

## Research Statement

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My research fields are labor and development economics, with a focus on poverty and socioeconomic inequality. I use both experimental and quasi-experimental techniques and large datasets to answer policy-relevant questions.

### *1. Education policy and intergenerational mobility*

One strand of my research assesses the effectiveness of education policies designed to enhance intergenerational mobility of socioeconomic status. For instance, my job market paper examines the effects of statewide affirmative action bans on low-income college access and upward mobility. In recent years, many states in the United States have banned race-based affirmative action in college admissions. Public universities in these states have put more weight on socioeconomic factors such as family income to ensure diverse student body without the explicit consideration of race. These “color-blind” alternatives are often called poverty preference admissions policies because they target truly disadvantaged students. Using institution-level data, I find that affirmative action bans increase the enrollment share of low-income and first-generation students at selective public universities. Banning the use of race in admissions also raises upward mobility rate, which measures the extent to which an institution contributes to intergenerational income mobility.

In other work, I examine whether investment in public schools can enhance equality of opportunity as measured by intergenerational income mobility (IGM). To estimate the causal effect of public school spending, I exploit the plausibly exogenous variation in school spending induced by the U.S. court-mandated school finance reforms. I use county-level college attendance rate and IGM constructed based on administrative tax records. Students are more likely to attend college due to additional resources in public schools. An increase in school spending also raises IGM of children from high-income families. For low-income children, however, I find a small, insignificant increase in IGM.

In collaboration with the World Bank and Ministry of Education and Vocational Training in Zanzibar, I conducted a randomized field experiment in 187 secondary schools to investigate whether a non-binding self-set goal improves student motivation and test scores. This project is joint with Shwetlena Sabarwal and Eema Masood (World Bank), Asadul Islam (Monash

University), and Nishith Prakash (University of Connecticut). Schools were randomly placed into either a goal-setting group wherein each Grade 7 student set a specific self-referenced target for an upcoming achievement test or into the control group. The preliminary results indicate that the intervention increases student efforts as measured by study time.

In another project, "*Whose Children Are Better? Stimulate a Desire for Rank in School,*" I utilize performance ranking within a reference group as a non-financial incentive to motivate teachers and parents who play critical roles in education. I aim to conduct a randomized field experiment in secondary schools in Tanzania which has a nationwide school evaluation system based on standardized test scores. To motivate teachers and schools, school rankings within a district are released on a bulletin board at randomly selected schools. To stimulate parents' desire for rank, randomly selected parents are noticed about their child's ranking within a class room. To control for other informational effects, nation level ranking is always provided.

## ***2. Household Responses to Expected Marriage Payments***

The second strand of my research examines a controversial social practice: dowry payments in India. Dowry, a bride-to-groom marriage payment, is often cited as a factor behind gender inequality, for example in sex-selection and dowry-related violence in India. However, empirical research on dowry has been limited by the lack of data. With S Anukriti (Boston College) and Nishith Prakash (University of Connecticut), I utilize retrospective information on gifts exchanged at the time of marriage for 39,544 marriages during 1960-2008 (a) to describe dowry trends and (b) to examine the impact of dowry expectations on households' financial and childbearing decisions in contemporary rural India. Average real net dowry has been remarkably stable over time; although there is considerable heterogeneity across castes, religions, and states. We also test if credit-constrained parents respond to the "lumpy" nature of dowry payments at the time of marriage by saving in advance. We find that, relative to parents of firstborn-boys, parents of firstborn-girls increase per capita household saving and fathers work more after the child's birth if expected future dowry payment is higher.