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Selection Committee
Development Economist
AtlasAI
Palo Alto, California

November 16, 2020

Dear Selection Committee,

I am writing to apply to the position of Development Economist at AtlasAI. I am a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of California, Davis in Agricultural & Resource Economics expecting to graduate in June 2021. My dissertation research broadly focuses on incorporating insights from nuanced qualitative work into empirical development economics, with a particular emphasis on the implications of customary land rights and political governance in Burkina Faso & Uganda. My work, in meaningful collaboration with policymakers and local actors can have significant impacts: by devoting more attention to the contexts in which we implement policies, we can better understand how people will react to them. I would be excited to join a team developing products that can speed up this crucial process, improving lives around the world.

My job market paper **“Decentralization of Land Governance and Elections in Burkina Faso”** asks how and why local political actors respond to a decentralization policy that created land offices to document and formalize customary land rights. Using the experimental pilot phase of the policy, I find an additional 0.8 political parties contesting elections in anticipation of receiving land offices. I develop a theoretical model that posits the documentation of land rights is itself politically important, as a source of private rents but also for political actors who consider constituent welfare affected by policy. Consistent with the constituent welfare story, the number of parties falls again after implementation. Likewise, I find that responses are stronger in rural municipalities near urban centers where existing tensions in customary land rights are more significant.

In other research, I look at how customary land rights, distributed among multiple individuals, can shape agricultural investment incentives depending on the particular social and land rights context. This work is connected to a large-scale impact evaluation of the Agriculture Cluster Development Project (ACDP) in Uganda, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry, and Fishery and the World Bank’s DIME team. We seek to measure the impact of a time-limited agricultural input subsidy on persistent improved technology adoption and income. Working closely with government partners is key to this project: despite tensions in conducting a randomized control trial within a government program, we are measuring the impact of the program as actually implemented, and are able to improve policy directly.

I also am involved in a body of research on the broader context of nutrition interventions. My paper, **“Replacing Iron-Folic Acid with Multiple Micronutrient Supplements Among Pregnant Women: Costs, Impacts, and Cost-Effectiveness”** in the *Annals of the New York Academy of Science* (joint with Reina Engle-Stone, Sika M. Kumordzie, and

Steve Vosti), was a collaboration with nutritionists that built a quantitative model of the cost-effectiveness of scaling up multiple micronutrient supplementation in pregnancy across a country's population, and was cited by the WHO in their recently-changed guidance.

I would be an exceptional fit for this position. My degree in Agricultural & Resource Economics involved advanced quantitative training, including fields in development economics, econometrics, and public economics. I have experience working collaboratively on large international research projects with direct policy relevance. I am deeply committed to creating an inclusive, diverse environment in economics and research more broadly, and have been a central part of the academic and broader life of my department in graduate school.

My application materials are enclosed. I will be available to interview by Zoom, Skype, or phone and look forward to hearing back from you. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura Meinzen-Dick". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Laura Meinzen-Dick