be an important question. A «big» question
- A paper using an exotic estimator with amazing asymptotic property on a second order problem rarely sees the light...
- Uninteresting question * Fancy technique or estimator = 0

Your paper

Must have a close connection with:

1. economic situations of the most general interest, or
2. economic theory that provides predictions

Testable hypotheses can come from (1), (2) and previous work,
but also your own observation and intuition

Should I work with someone else?

- Yes! It is much more fun than alone
- Try to work with people who have capabilities that you do not have or you can complement theirs
- 2004 Household Characteristics Nepal paper: 648 citations
- 2011 Adaptation in Ethiopia paper: 750 citations
- Share the burden
- You can learn a lot from other colleagues

Who not to work with:

Three types of bad co-authors. Avoid them all

- Too busy
- Too incompetent
- Too strategic
- Look at whether that person's other young co-authors continue to work with them..see if that collaboration helped, placement, tenure, etc.

Good writing (and Marketing)

- Publishing your work in good journals depend in large part on how well you can present your ideas
- Make your paper concise and easy to read
- Each paragraph should have a designated purpose
- Don't bog reader down in results
- Be consistent with definitions!

Good writing (and Marketing)

- The introduction is where the magic happens so it requires more time than everything else
- Read and rewrite your introduction any time you open your document
- Clarify the contribution/novelty ASAP. “How many inches of your text shall I read before understanding what you have done?”

Introduction formula (adapted from Keith Head at UBC)

- Hook: This is where you motivate your work as broadly as possible
- Question: This is where you clearly state your research question and explain how you answer it
- Antecedents: One-paragraph mini literature review. (Not too long)
- Value Added: Your contributions, and why this deserves to be published. (Do not be shy!)
- Roadmap: The remainder of this paper is organized as follows...(not compulsory)



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journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jeboRain and impatience: Evidence from rural Ethiopia[☆]Salvatore Di Falco^{a,*}, Peter Berck^b, Mintewab Bezabih^c, Gunnar Köhlin^d^a Geneva School of Economics and Management, University of Geneva, Boulevard du Pont d'Arve 40 - 1211 Geneva, Switzerland^b University of California, Berkeley, USA^c Environment and Climate Research Center, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia^d University of Gothenburg, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

We have combined farm household panel data, weather data and discount rates, as measured by a hypothetical survey question, to estimate the impact of income on discounting. This paper has found that income variation driven by anomalies in rainfall during the main growing season is a strong predictor of farmers' subjective discount rates. Farmers prefer a smaller immediate reward to a larger deferred one when affected by negative income shocks, while they display lower discount rates when the income shocks are positive. We have also found that higher discount rates are negatively correlated with profitable agricultural investments.

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1. Introduction

In developing countries, exposure to negative and positive income shocks affect many dimensions of people's lives. This includes the way they 'discount' their future.¹ Poorer individuals, for instance, may not be able to afford to forgo current (smaller) income for future (larger) income (Becker and Mulligan, 1997; Fehr, 2002). A growing body of empirical literature has investigated the specific link between discounting of the future and how it varies depending on income.² The findings

of such research are very ambiguous (Pender, 1996; Tanaka et al., 2010; Spears, 2011; Haushofer et al., 2013; Krupka and Stephens Jr., 2013; Chuang and Schechter, 2015; Carvalho et al., 2016).

This paper studies the impact that climate-driven income shocks have on discounting in rural Ethiopia. It aims to contribute to the existing literature in three different ways. First, as in the cross-sectional Vietnam study by Tanaka et al. (2010), we establish a causal relationship between income shocks and farmers' discount rates by using the exogenous variation in rainfall as an instrument. In contrast to the Tanaka et al. (2010) paper, we have taken advantage of the availability of panel data. This has allowed us to control for individual unobservable characteristics, such as time-invariant individual characteristics, cognitive skills and soil features, as well as time-fixed effects. We have found that income variation driven by anomalies in rainfall during the main growing season is a strong predictor of farmers' subjective discount rates.³ Farmers prefer a smaller (hypothetical) immediate reward to a larger (hypothetical) deferred reward when affected by negative income shocks, while they display lower discount rates when the income shocks are positive. This result echoes the findings of a laboratory experiment undertaken by Haushofer et al. (2013), who have found that negative income shocks increase discount rates while positive income shocks weakly reduce them. Our results are quantitatively relevant. We estimate that a 10% increase in negative income shocks will increase subjective discount rates by 17%.

This paper also explores some of the economic implications of discounting. We have studied if poorer farmers are less inclined to undertake profitable agricultural investments (Fuchs, 1982; Card, 1995; Fehr, 2002).⁴ Our research has found that heavy discounting is negatively correlated with profitable agricultural investments in soil conservation and livestock. This result is of particular relevance in the context of developing countries, as it may relate to the perpetuation of poverty (Haushofer and Fehr, 2014). Poverty may indeed reduce the incentive of undertaking profitable investments that produce benefits in the long-term and costs in the short-term.

A third aim of this paper is to contribute to the rapidly expanding literature exploring the influence of climate factors on a set of different economic outcomes (Mendelsohn et al., 1994; Barreca, 2012; Dell et al., 2012; Dell, 2012; Jia, 2013; Hsiang et al., 2013; Rabassa et al., 2014; Harari and La Ferrara, 2018). Our research has highlighted some important behavioral implications of exposure to climate anomalies. Understanding how climate-driven income shock may affect discounting and investment decisions in sub-Saharan Africa is of paramount importance as a plethora of climate models have forecast an increased frequency of extreme events (e.g. more severe and longer droughts) in the region, thereby impacting its rural populations (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2013; Di Falco, 2014).

2. Background

Ethiopia's frequent and well-documented exposure to climate anomalies makes it a prime study area. During the last 40 years, Ethiopia has experienced many severe droughts, leading to production levels that have fallen short of basic subsistence levels for many farm households. Negative rainfall anomalies are considered the most important problem for these farmers (Dercon, 2004). The country also has one of the highest rates of soil nutrient depletion in Sub-Saharan Africa (Grepperud 1996; Shiferaw and Holden, 1999).⁵ In the highlands of Ethiopia, degradation and underdevelopment form a nexus in which soil degradation leads to deepening poverty and further dependence on increasingly ecologically fragile environments (Dasgupta, 1993; Dasgupta and Maier, 1991). With poor and variable agricultural yields, food insecurity is a major preoccupation for the majority of Ethiopia's rural population (World Bank, 2006).⁶

We have used data from the Sustainable Land Management Survey. This farm-household panel survey was conducted by the Department of Economics of Addis Ababa University in collaboration with the Ethiopian Development Research Institute and the University of Gothenburg, during the years 2005 and 2007. The surveyed farms were scattered across an area of about 32,000 km². A stratified random sample of Kebeles⁷ was selected from the highlands of Ethiopia. Strata were defined according to variables associated with moisture availability (a major factor affecting agricultural productivity), market access and population density. The dataset comprised randomly selected farm households from 80 different villages (grouped in 13 Kebeles) in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. These were subsistence farm households whose agricultural production was largely consumed within the family and its network. Farms were located at a latitude of above 1500 m above sea level. The main purpose of the data collection was to understand the links between poverty and natural resource use in Ethiopia. The landscape in these highlands is very steep and denuded of vegetation landscape. Marginal lands are typically cultivated due to high population pressure and soil erosion.

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¹ Discounting encompasses any reason why individuals may attach less importance to future consequences than current ones. While discounting is related to time preferences, it is not the same concept (for a general discussion, see Frederick, Loewenstein and O'Donoghue, 2002).

² This question dates back to the work of Irving Fisher who argued that impatience is likely to be related to income. He wrote (Fisher, 1930, p.72): 'Poverty bears down on all portions of a man's expected life. But it increases the want for immediate income even more than it increases the want for future income.' Haushofer and Fehr (2014) provide an exhaustive review of this body of literature.

³ Negative rainfall anomalies (e.g. droughts) imply that, in a given year, crops have received less rainfall compared to the long-term rainfall trend. Positive rainfall anomalies imply, instead, that crops have received more rainfall in comparison to the long-term rainfall trend. While it is known that too much rain, by generating floods, would have also negative consequences on crops, we have no evidence of this effect from the two years covered by the dataset.

⁴ For a theoretical model linking investments and endogenous discounting, see Chavas (2013).

⁵ Annually, erosion leads to Ethiopia losing over 1.5 billion tons of topsoil from the highlands. This may have added between 1 and 1.5 million tons of grain to the country's harvest.

⁶ Ethiopia has experienced at least five major national droughts since 1980, along with dozens of localised ones (World Bank 2006). Additionally, Dercon (2005) has observed that these cycles of drought create poverty traps for many households.

⁷ The Kebeles, or Peasant Associations (PA), in the rural part of the country, were founded by the Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police and Territorial Army of Ethiopia, also known as the Derg, after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974. They are the lowest administrative unit.

Titles are important too

- Avoid making your paper sound like a case study: A study of, Investigations of, Observations on....
- Avoid long titles
- Bramoulle and Ductor (2018) find strong and robust negative relation between the length of the title of an article and its scientific quality
- Articles with shorter titles are published in better ranked journals
- Title length is negatively associated with the novelty of the article
- Articles with shorter titles tend to receive more citations

Empirical work

- Identification
- Sources of (exogenous) variation (be open)
- Anticipate (all) the possible alternative explanations/mechanism
- Build your argument
- Robustness checks are everything and lack of space is not a good excuse for not providing them
- Supporting material (Do files, data, power analysis, etc.)

- The field moves quickly - no more small case study
- Large data set, large variation across space and time
- My first ERAE (2005) had $n = 55$
- Borrow identification strategies from other body of (econ) literature
- Structural approaches (IO literature)

Once the draft is ready

- When you think you are ready to submit the paper, then stop and try to shorten it
- Make sure there are no typos and grammatical errors
- DO NOT BE IMPATIENT
- You get one chance per paper on a given journal

Once the (copy edited) draft is ready

- Circulate it as widely as possible
- Present it, give seminars go to (virtual and non virtual) conferences, as much as you can
- A presentation may serve the function of a round of referee reports
- Go through the papers published in the top journals: many seminars acknowledged, many people acknowledged..
- Get invited, go at zero cost
- Invite for your department

Journal choice

- Aim high but also be realistic
- Look at your own references
- What have they published lately?
- You should be willing to submit to new ambitious journals (e.g., JAERE)
- If you have an article in a new journal and then it becomes good, you will benefit
- Consider special issues if you have work that fits the theme

Submission (ERAE Example)

- Submit online and the review process starts:
- Oxford University Press editorial office checks the submission
- ERAE editor has an initial read and decides whether to send to referees
- or screen/desk reject screen reject is not a failure; it is efficient and saves you wasting time
- If paper sent out then 2 or 3 reviewers get invited
- These depends on how you have positioned the paper
- Editor takes a decision (on average less than 2 months for ERAE submissions)

Outcomes

- Screen/desk reject (no reviewer reports, less than 3 weeks)
- Reject with reviewer reports
- revise and resubmit

Rejections

- It really hurts when you get a rejection. And the pain of rejection will rarely completely go away...
- Everyone gets rejected (Gans and Shepherd, 1994)
- Developing an healthy attitude towards it, makes you a happier person and a better researcher
- Editors want to publish articles that their readership will think are important. They want to publish scientific “news”

- They will desk reject based on both quality and on the perceived taste and preferences of their readers
- Editors will sometime have to overrule a positive referee -> so don't get too mad at them when this happens

Author's classic trap

- “My paper is as good as that paper published in the AJAE in 2007. I can’t believe that the &%*\$# editor rejected it”
- Yes, but....The acceptance rate was a lot higher then
- The field moves on!
- You might be comparing your paper to one of the weaker papers published...

- Rejections can be good. Sometimes they provide the best feedback on your paper
- Use it for improving your paper
- If both reviewers agree on something or find an important flaw, address it before resubmitting the paper
- It is valuable feedback. The rest is noise. Breathe normally and move forward

Do not fall in love with your paper

- If a paper gets rejected many times then stop and ponder
- It is a good idea with not great data? It is not written well? Why “they don’t get it?”
- Do not be afraid to kill or freeze your babies
- Opportunity cost
- Other more exciting projects
- Perhaps get back to it in the future

R&R

- Super good news!
- Make a plan how to respond
- Go through all comments
- Consider which are most important and spend most time on them
- Pay particular attention to the Editor's letter
- Think that you work with them
- Be cooperative and open 😊
- Politely argue your case to the referee and the editor
- Make sure that they don't think that you are just trying to avoid doing more work

- Do everything that the editor asks (even if you think it is not necessary...)
- It is ok to ask the editor questions if you don't know what to do
- It is ok to ask for more time if needed

Conclusions

- Publishing your research in highly ranked journals is very important
- The process is not perfect but things are improving dramatically (quicker turnarounds, more high quality outlets, some journals open to a review piece, pre analysis plan)
- Do not forget how lucky you are
- You get time to think, read and work on one thing you believe is important
- It is a luxury
- It is a great journey

Thank you

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